

# You Are Not Alone

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[ 0 : 00 ] We've been in the book of Colossians. I know you've been counting. We've been there for 13 weeks now. And we're finishing this morning. We're going to look at the end of Colossians. And next week is Palm Sunday. And the following week is Easter.

And then after that, we'll move into a new series. But today we're in the last verses of Colossians. We're going to start at verse 7. So hear now God's word.

And with him, Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother who is one of you, they will tell you of everything that has taken place here.

Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, greets you. And Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, concerning whom you have received instructions. If he comes to you, welcome him. And Jesus, who's called Justice.

These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom. And they have been a comfort to me. Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God.

[ 1 : 28 ] For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you. And for those in Laodicea and Hierapolis, Luke, the beloved physician, greets you, as does Demas.

Give my greeting to the brothers at Laodicea and to Nympha and the church in her house. And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans.

And see that you also read the letter from Laodicea. And say to Archippus, see that you fulfill the ministry that you have received from the Lord. I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand.

Remember my chains. Grace be with you. Amen. The pastor, John Piper, had a very famous quote where he said, at any given moment, God is doing 10,000 things in your life.

And you may be aware of three of them. And it's his way of saying, sometimes we wonder, where is God? What is he doing? And more often than not, he's doing way more than we realize.

[ 2 : 32 ] And what you see in these last few verses is that Paul actually illustrates that with the way he concludes this letter, because he gives the people in Colossians a bigger picture of the church. Not just to show them how big the church is, but to show them how God uses community to help them to persevere.

And I think if there's one theme of these last verses, it's this. In the kingdom of God, you are not alone. In the kingdom of God, you are not alone.

And what you see in the way that Paul talks here in these last few verses is Paul shows these people how God uses other Christians to help us to persevere, and that we actually need other people in order to help us to persevere.

And so we're going to look at three ways, if you can believe it, three ways. Guys, we're going to look at three ways this morning that God uses his church to help us, his church, persevere.

And the first way is dangerously simple. And I say it's dangerously simple because it's so simple that so often we don't do it. And it's words of encouragement. That's how God uses the church to help us persevere.

[ 3 : 44 ] And you see that in the way that Paul talks about this man called Tychicus. Great name. And Tychicus, I think the way to think about him is he's a divinely appointed mailman.

And so most people, almost everyone agrees that the way that Paul talks about Tychicus would lead you to believe that Tychicus is the one that Paul appointed to bring the letter, Colossians, from Paul in prison to wherever the Colossians were in Colossae.

And Paul, because Paul in verse 8, he says, I have sent him to you. So the assumption that he's the mail carrier. And we know from the book of Ephesians, too, that Paul did the same thing for the church in Ephesus. So Paul gave a letter to the church in Ephesians.

He gave a letter to the church in Colossians. He gave a letter to the church in Laodiceans. And so you get this picture of a man that Paul trusted so much that he was willing to send him all across the Roman Empire to deliver these epistles, these letters from him in prison.

And if you're going to call Tychicus a mailman, you've got to realize what that means. Because Paul, as far as we know, he is sitting in a prison in Rome, which is over a thousand miles away from Colossae.

[ 4 : 57 ] And so to be a mailman for Paul means that you've got to be willing to travel by foot or by boat or by both over a thousand miles to deliver a letter like this.

And so if you're Paul, you've got to say, who do I really trust for something like this? And he chose a man called Tychicus and all that a journey of weeks or months for what? To live to deliver these three or four pages that we've been looking at these past 13 weeks.

And that shows you just how precious a letter like this was to Paul, that he would send someone on a journey like this just to deliver these words that we've been looking at. But you see, if you look down at verse eight, that Paul had another reason for sending Tychicus besides just being a delivery man.

You see, what does he say in verse eight? He says, I have sent Tychicus to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts.

So you imagine Tychicus is standing in Rome with Paul. Paul's standing in prison and Paul looks at Tychicus and he says, Tychicus, I'm going to stop saying that word. It's really hard to say. But he looks at this man and he says, when you get to Rome, when you get to Colossae, deliver the letter and then you've got two jobs.

[ 6 : 14 ] What are they? Tell the people how I'm doing and encourage their hearts. Encourage them all that way. A thousand miles to deliver a bit of news and to encourage these people.

And I think if you read Colossians closely, you see that the news and the encouragement, they're actually meant to go hand in hand. Because in chapter two, verse two, Paul's death. He says this.

He says, I want you to know, Colossians, how great a struggle I have for you, that your hearts may be encouraged. So the reason Paul wants them to know about his imprisonment is not so that they'll pity him.

It's so that they'll know how deeply they're loved. Because this is human nature, right? When you know that someone has suffered for your sake, it shows you how much they care, right?

When someone is actually willing to suffer for you, it shows you that wherever they are, you are not alone. And for Paul, that was a truth worth sending someone all the way across the Roman Empire to prove.

[ 7 : 19 ] I remember really well when I was about 13 years old being at my grandfather's funeral. And one of the only times that I saw my dad kind of lose it in the funeral was when my uncle, my dad's brother-in-law, showed up unannounced, having driven all the way across the country on very short notice to be there.

And I just saw, my 13-year-old self saw how that caught my dad off guard, that his brother-in-law would love him so much that he would drive all the way across the country just to be there to encourage him.

And I'm sure you've probably had points in your life where someone has done something for you that just shocked you with how loving it was, that they would show up for you in the midst of a real deep crisis.

And you say to yourself, wow, what an encourager. And Paul says that was the mission of Tychicus, the mailman, was to be that for the church in Colossae.

And you can see why Paul placed a really high value on encouragement. And one reason you can see why is because of really personal reason. If you look down at verse 11, Paul's talking about a couple of guys. We're not going to go through every person, but he talks about this man, Aristarchus and Mark and Justice.

[ 8 : 35 ] And he says, these men, they have been a comfort to me. In other words, in my imprisonment, they have been my encouragement. You know, I think Satan, Satan loves to make each of us think that even when we're in the midst of a crowd, we are totally alone.

And even when we show up on Sunday morning, there's no one here that really cares about us. And isn't that how Satan attacked Adam? He made Adam question whether God really cared about him, whether God was really out there for Adam's good.

He made Adam question, aren't you alone? Don't you need to step up for yourself? And Satan would have loved to have made Paul feel alone. But what does God do?

He sends these three men that all that we know about them is that they showed up to Paul in prison and were his comfort. Encouragement.

It sounds so simple that we don't do it. Right? Sometimes I think how many times a day do I think, you know, I could send that person a note, just a text message, letting them know I'm thinking about them, encouraging them.

[ 9 : 44 ] And then I get distracted. And, you know, as I was sitting thinking about this guy Tychicus and thinking he was willing to travel thousands of miles for something that I'm not even willing sometimes to lift my thumbs to do on my phone screen.

But Paul says, know the value of encouragement. And it's not flattery. You know, flattery is when you just tell someone they're great.

Encouragement is deeper than that. The Bible condemns flattery, but it says build one another up. You know, one definition I came across was this. To encourage someone is to instill someone with courage, comfort, or cheer.

It's to literally build someone up. So, you know, if Satan's goal is to make each of us feel like we are alone, then whenever you encourage someone, what you are doing is you are actually pushing back the kingdom of darkness.

And you're building up the kingdom of God. Because encouragement is one of the tools that God gives us to build up his church. And you know this. A well-timed encouragement can be the difference between someone giving up and someone pressing forward.

[ 10 : 51 ] You know, I've been on the baseball fields a lot the past few days. And I know that a lot of you have too, because I've seen you there. And what better picture of encouragement sometimes than when that, you know, you've got a six-year-old boy who is running with all of his heart.

But the one thing he doesn't do is touch the base. And he gets out. And his coach, if he's a good coach, well, he doesn't chew him out. He's six years old. But he comes up to him, and you can't hear the conversation.

But that kid walks away with his chest held high and, hopefully, understanding that the next time you go, you touch the base. You know, encouragement can come with correction. But the point is, are our words building up?

Or do people walk away from us more torn down than when they came to us in the first place? And Paul's saying, know the value of encouragement. You know, sometimes repentance is not about admitting the sins that we've committed.

It's about acknowledging the things that we haven't done, like encouraging. There's a great line from the Anglican Book of Common Prayer that says this. It says, Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed by what we've done and by what we've left undone.

[ 12 : 08 ] And sometimes what we have left undone is encouragement. And Paul says, know how a word can change someone's course. So encouragement is a part of the mission of God in the church.

So that's one way that God builds perseverance, is that he gives people to us that encourage us. But the second way that you see in this passage is that he gives us endurance or perseverance is through prayers for strength.

Now, we've been in Colossians a lot, and Colossians says a lot about community. It says a lot about prayer, because Paul cared a lot about community and about prayer. And last week we talked about how prayer can be the tool that God uses to open the door for the gospel.

But this week, Paul talks about prayer in a different way. And you see it with this guy named Epaphras. In verse 12, he says, Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you always struggling on your behalf in prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God.

So here's Epaphras in Rome, and he prays. And the word that Paul uses to describe it is struggling. And that's athletic language.

[ 13 : 25 ] So a synonym would be wrestling. So Paul is saying, if you could see Epaphras now, if you could see him pray, it's like watching someone in an Olympic event. He's pouring his heart out to God.

He's wrestling in his prayers. Why? For your sake, to make you strong. And most people think it's pretty obvious why Epaphras is wrestling so much in his prayers.

Because what Paul says here, Epaphras is one of you. He came from the church in Colossae. And most people think that he probably planted the church in Colossae. And presumably, Epaphras is now living with Paul a thousand miles away from Colossae.

Maybe he was the one who told Paul that the church in Colossae was struggling with all these doctrinal problems, which is why he wrote the letter in the first place. And imagine if you're in Epaphras' shoes.

You've done so much for this church, and you know that they are in danger of going astray, and yet you're a thousand miles away from them, and you feel totally powerless. And you know this in your own life.

[ 14 : 32 ] Sometimes you don't have to be a thousand miles away from someone who you love, and yet feel totally powerless as you watch them make choices that you think are going to lead them way astray, go way wrong.

And you say to yourself, you know, I have to watch this, and yet I'm powerless, and there's nothing that I can do. But what you see in Epaphras' example is that that's actually not true, right?

If you're a Christian, you are never truly powerless when you watch someone else suffer, because at least you can always go to the Lord in prayer. And that's what Epaphras is doing.

You imagine, why is he wrestling? Because he's anxious. He's worried about these people, but he doesn't let that anxiety stew. He takes it to God. He brings all that anxiety, and it comes out in what Paul would call wrestling in prayer.

He says, God, make these people strong. Help them in a way that I can't help them, because I'm thousands of miles away. He took all that he had in prayer, and he clearly believed.

[ 15 : 36 ] What would that mean? If you're willing to wrestle in prayer, what does that mean? That means that you must believe prayer is powerful, that you can actually be a thousand miles away from someone and actually change the trajectory of their life, because you think that God can work in your prayers to shape someone else's heart.

And that's what Paul believed. He believed that prayer was that powerful. And this really, well, there's two things you can take away from that. One is, sometimes we let anxiety rot inside of us and drive us crazy, and we don't do anything.

And the Bible always says, cast your cares before the Lord. We can always take our cares before God and see if that doesn't relieve our anxiety, knowing that we've given it to the Lord, actually.

But another thing it shows is that, you know, we are not the master of our fates and the captain of our souls, or vice versa. I can't remember the exact line. Paul says, we're not these individual people who control every decision that we have, maybe in the way that we think we do.

Paul's saying, God can work in your heart, and maybe, maybe, the best thing about you is not so much the result of your choices, but the result of someone else's prayers for you who loves you.

[ 16 : 55 ] You know, maybe you were on the cusp of making a terrible decision, and in your mind, you just made the right decision. But what you can't see behind the curtain, and we won't know until we go into the next life, that someone in that very moment was praying for you, that God would give you the wisdom that you needed to walk in the right path.

Isn't that a beautiful idea? And so Paul's idea of a healthy church, of a church that perseveres, is one where the people are praying for each other, not just for broken bones and illnesses, but praying that their spirits would be, how does he put it here, that he would stand strong?

What is his language? That you would stand mature and fully assured in the will of God. He's praying that these people's hearts would be changed by God.

So you've got words of encouragement. You've got prayers for strength. And then lastly and briefly, another way that Paul shows us how the church helps the church persevere is through labors of love.

And this comes up over and over again in the passage, but you almost miss it because of how often it comes up. But if you look in the middle of verse 11, this is one place where Paul's talking about these three men.

[ 18 : 12 ] And what does he call them? He says these men are fellow workers for the kingdom. They're workers. These people that are serving the church. Sometimes Paul uses the language of servanthood.

You know, ironically, the one person that Paul doesn't call a servant in this passage is Onesimus, who we know from the book of Philemon is a slave. But he's saying that the posture of a leader in the church of Jesus Christ is that they work hard and that they serve.

And, you know, there's there's something behind that, like there's a belief about the way the church works, which is that if you want to see the church thrive, if you want to see God bless it.

It takes hard work. You know, I've been sitting at my porch. I've been living in this house for 18 months and I'm not going to call it a conspiracy. But three of my neighbors have won yard of the month in the past 18 months.

And, you know, and I look out at those yards and they're beautiful yards. And I say to myself, I deserve a yard like that. But but I also look out at those yards and I see someone in them every single day pulling weeds and mowing the lawn and doing all those things that my yard doesn't have.

[ 19 : 23 ] Poor Charlie. I don't think she's in here. She came up to me. We were at a couple's house yesterday and Charlie came up to me and she said, I want I want grass like they've got where you can walk through it and your feet don't get hurt because our feet.

Our yard is full of weeds. She didn't know how insulting that was to her family. But but there's no reason not to believe the same thing is true of the church, that if you want to see a church that's glorifying God, it's not something that you can just sit back and say, I'm just going to wait for God to do something.

It's God says that in our work, he works. Work out your salvation with fear and trembling for it's God who works within you to will and to work. And Paul had no expectation that that a loving fellowship was going to be easy.

And, you know, a lot of times there's this temptation when we look at the early church and we say to ourselves, you know, if I had been in a community like that, it would have been so much easier to be faithful.

It would have been so much easier to show up on Sundays because these people were great. And but if you you've got to read this letter in the context of Paul's whole life and you see that's just not true. For instance, if you look down at verse 10, Mark talks about this guy called Mark.

[ 20 : 46 ] Excuse me. Paul talks with this guy called Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, and he calls him a fellow worker of the kingdom. You know, a great, faithful guy that you would want to have on your team. Right. Who had been a great comfort to him.

Well, the whole story of Mark, if you read the book of Acts, is that before this letter was written, there's a history between him and Paul. And part of that history was that Mark had traveled with Paul a good ways.

And then at some point, Mark actually deserted Paul. Mark left Paul on a leg of the trip and it hurt Paul so much that he refused to travel with Mark for a number of years after that.

So the fact that he would write this in this letter must mean that at some point he had finally reconciled with Mark. But all that to say, Paul was not working with perfect people.

And I think an even harder example is this guy called Demas. You see in verse 14, he mentions a man named Demas who clearly Paul here would call a brother.

[ 21 : 48 ] But then three or four years after this, Paul sits down and he writes the letter of Second Timothy. And here's what Paul says about the same person. He's talking to Timothy and he says this.

He says, Timothy, do your best to come to me for Demas in love with this present world has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. So Paul did not live in a church of perfect people.

Some of the people that he lived with left him and never came back. People who he formerly thought that he could trust. And some people left him and they came back. And because of God's grace, he was able to welcome them like they had never left at all.

But all that to say, what drove Paul was not the fact that he lived in a perfect community. It was that he had a vision for what community could be in the kingdom of God because he knew the grace of Jesus Christ.

And he knew the power that that grace could have on someone's life because he was a murderer. He knew how that could how the gospel could change someone. And so he was always pulling the weeds.

[ 22 : 55 ] He was working in the garden of the Lord, wanting to see what God would do through that work. And he was trusting that his labor was not in vain. And, you know, if we need any more reason to believe that the church is worth fighting for.

And Paul would have said this, too. It's the Lord's Supper that Jesus Christ. Who does he die for? He dies for his church to and the way Ephesians puts it to make her a bride that is spotless, totally sinless.

The church is worth fighting for. And it's in the church that God gives us perseverance. You know, Paul's final words here, he says, remember my chains.

And, you know, if I were writing the letter, the way that I would intend for you to understand that is you better be praying for me. Remember, remember how important I am to this organization.

But what Paul meant, and we know this from later in the letter, is he's saying, remember how loved you are. Remember that there are people all across this empire who are laboring so that your church might thrive and that the kingdom of God might grow.

[ 24 : 07 ] Grace to you. Grace to you in the name of Jesus Christ. Let's pray. Lord, our community is, we cry out to you.

Help us to be renewed. Help us to grow together, to depend on one another, to persevere by the power of the Holy Spirit through encouragement and through prayer and through laboring together in the gospel.

In your son's name we pray. Amen.