

Friendships are some of the greatest blessings that God gives us while we go through life on this earth. Today we're going to be looking at the closing of Paul's letter to the church in Colossae. What I want you to notice is the friendships that the Apostle Paul has in his life. I think everyone who is familiar with Paul would come to the conclusion that he was a remarkable man of God. That he loved the Lord Jesus Christ with all of his heart and had this magnificent obsession with preaching the gospel to all he came in contact with.

But the Apostle Paul didn't do it alone. You will find at the conclusion of most of his letters him mentioning the group of friends that he is surrounded by they advance the name of Jesus in various parts of the world. He's never alone! Here in the west, we admire the Lone Ranger, the Lone Survivor, and the individual who can conquer the world by themselves. And that may make for great entertainment, but God never intended for us to go through life flying solo.

Even in the Garden of Eden, God said that, "It is not good that man should be alone." Even in the most perfect of settings, the Garden of Eden where sin has not been introduced into our world, things were not good until a relationship was established. All of us have the opportunity to be in relationship with other people. All of us have the opportunity to be friendship with other people.

I believe that if the Apostle Paul were standing here this morning, he would testify to the significance of the friendships that God blessed him with in life. For that's what he does here at the closing of his letter to the Colossians. He talks about his friends. These are good friends. These are deep friendships. And I would say that your friendships go as deep as what you have friendship around.

If your friendship is founded upon a sport, your friendship can only go as deep as that sport can take you. If your friendships rotate exclusively around your job, or around a particular activity, or a season of life... once those things are done, the friendships fade. But if the friendship is founded on Jesus Christ, if the relationship is centered on the Gospel, the friendship can go infinitely deep. Because what you have friendship on, what you have friendship around, is an infinite God who has no end.

So today we're going to talk about **Gospel-Centered Friendships**.

READ COLOSSIANS 4:7-18

A lot of friendships are mentioned in this closing. Tychicus, Onesimus, Aristarchus, Mark, Jesus who is called Justice, Epaphras, Luke, Demas... Significant relationships that Paul had in advancing the gospel. These are men that Paul considered dear to himself and he was so thankful to God that they had been brought into his life.

[I can tell you from personal experience of how important friendships have been to me over my lifetime. One of my best friends growing up is a guy by the name of Dave](#)

Clinton. We met in the 7th grade when his family moved from California to the little town in Michigan where I lived. His family started attending the same church that my family did and we ended up attending the same school from 7th grade through 12th grade.

On just about every weekend or any random day throughout the summertime growing up, you could find Dave and me hanging out with each other. We would be playing basketball, or we would be watching a movie, or just about anything that two teenage guys would do. [Here is a picture of us as teenagers](#). I'm thankful for that friendship. It's a friendship that has lasted although we don't go to the same church anymore, we obviously don't go to the same school anymore, we don't even live in the same state as each other. But the friendship has lasted. [Here's a picture of us](#) from just a couple of years ago.

Friendships are a blessing from God. And I want you to think for a moment about the friendships *that you have had over your lifetime*. Think about the friendships that you have had as a child. Think about the friendships that you have made while going through a certain season of life. Think about the relationships that you made while attending a particular school, or participating in a sport, or while working in your job, or while living in a certain neighborhood. Over your lifetime, you interact with 1000's of people. And some of those people will be and have become your friends.

At least I hope so...

And I say I hope so because friendships are on the decline. I recently read an article from Time Magazine that states,

"the number of Americans who say they have no close friends has roughly tripled in recent decades. "Zero" is also the most common response when people are asked how many confidants they have... And adult men seem to be especially bad at keeping and cultivating friendships."

That may seem strange in our day and age of Facebook, Twitter and endless digital connection. But the "friends" that are reachable through your digital connections are not the ones that matter.

In fact, they may even hinder you from being in true relationships with other people. About 7 or 8 years ago Laura and I were living in a really tiny community in Michigan. It was a beautiful summer day and something happened in our neighborhood where our entire community lost power. And you know what happened? People got bored. There was no T.V. to watch, no Internet to connect to, no A.C. to be comforted with... so people came outside and interacted with each other. I saw people that day that I had never seen in my life. They put their devices down for a little while and walked outside.

Here it is, the last weekend in April in northeast Ohio. The weather is getting beautiful. It's a perfect time to be outside. It's the perfect time of year to introduce yourself to your neighbor. It's the perfect time of year to have a backyard barbecue and invite a bunch of people over or just one. It's the perfect time of year to pursue friendships. How many of you, sitting in this room, desire to be in friendship with other people? We all do.

And the best of relationships are centered on the gospel. What I want to do today is walk our way through this passage and give you 4 principles for Gospel-Centered Friendships. We've read through the entire passage and we're ready now to break it down into smaller portions. The first principle that I want to draw your attention to is found in verse 7-9.

Read Colossians 4:7-9

Gospel-Centered Friends are Faithful. Paul tells the Colossian church that everything that they need to know about his activities will be told to them by Tychicus and Onesimus. These are two men that Paul had befriended while in Rome.

To talk about Tychicus for a moment, this is not the only place in scripture where his name is mentioned. We all know who the Apostle Paul is and how he wrote 13 letters/books of the New Testament. But in that ancient time period Paul was in need of faithful individuals to deliver those letters to various people and churches. There was no FEDEX, or UPS asking what can we do for you? Paul was in need of a faithful friend who could hand deliver his messages. And that is where Tychicus would come into play.

We know that Tychicus carried the letter to the Colossians. But we also know that he carried the letter to the Ephesian church as well.

²¹ So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything. ²² I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts.

When Paul needed an important task to be completed, he looked to a faithful friend who was responsible to inform the people of Ephesus as well as Colossae exactly how Paul was doing. You think for a moment on how important the task was that Tychicus took up. Here, we hold in our hands the Word of God. We take the time to study it, to preach on it, to memorize it. We treasure the Word of God in our heart. And we're so thankful that the Holy Spirit inspired men like Paul to write it out for us.

But do you ever stop to think of how significant of a role that people like Tychicus played so that we could have these words from God? You don't hand a responsibility like that over to just anyone. Paul says here "he is a beloved brother and faithful

minister and fellow servant in the Lord.” The Apostle Paul was very close to this man. Tychicus was trusted and he was faithful. And upon his arrival he would make it known everything that was happening with Paul.

Unlike today, Paul didn’t have a missionary card or a monthly newsletter that he could/would send out to keep his supporting churches updated. He was missionary that deeply depended upon faithful friends to carry along the good and the bad news that would arise within his ministry.

Also with Tychicus was a man by the name of Onesimus. He too was entrusted by Paul to carry the message back to the city of Colossae. If you’ve ever read the tiny book of Philemon, the Onesimus stands out because he was a runaway slave that is sent back to Philemon, the slave owner, who is involved at the church there in Colossae.

What is amazing about this is that Paul is sending Onesimus back to his master. Paul doesn’t discredit Onesimus because of his position in life, but trusts him with a significant ministry. Why would he do that? Well, because when the gospel had come to him, his life was completely changed upside down. Take the time to read Philemon and you will notice that he is going back to his master because he had come in contact with Jesus.

When Jesus is the center of your life, you will do things that will not make sense from worldly perspective. It doesn’t make sense to put your life on hold to deliver a message to a faraway country. It doesn’t make sense to voluntarily go back to your slave owner who you ran away from. But when Jesus is the center of your life, you will seek to honor Him at all cost.

When Jesus is at the center of your friendships, when the gospel is what is most significant in your life, within your friendships you will be found faithful. You’re looking at the bigger picture of what is significant and not just focused in on what’s best for you.

That’s the first principle. Well the second principle for Gospel-Centered Friendships can be found in verses 10-14.

Read Colossians 4:10-14

Gospel-Centered Friends are Givers. Answer these question for me in your own mind: why do you show up here every Sunday morning? Why are you involved in a Small Group? Why do you invite people over to your house for dinner or get together with someone at a local coffee shop? Do you gather together with other people in order to receive something from them or are you on the lookout for ways that you can be a blessing in another person’s life?

Here we see in this group of verses six different individuals that are basically in prison with Paul because they want to help him. Paul is not alone in his chains. He has **Aristarchus, John Mark, and Jesus** who is called Justice. He has **Luke**, who without a doubt a blessing spiritually as well as physically, considering that Luke is a doctor. **Demas** is still there. If you're familiar with Demas, he would eventually leave as we're told in Paul's second letter to Timothy that Demas deserts Paul having loved the present world.

And that last person that we're told of is **Epaphras**. Do you guys remember talking about Epaphras? When we first began studying Colossians we talked about this guy. He was from Colossae. He had traveled away and was introduced to Paul and Paul introduced him to Jesus, which turned his life around. Epaphras came back to his hometown with a burning passion for the Lord. He was the one that planted this church. Epaphras is the pastor of this church.

If you remember the reason that Epaphras left was to get some help in fighting heresy/false teaching that was arising in the congregation.

All of these men are not there to take something from Paul. They're not sticking around simply because Paul made them feel special and life was always better being around Paul's winsome attitude. If anything, association with Paul brought them imprisonment, discomfort and brought them down a path in life that got significantly harder through their friendship. They were invested in the life of Paul for the long haul, regardless of the cost. They were there to give!

And a good friend does whatever he/she needs to do in order to help the other person out. Even if it means going to prison, even if it's a sacrifice of time and energy. A friend, a true gospel-centered friend, is committed to giving. You will be there for your friends and you will do anything for your friend! Because you're not just there for the good times and what you can get out of it, you're there to give.

And that brings us to our third principle.

Read Colossians 4:12-13

Gospel-Centered Friends are Prayerful. I know we talked about Epaphras already, but we need to talk about him a little more. Epaphras spent some time in prison with Paul. Do you know what Epaphras spent time praying about in prison? It wasn't his own well being, it wasn't his release... He was praying for his church! He was praying for his group of friends back home.

And I love the way that Paul describes Epaphras praying. "Always struggling on your behalf in his prayers." It wasn't the type of prayer that I'll do when I get around to it or happen to think about it. No! Epaphras had such a passion for his people. Colossae is his hometown; he knew these people, and loved these people. He had a desperation to see them grow and mature in Christ.

And I love that word “struggling.” Gives me the idea of running a race. Where I want to do the best that I can... but at the same time, it’s hard. My body is saying, “slow down, just give up.” But in my mind I’m saying, “no, I’m going to keep pressing on. I’m not giving up. I’m going to struggle with all of my might to finish this race well!” This is how Epaphras’s prayer is described. He spent time and effort passionately praying for his people.

Prayer can be so hard sometimes. Life gets busy. Our minds get distracted. And prayer gets pushed off to the side. And if we’re going to pray consistently for others it’s going to take focus, it’s going to take intentionality, it’s going to take time, and it’s going to take effort. But it’s so worth it!

Do you pray for your friends? I mean really pray for your friends and struggle on their behalf on your knees before God? I want my friends; I want my church to stand mature and fully assured in the will of God. If I’m dedicated to gospel-centered friendship, I will pray towards that end... and so will you.

And that brings us to our fourth and final principle.

Read Colossians 4:15-17

Gospel-Centered Friends are Committed to Christ. Now, I know that sounds redundant. And it is a little repetitive. But I want to make the point clear that we’re not seeking to gain good friends at church. We seeking to established deep, significant relationships that are founded on Jesus Christ. The only reason that Paul had come in contact with any of these individuals was because of his relationship with Jesus.

And gives a final greeting to those in Laodicea, a nearby town, those meeting in Nympha’s house, and to Achrippus. And that saying Archippus, I’m not sure if it’s a rebuke or an encouragement, but it’s a challenge to not give up on doing well in serving the Lord. And finally Paul reminds the believers of how far his commitment to Christ has taken him. Paul wasn’t a half-hearted follower of Jesus... He proclaimed the greatness of Jesus to the point of being put in chains for the gospel. I want to encourage you to have that same commitment to Christ, to go to whatever lengths are necessary to proclaim Jesus’ greatness.

And has focus in on friendships today, I hope that you are pursuing friendships that committed to our Savior. Like I said before, your friendships only go as deep as what you have friendship around. Center your friendships on your commitment to Christ.

My hope at Cornerstone Bible Church is that we would be packed full of people who are truly friends. You know, people don’t stay around a church because it’s friendly. They don’t. They stay around a church where they have friends. Friendships can be difficult. Not everyone makes friends easily. We hope that people pursue us for

friendship, but make the necessary steps to pursue gospel centered friendships as well.

With summer just around the corner, can I encourage you to have some families/individuals over to your house/apartment? And don't just have the same people over all the time. Look across our church and find someone that you don't know very well... and seek them out. Grow in relationships. Pursue true friendships. For we all need gospel-centered friends.