

Christ Central Encouragement

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[0 : 00] We've come to the end of the book of Colossians, and so I'm going to read Colossians 4, 7 through 18. Hear the word of the Lord. Tychicus will tell you about my activities.

He's a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. I've sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts. 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 in Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, concerning whom you've received instructions. If he comes to you, welcome him.

And Jesus, who is called Justice. These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers of the kingdom of God, 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.

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 greetings to the brothers of Laodicea and to Nympha and the church in her house.

[1 : 17] 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 in the Lord.

I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

May God bless the reading and now preaching of his word. Well, here we are. We're at the end of the book of Colossians. Now I'm a little sad. This has been a great book. I've loved every minute preaching it because it's so encouraging.

The reason why the book of Colossians is so encouraging is it gives us Christ. Christ. Again and again. Love it. Big doses of God's grace in Christ Jesus.

And he just gives us this Christological vision that is to put strength in our hearts. Because we're prone to be discouraged, aren't we? We're prone to wander.

[2 : 31] Lord, we know it. Prone to leave the God we love. Maybe you walked in here a little discouraged this morning. A little wandering.

And if you were to humbly say, hey, Pastor Mike, I just feel spiritually off. I feel spiritually like I'm in the midst. If I had a minute, I'd ask you a number of questions.

Here they are. Yes or no's? And one open question. I'm sorry to hear that you're feeling like you're in a spiritual mist.

Hey, have you sincerely prayed to God in the last seven days? Yes or no? Have you read God's word on your own in the last seven days?

Yes or no? Do you want to be around other Christians? Yes or no? Do you envy non-Christians?

[3 : 31] Yes or no? Are you becoming cynical of the Christian faith, for example? Are you starting to ask, does Jesus really matter? Yes or no?

Are you discouraged? And then there's this question. Brother, sister, can you think of the last time that you, with your own lips, spoke to the risen Christ something like this?

You are worth it. I need you. Help me, Lord, walk in your ways today.

Can you remember the last time you spoke that to him? We're all prone to wander, right? We're all prone to leave the God we love.

And if you are, you're in the right place this morning. Because not only is the whole book of Colossians and encouragement, the very close is a series of encouragements.

[4 : 40] And you just, you thought it was a list of names. It's actually a list of encouragements. It's a series. It's organized. Paul organizes it with four distinct moves.

He wants to encourage us by way of suffering. He wants to encourage us by way of unity. He wants to encourage us by way of an exhortation.

And then he wants to encourage us by way of grace. The end of the book of Colossians is a classic closing that is filled with Christocentric encouragement.

Now, I'm going to ask you a question. And I need you to answer to me. It's a four-word answer. Let's practice. Will someone encourage me?

And then you say, Christ is worth it. Ready? Let's practice. Will someone encourage me? Christ is worth it. Okay. We're going to, you're going to hear that throughout the sermon.

[5 : 45] Will someone encourage me? Christ is worth it. All right. Here we go. Four lines of encouragement.

The first one is this. Be encouraged by suffering. Now, that might sound like those two don't fit together. Be encouraged by suffering?

Shouldn't you be discouraged by suffering? Well, in verses 7 and 9, the Apostle Paul introduces us to two men, Tychicus and Onesimus.

And if you look at these men, they've been sent by Paul from Rome, 1,300 miles to Colossae to get something done. Now, look at the descriptions of these guys.

So, Tychicus is, he will tell you about my activities. He's a beloved brother, faithful minister, fellow servant of the Lord. And I want you to key on that word faithful. All throughout the Bible, that word faithful is a high kingdom value among God's people.

[6 : 48] Faithfulness. And Tychicus was a faithful minister, a fellow servant. He's a fellow slave with Paul to Jesus. He was beloved.

He was well thought of. Tychicus was on Paul's apostolic ministry team. He wasn't a capital A apostle, but he served on Paul's apostolic team. And so, here's what that would mean.

Paul is in prison in Rome. He can't leave Rome. And so, he would send someone like Tychicus to a place like Colossians, carrying the letter to the Colossians, to bring it to the Colossians, then to have it read by Tychicus to the Colossians.

And then, Tychicus would explain any question that would come up on the letter because he was a representative of Paul, because he was faithful, reliable. So, Tychicus, man, he's a reliable dude, but he's not traveling by himself.

He's traveling also with this guy named Onesimus. We see that in verse 9. He is a faithful, there you go, and beloved brother who is one of you, which means he's from Colossians.

[8 : 00] He is a native of Colossi. Now, there's a little story here. Are you guys familiar with the book of Philemon? Philemon was another Colossian.

And he was a wealthy Colossian who the Colossian church met in his house. And he had a slave named Onesimus. And Onesimus somehow found his way to Rome, where he encountered the apostle Paul.

Paul shared the gospel with Onesimus. And Onesimus was delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of the beloved son. He got flipped by the grace of God in Rome.

It's this same Onesimus now that Paul is sending back to Colossi with Tychicus with this letter. What a story, huh? Well, these two men who are faithful, beloved brothers are delivering Paul's letter to the church in Colossi.

And look what they're to tell. And verse Tychicus will tell you about my activities. Verse 8. That you may know how we are. Verse 9.

[9 : 13] They will tell you of everything that has taken place here. So they're being sent not only with the letter to the Colossians, but to inform them of what's going on with Paul in Rome.

Do you know what's going on? Well, he says so in this letter. Chapter 124. If you look at 4.3. At the same time, Paul is suffering for Christ in Rome.

He's imprisoned. Shackled to a Praetorian guard. And so even though he's had his freedoms significantly restricted, he's rejoicing at the opportunities he's being given to speak of Jesus.

And so he's sending Tychicus and Onesimus back to Colossi to tell these Colossian Christians who've never met Paul, that hey, don't be discouraged by my circumstances.

[10 : 24] Be encouraged by my circumstances. And that's what we see in verse 8. Chapter 4. I have sent him to you for this very purpose that you may know how we are and that he may

encourage your hearts.

There's the purpose. To encourage your hearts. To put strength in their hearts. If you look at chapter 2, verse 1, we read this.

For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea. That's another church just miles down the street. And for all who have not seen me face to face, that their hearts may be encouraged.

Be strengthened. Don't think, Paul says, that my suffering is something that should discourage you. It should encourage you. And you might be saying, well, how does that work?

It's because when we see brothers and sisters who are suffering for the name of Jesus, it puts strength in us. Do you know what they're saying? They're saying Jesus is worth it. Remember this illustration I've used?

[11 : 35] Two baby grand pianos up on the stage. They're both perfectly tuned. And if you start hitting center C in one, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, it will sympathetically resonate in the other baby grand.

It will hum center C. And so on the stage, you get music. And what Paul is doing here is he is tapping on center C, Christ central.

Don't be discouraged. Be encouraged. I'm in here for Christ, and he's being exalted. Ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding. And this is what Tychicus and Onesimus is bringing to this Colossian church.

They're to take strength from that because Christ is the controlling center of all things. You know, there's other things that you can look to to get this kind of Christocentric resonance.

Has anybody read a good Christian biography lately? Has anybody read a biography on like a missionary? Okay, I'm going to list some books.

[12 : 45] If you haven't read one of these, you've got to. Because you're going to find this kind of center C resonance in you from suffering saints. We've wanted to bring glory to Jesus through the gates of splendor.

Elizabeth Elliot. Story of Jim Elliot and his companions. The hiding place. Corrie Ten Boom. To the Golden Shore. The story of Adoniram Judson.

Hudson Taylor's spiritual secret. John G. Patton's missionary to the New Hebrides. These are just classic biographies that will stir your soul towards Christ because all of these people are hitting center C.

And saying Jesus is worth it. Church, I'm a little discouraged. I dropped that on you quick, didn't I? Let's rewind. And John G. Patton, missionary to the New Hebrides. Church, I'm a little discouraged. That's right.

[13 : 51] So this close is more than a list of names. Paul is seeking to encourage this church even with his sufferings. Not only are we to be encouraged by suffering, we're to be encouraged by a unique, distinct unity.

In verses 10 through 14, there's a list of six men. You're like, whoa, whoa, that's a bunch of dudes. It is. And Paul makes a move in the close.

He changes directions. Instead of talking about these two men he sent, now he's talking about six men who are sending their greetings from Rome because they're with Paul. The first is Aristarchus. He's a fellow minister. Verse 10, Aristarchus was one of the guys, along with Gaius, in Acts 19. Maybe you remember this, the riot in Ephesus. Paul was preaching. It was the whole economy of Ephesus turned upside down because of the preaching of Christ.

And so the people in Ephesus wanted to hurt somebody. They couldn't get Paul, so they dragged out this guy, Aristarchus and Gaius.

[15 : 06] He sends greetings. Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, as in John Mark, as in the Mark who joined Barnabas and the apostle Paul on the first missionary journey, the same Mark who in Acts 13, they got to Pamphylia, and he's like, I'm out.

See ya. He bailed on him. That Mark. And it's at the end of Acts 15 where Paul's like, let's do another missionary journey.

And then Barnabas is like, yeah, I'll bring Mark. And Paul's like, no way. I'm bringing Silas. And they split ways. But here, years later, the apostle Paul is commending Mark to the Colossian church.

Hey, if he comes, welcome him. Something changed there. There's a story there of restoration. The other name that gets listed of these first three is this guy named Jesus.

Not to be confused with the firstborn of creation and the firstborn from the dead. This is justice. That Jesus. But what they all have in common are they all fellow workers of the kingdom of God.

[16:22] They're all seeking to help deliver people from the domain of darkness and bring them into the kingdom of the beloved son. It's that kingdom of God. But here's what you really need to see.

It's in verse 11. These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers. These are three Jewish men. With Paul and Rome.

You know why that matters? With what comes next. The next three. Starting with Epaphras. He's a Gentile. Paul thinks the world of Epaphras.

This is not the first time we encountered Epaphras in the book of Colossians. Colossians 1.7. Paul is telling us how the gospel has come to Colossians.

And it didn't come from Paul. It came through Epaphras. The beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf.

[17:25] This Epaphras. He's the one that brought the gospel to Colossae. He's one of them. He's from Colossians. Colossians himself.

4.12. And we learn also that he's always struggling on your behalf in his prayers. That they would stand mature. Right? That they would be fully assured in all of the will of God. Do you know what this covers?

He's like a mini Paul. He's following in Paul's footsteps. These are the very things Paul is striving after in Colossians 1.28.

He's toiling, struggling to present everybody mature in Christ. Same language. Paul prays in Colossians 1.9.10 that these Colossians would know the will of God.

That they would walk in a manner worthy of their Lord. That's the same thing that Epaphras is praying for them. But then in verse 13, Paul says this.

[18:26] For I bear him witness. That's coming close to an oath. That's like me saying this. Hey, I got to tell you something about this guy. Here's what you need to know about him.

He is a hard worker. He gets it done. I'm so impressed with how he works. And that's what the Apostle Paul is saying about Epaphras.

He's working hard, not just among the Colossians, but among the Laodiceans and those of Hierapolis. These are three different churches, three different cities. And what it seems to be pointing to is this, that Epaphras was a church planter.

And that not only did he establish the church in Colossae, he established the church in Laodicea and Hierapolis as well. And he is laboring to see that these churches are established in the truth of Christ and being built up.

There's a lot of print on this man because he's one of their own. Paul wants them to know that he holds him in high regard.

[19:32] He then describes two other Gentiles. Luke, the beloved physician, greets you. He's the traveling companion of Paul in the book of Acts. Luke wrote the gospel of Luke in Acts.

And also this guy named Demas, another Gentile. So here we have Paul's apostolic team in Rome. And Paul's making very clear that the Colossians know that three of them are Jews and three of them are Gentiles.

He wants them to know that this team is united despite their ethnic backgrounds, despite their different cultural backgrounds.

They are united in Christ. Jesus Christ is the controlling center of these men. It would have been encouraging to them because one of the false teachings that they were experiencing, we know this from Colossians 2, is some kind of like spin on Judaism that distract them from Christ.

And Paul's saying, here's nope. Here's my team saying hi from Rome, suffering with me for the glory of Jesus. These three Jewish men, they're laboring for you, and these three Gentile men are laboring for you.

[20:51] Jesus is their controlling center. There's an implicit warning in this too. You don't see it from this passage.

It has to do with Demas. Later on, 2 Timothy 4, verse 10, Paul is realizing he's coming near to death.

He's talking to Timothy. He's wrapping up that letter. He's all alone. And he writes this regarding Demas. Demas, who loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica.

You see, it's a sober warning because Demas didn't keep Jesus as the controlling center of his life, the treasured center of his life. He came to value the temporary trinkets of the world.

And there was separation as a result. Brothers and sisters, this unity that we're seeing on this ministry team, which was to encourage the Colossians, well, this is a unity that we experience too as a church.

[22 : 04] It's not static. It's dynamic. And the best way that we can preserve the unity of the church is for each of us individually to be treasuring Jesus above all else, to be making Jesus the controlling center of our lives.

And when we do that, he becomes the center C of our church. Church, I'm just a little discouraged. Christ is worth it. He's our unifying center. And then we come to verses 15 through 17. Be encouraged by an exhortation.

Paul, again, changes kind of his tact. He goes from sharing the greetings of six men in Rome with him, now to saying, hey, would you pass my greetings on to this church?

And would you swap letters with that church? And by the way, would you say this to this one guy? You may have noticed in verse 15 that Paul tells the Colossians to say hi to the Laodiceans.

[23 : 20] So like if there were some Colossian Christians shopping at Walmart, in between kind of Colossi and Laodicea, and they see some people from the Laodicean church, they were to do this. Hey, you know what?

We got a letter from Paul. He says hi. That's how that would roll. And you know what that does? It's a unifier. The apostle Paul is brokering inter-church fraternization.

He's helping these churches greet one another, be aware of one another, to love each other and care for each other. He's very specific. Greet the brothers in Laodicea, nympha in the church in her house.

I did something a couple months ago. I should have asked your permission first. I was preaching at a church in South Carolina, and I just greeted them. The people of Christ the King Church, greet you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I should have asked you first. Can we just do this from here on out? If I get a preaching opportunity somewhere else, can I just greet people on your behalf in the name of Jesus?

[24 : 32] Is that cool? And so by doing that, you know what we'll be doing? We'll be saying this to these people. We got Jesus in common. Glory to Him.

We're blood-bought in Kenosha. Greetings to the blood-bought in South Carolina. In verse 16, we see something interesting.

We see the Apostle Paul telling them, hey, this letter's been read among you. Have it read aloud in the church of the Laodiceans. And see that you also read the letter from the Laodiceans.

The idea here is Paul wrote this letter to the Colossian church and sent it by way of Tychicus, and he wrote another letter to the Laodicean church. We don't have that letter. We just have the letter to the Colossian church.

But what we see going on here is this. The Apostle Paul wanted these churches to be benefiting from his apostolic writing.

[25 : 32] He wanted the Word of Christ dwelling richly between the churches. Isn't it so wonderful now that we don't have to be swapping Colossians and KBC's copy of the book of Romans?

We got it all in one spot. All canonized together in one book. It's a feast for our souls.

But Paul wanted this Christocentric resonance happening between the churches. It's verse 17 that I want to draw your attention to.

And say to Archippus, see that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord. Archippus is named in the book of Philemon.

He was a Colossian. And he's described as a fellow soldier. He's a faithful brother. He fought the fight of faith. And so, you need to understand what Paul is doing here.

[26 : 46] Paul is telling the Colossian church to speak a word of exhortation to their brother, Archippus. Now, could you imagine when Tychicus is reading this for the first time when the Colossian church is gathered there and there is Archippus standing?

Could you imagine that? The whole church looking at him saying, okay, we got a word for you, brother. What's going on here? What's going on here? will immediately you have a sense that whatever this is, it's serious.

See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord. I think that there's two possibilities here. The first possibility is this, that Archippus somehow started to become unfaithful. He's dragging his feet. He's not doing what God has entrusted him to do. And the church is to actually deliver the business end of a rebuke to Archippus.

I think that's the first possibility. They're to say, brother, come on, get back in the game. Fulfill the ministry that's been entrusted to you by the Lord Jesus Christ. And so it's kind of like semi-disciplined there.

[28 : 03] The church kind of rebuking a brother to press back into his ministry. That's a possibility. I think a better explanation is option two. And here it is.

He was discouraged. That's what the church was to tell him.

If you look at 2 Timothy 4, 5, you read this. Now this is to another faithful brother.

His name is Timothy. As for you, Timothy, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

Complete it. That was not a rebuke. That same kind of language is being used here. So I think the better explanation is Paul telling the Colossian brothers and sisters, brothers and sisters, you've got a brother who's laboring hard.

[29 : 11] Don't let him be discouraged. Speak to him. Tell him to press on. Tell him Christ is worth it.

Don't stop. Keep preaching Christ. Ministry's tough. Don't give up. Keep fighting the fight of faith. Jesus is worth it. Your labor's not in vain. What you do now matters. Either way, it's an encouraging exhortation, isn't it?

They're calling him to be faithful. Just like Tychicus is faithful. Just like Onesimus is faithful. Just as Epaphras is faithful. Archippus is to be faithful.

Just as Paul was faithful. Just as Jesus is faithful. Faithful and true. It's a kingdom value. Don't give up. Give up.

[30 : 14] Jesus is worth it. It's like the church of Colossae is to hit the center sea of Christ central so that Archippus could feel it and press on.

Church, I'm a little discouraged. Now be encouraged by grace. We've come to the very last verse of the book of Colossians.

Verse 18. And it's interesting. Paul writes, I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains.

Grace be with you. What's going on there? In the first century, Paul would be, he'd often use someone to write his letter. So he would dictate, a secretary would write it.

In Romans 16.22, you read this, I, Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you. So, the book of Romans didn't come from Tertius.

[31 : 16] It came from Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. And so, most of the book of Colossians up to verse 17 of chapter 4 was likely kind of dictated.

But Paul takes up that pen. And now he's writing with his own hand. It would have been a signature of his own name. I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand.

Remember my chains. Grace be with you. Do you know what gets done? It authenticates the letter. It's genuine. This is from the Apostle Paul. And then you know what it does?

It authorizes the letter. It's binding. This is apostolic authority. This is God speaking to us through the Apostle. And he is calling us to live with Christ as the controlling center of our lives.

Remember my chains. Do you remember where verse 7 began? Tertius will tell you about my activities, my sufferings here in Rome.

[32 : 26] And now he comes back to talking about his sufferings in Rome. Remember my chains. It's called a prayer. Hey, when you pray for me, remember that I'm chained.

And would you pray for open doors to the gospel for three? And that I would have clarity and boldness in walking through them? It reminds us to be praying for brothers and sisters just locally and globally who are suffering for Jesus that we are praying for them, remembering them in their distress.

and it's like smelling salts. It's like Christ is worth it.

Remember my chains. Don't be discouraged. Be encouraged. Christ is worth it. There are consequences to being a follower of Jesus and Christ is worth it.

It's like he's saying, hey, I have no regrets of being here. No regrets. grace. But Paul doesn't end with chains.

[33 : 42] He doesn't end this letter with chains. He ends this letter with grace. Grace be with you. And that's where he started.

Chapter 1, verse 2, to the saints and faithful brothers, faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae, grace to you. Grace, you can remember it this way, God's riches at Christ's expense.

Grace. God's riches at Christ's expense. God's grace is his powerful kindness. Something we don't deserve that transforms us.

God's grace makes the spiritually dead, spiritually alive. God's grace transforms adulterers into faithful men and women.

God's grace is powerful. Are you on the lookout for God's grace? If you were looking for God's grace, do you know where to look for God's grace? Look for the word and the word is going to point you to Jesus.

[34 : 56] Jesus is where you find God's grace. He's the controlling center of all things. He's the gracious center of all things.

And so I thought we would wrap up our series in this last point of grace by me just reminding you a few things. By God's grace, brother and sister, you are now part of a new kingdom.

You've been delivered from the domain of darkness and you've been transferred into the kingdom of the beloved son. You're in a new kingdom with a new king. He is the king of the old creation and the king of the new creation.

The firstborn of both. And his is a new creation kingdom. You've been brought into that by grace.

Nothing you've done. It's all by his grace. And not only that, you have a new ID. You've got to pull out your saint card from time to time. You've got to remember that 220, you've died with Christ.

[36 : 05] In 3.1, you've been raised with Christ. And if you've died with Christ and been raised with Christ, you've been united with Christ in his death and his resurrection. So therefore, sin no longer rules over you.

Christ does. Grace does. You're no longer a slave to sin. You're a slave to Jesus. That's who you are. Now you've got to pull out your saint card from time to time.

And you've got a new aim. 3.1, where you just seek the things that are above. Where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. We don't live for the temporary trinkets of the world.

We live for the timeless treasures of Christ now. He is our aim. He is our king. He is the controlling center of our lives. And we're on new time.

Church, what time is it? It's Christ time. We live between the first coming and the second coming of Jesus. Here's one of my favorite poems of all time. Only One Life.

[37 : 09] This is just a clause from it. Stanza. Only one life shall soon be passed. Only what's done for Christ will last. Only one life. Yes, only one.

Soon will its fleeting hours be done. Then, in that day, my Lord, to meet and stand before His judgment seat.

Only one life shall soon be passed. Only what's done for Christ will last. We're living in between the first coming and the second coming of Jesus. That day. So we synchronize our watches.

And we get on Christ time. We're living for His kingdom. And we've been given new wardrobes all by His grace. By His grace, we're to put off the sexual immorality of 3.5.

By His grace, we're to put off that rancorous spirit we read in 3.8.9. That's the grave clothes of the old self that died with Christ.

[38 : 11] Why would someone living be wearing the grave clothes of someone dead? But now we put on the Christ wear. Put on then as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another, forgiving each other.

And above all these, put on the love. And when we are wearing Christ wear together, do you know what happens, church? Christocentric resonance, the peace of Christ ruling our hearts, the word of Christ dwelling richly among us, and the name of Christ being exalted in all that we do.

Center see by His grace. grace. Nothing we've done to earn that. We get to live that out.

This is Christ centralizing grace. And this is where Paul closes. And there's where I'll close.

Did you come in here feeling a little discouraged? Be encouraged by suffering saints.

[39 : 31] Be encouraged by the unity of those who are making Jesus central. Be encouraged by these exhortations.

Don't give up. Press on. Be encouraged by grace. I'm guessing this week you're going to encounter someone discouraged or wandering.

Maybe it will be you. Four words you can speak on the spot when someone says, I'm feeling discouraged.

Christ is worth the church because He's the controlling center of all things. Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, we are so grateful to who you are and the glory surrounding all that you are.

Would you make yourself known? Would you take center stage in our lives individually and as a church?

[40 : 38] Would you unite us together more and more as we move forward regardless of what we encounter? God, would our unity in you would that endure? We want to do everything, Lord Jesus.

Everything in your name. It's your name we pray. Amen. Amen.