



**SESSION OBJECTIVE: COLOSSIANS 4:7-18**

To understand how ministry is not a one-man show, but a collective effort.

## The Supporting Cast

Every great movie has a great supporting cast. I don't know that I can fully prove that statement, but it at least sounds right. There is always a great story, and of course a couple of really strong leads, but you'll also nearly always find filling in the gaps a top-notch supporting cast. The supporting cast matters. As we come to the end of this letter to the church in Colossae, we get a list of several people who fill out the supporting cast in the New Testament, and what they contributed. It's tempting to read letters like the one we've been studying, however, and come away with the idea that if these people are the supporting cast, Paul must be one of the leads. That is not the case. Paul, and all of the other apostles, and the prophets of the Old Testament, as well as the kings and judges, are all a part of the supporting cast. Who then is the lead in this magnificent story?

*Jesus Christ.*

The Scripture is an account of God's grand, redemptive narrative and the lead star is Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God. There is no other lead. God shares His glory with no one. That is, after all, one of the major themes of Colossians! This week, the final week of our study, we will examine each of these names that Paul records and talk a little bit about each of them. We will discuss not only their significance in this chapter, but whether or not they show up in other places in the New Testament as well.

## Roll the Credits

Below is an outline of each of the names given, their role, and where else we might find them in the New Testament.

### **TYCHICUS**

Paul says that Tychicus will deliver, “all of the news concerning me.” He was apparently a close person in Paul’s life and a very important messenger in Paul’s ministry. He is described here as a, “beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord.” This implies he was, in fact, a believer. And beyond a believer, he was a skilled minister that the apostle trusted greatly. Given that Colossae and Ephesus were only about 120 miles apart from one another, and that Tychicus also carried the Ephesian letter (Eph. 6:21-22), as well as the presence of Onesimus in this letter with Tychicus, Tychicus likely carried *Colossians*, *Ephesians*, as well as *Philemon* (who likely lived in Colossae). According to Acts 20:4, Tychicus came from Asia and was sent to Ephesus later in Paul’s life (2 Tim. 4:12) as well as Crete (Titus 3:12). Because of his Asian heritage, he was a more than suitable candidate to carry these letters back to the churches in Asia.

### **ONESIMUS**

Onesimus is sent with Tychicus to Colossae to deliver this letter, and we learn two things about him in this description. One, he was no doubt a Christian. He is called, “our faithful and beloved brother” (Col. 4:9). Secondly, we learn that he was almost certainly from Colossae, as Paul describes him as one, “who is one of you” (Col. 4:9). Beyond what we know from his letter, we can form some ideas from Philemon as well. Philemon 10 indicates that Onesimus ran into Paul during Paul’s imprisonment, and it was there that he came to faith in Christ. Since Paul says he is, “sending him back,” scholars agree that Onesimus was likely imprisoned as a runaway slave. Paul’s instructions to Philemon are to receive him, not as a slave, but as a brother, thus reshaping and redefining what slavery looked like for Christians then (See also: Session 11). This reality adds some flavor to the discourse Paul gives regarding masters and slaves in both Colossians and Ephesians. Imagine the reaction when the people realized that a former runaway slave and now brother in the faith was carrying the letter they were reading! Onesimus’ presence in this letter is important. He is not merely a servant, but a part of the supporting cast, and Paul gives credit where credit is due.

### **ARISTARCHUS**

Aristarchus was a Macedonian from Thessalonica (Acts 19:29; 20:4). He was another traveling companion of the Apostle Paul’s. He likely became a Christian in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9), and after growing in his faith some, was selected to accompany a collection that Paul took up for the Jewish saints (Acts 20:4). He later remained with Paul on his journey to Rome (Acts 27:2). Paul calls him a, “fellow-prisoner,” in this passage, indicating that he had been imprisoned with Paul. Aristarchus was one of the three Jewish believers with Paul at this time (Col. 4:11).

### **MARK**

John Mark is one of the biggest names listed here. In addition to being one of the three Jewish believers with Paul (Col. 4:11), Mark is most famously known for penning what we now call *The Gospel According to Mark*. Mark was the cousin of Barnabas, and grew up in Jerusalem (Acts 12:12). As was typical in this time, he bore two names; John was his Jewish name, and Mark was his Roman name. Mark had a storied past with Paul. He accompanied Paul and Barnabas on Paul’s first missionary journey, but for reasons unknown left in the middle of it (Acts 13:5-13). This led to a distrust of Mark on Paul’s part, which led to a subsequent division between Paul and Barnabas before their second missionary journey (Acts 15:39). Tradition holds that Barnabas disciplined Mark after that point until he ended up in Rome after the edict of Claudius against the Jews was reversed sometime in the mid-50s. By the time the Apostle Peter wrote his first letter, Mark was

there and being disciplined by him (1 Pet. 5:13). It is during this time that Mark likely penned his Gospel, known in the early church as *The Memoirs of Peter*, since Mark was not actually there, in person, with Jesus. After these years of discipleship and proving worthy as a fellow servant, Paul rightly recognized him as such, and even spoke of his usefulness and even requested him (2 Tim. 4:11). Mark is a great example of how the errors of youth can be overcome through commitment to Godly discipleship and time.

### **JESUS (JUSTUS)**

Very little is known of Justus as this is the only place he is mentioned. What we know of him is that he was a Jewish believer, and he brought great comfort to Paul while he was in Rome. His Jewish name was Jesus (or Joshua), and his Roman name was Justus.

### **EPAPHRAS**

Epaphras was first mentioned in Colossians 1:7, as the one who brought greetings from the Apostle. He was the one responsible for planting the church in Colossae (a place Paul had not been to), and was responsible for many who had come to faith in the Lycus Valley (Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis). Paul writes that Epaphras was, “always struggling on your behalf in his prayers” (Col. 4:12), and was also a hard worker (Col. 4:13). The audience to which Paul was writing to would have been very familiar with Epaphras, and to hear this kind of commendation from someone like Paul must have been pretty exciting.

### **LUKE**

In verse 14 Paul writes, “Luke the beloved physician greets you.” There is no question who this is in reference to. It seems fairly certain through interconnected details in the New Testament that Luke was with Paul during much of his missionary efforts from about A.D. 49 to 62. Luke was a trained physician, and was an educated individual, skilled with the Greek language. As a result, the two books he penned (The Gospel According to Luke and The Acts of the Apostles) are forged in a nearly classical version of Greek (unlike the rest of the New Testament in the more common Koine Greek). Luke was an eyewitness to the unfolding Kingdom of God, and sought to share these eyewitness accounts with the generations that followed (Lk. 1:1-4). That he was with Paul during this time suggests that Luke continued to minister both with Paul and to Paul while Paul was in prison in the early to mid-50’s. It is also likely that Luke was well-known by this point, in that Paul does not feel the need to describe him in more detail than what is given. However, he was not known at this time for his authorship of his Gospel account; it was not written until the early to mid-80’s.

### **DEMAS**

Again, not much is given regarding Demas, but what we do know of him is not all that good. He is only mentioned three times total in the New Testament, one of which is here. He is also mentioned in Philemon 24, which bearing in mind, was likely carried by Tychicus with this letter, so the context is the same for both Philemon and Colossians. However, later in Paul’s life, he pens the second letter to his young protege Timothy, and by that point it seems that things had gone bad for Demas. In 2 Timothy 4:10, Paul writes, “For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica.” We aren’t given the full details of what this means, but it can’t be good. It echoes the warning of 1 John 2:15: “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” Demas serves as a great example to the importance of perseverance in the faith. Sometimes, those who seem like the real deal, turn out not to be. Only time will tell.

### **LAODICEA AND NYMPHA**

In verse 15, Paul greets those in Laodicea. Laodicea was also in the Lycus Valley where both Colossae and Hierapolis were located (Col. 4:13). Laodicea is most famously (or infamously) known as the recipient of the seventh letter in Revelation 3 from Jesus. They are chided for their lukewarm behavior (Rev. 3:16), and told to

answer the door when Jesus knocks (Rev. 3:20). The church in Laodicea was also almost certainly not founded by Paul. It seems like the churches in the Lycus Valley were founded by others (such as Epaphras) but then written to and cared for by the Apostle. Paul also reveals that a letter was sent to Laodicea to be forwarded to Colossae, but the contents of that letter are unknown because the letter itself was never uncovered (Col. 4:16).

Nothing else is known of Nympha, either, other than that she was a woman who apparently led a small congregation in the Valley out of her home. Why she was singled out by Paul is unknown, but it seems to be for positive reasons since no rebuke is given. This raises a lot of questions, none of which we have time for in the present study, about the role of women in leadership in the church. It is not clear what her role was. Whether she had a more prominent leadership role or simply opened up her home for the church to meet in is not even debatable, because there are no other details to consider.

### **ARCHIPPUS**

Last is Paul's words to Archippus in verse 17: "See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord." Perhaps he had received some call on his life to preach or do missionary work, and Paul was simply encouraging him. It is almost certainly not a negative statement because the corresponding letter to Philemon mentions him as well as, "our fellow soldier" (Phlm. 2). He is mentioned in concert with Apphia in Philemon 2, who is likely Philemon's wife. That Paul mentions her with Archippus has led some scholars to think that Archippus was a family member or at least prominent leader in their home church.

## **Closing Thoughts**

Paul's final words are powerful: "I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you." For one, there is something special about knowing that Paul himself (and not a scribe) wrote this letter. It has a sense of personal endearment to it. Beyond that, all of the commendations for the individuals listed in chapter 4 seem even more special. These were individuals that the Holy Spirit brought to Paul's mind as he was writing. It shows that Paul recognized the importance of team ministry. No one could do the work Jesus commanded alone. Jesus died for *the church*, not for an individual (Eph. 5:25).

Secondly, that Paul asks them to remember his chains is a rather sobering way to end the letter. They were no doubt facing some trials with the false teaching that had arisen among them. It was taking a toll. Paul had just spent considerable time writing a personal letter to combat such issues, and then to be reminded at the end of that letter that he was writing from a prison must have provided great perspective. When we come under attack we have a choice. We can either allow the attack to deflate us, or we can press through it. Paul wasted no opportunity. Even in prison, he was committed to God's Word and God's people. His final words are the most powerful, and the most consistent with Paul's overarching message: "Grace be with you." If not for grace, we are without hope and lost.

## **Study Questions**

### **Day One**

1. Read Colossians 4:7-8. Who does Paul mention first? How does he describe him? What does he say Tychicus will tell them about?

2. Read Colossians 4:9. Who is with Tychicus, and how is he described? Where else have we seen Onesimus mentioned and who was he? (Hint: See above notes)
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### Day Two

1. Read Colossians 4:10. Which two individuals does Paul mention in this verse, and who were they? (Hint: See above notes)
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2. Read Colossians 4:11. Who is named here in this verse? What do this person, and the other two mentioned in verse 10, have in common with each other?
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### Day Three

1. Read Colossians 4:12-13. Who is mentioned in these verses? Where did we first hear of this person? Where else has he been doing work? What was this area known as? (Hint: See above notes)
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2. Read Colossians 4:14-15. Which individuals are mentioned in these verses and what is their significance? (Hint: See above notes)
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### Day Four

1. Read Colossians 4:16-17. Who is the final person mentioned in verse 17? Where else have we seen his name? Who is he likely connected to, and why? (Hint: See above notes)
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2. Read Colossians 4:18. Who wrote this letter? What is the significance of this statement? What chains was Paul talking about? Whose chains?
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## Week 13 Discussion: The Roles Matter

Colossians 4:7-18 is a roll call of many individuals who have been instrumental to Paul and his ministry. One of the takeaways from this passage is that ministry happens as a team effort, not as an individual performance. It's easy to give attention to one or two people who are highly influential, but we must recognize that ministry efforts are only as effective as the team from which they proceed. Talk as a group about the importance of group ministry, and the need to identify the gifts of the Spirit in each group.

1. Icebreaker: When you think about the success of a church, do you think of just *the preacher*, or *the collective ministries* of that church? Why or why not?
2. How valuable has this group been to you during the COVID-19 pandemic? Do you think life would have been more difficult if you were not connected?
3. What is your spiritual gift? If you aren't sure, what do you think it is, and why? Do you use this gift currently in any group setting?
4. How important is it for you to encourage your pastors and leaders in your church? Do you make it a regular practice?
5. How can you better serve this group or any other group you are a part of?

## Takeaways:

1. Ministry is never a one-man effort, but a group effort.
2. Even Paul, one of the most influential voices of the New Testament era, recognized the value that everyone brought to the table.