

# Types of People God Uses

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Date: 30 December 2018

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[ 0 : 00 ] take out your Bibles to Colossians, smaller letter that Paul has written. Well, it's almost gone, right? We sang a few extra Christmas songs just to kind of keep you into the mood. I got a quiz I want to ask you guys. Who here has taken down their Christmas tree already? All right, we got a couple of people who've taken down their Christmas trees. All right, I'm going to tell you, there is a theory that I have about life that is reflected in people who take down their Christmas trees early. Those who tend to, well, let me tell you the people who keep their Christmas trees up. They tend to like the lights, the nice feelings, the emotions. They're also under the illusion that as long as the Christmas tree is up, any calories that you eat are halved. Isn't that true, right?

We eat extra thinking that there's some magical force put out by the Christmas tree which reduces our intake. But there's something about people who take down their Christmas trees early. And I describe them as people who are looking forward to the next thing. They're the type of people who like to get things done. Am I right on that? The three people saving you could be breaking my model here, buddy. But there's an attitude that they want to get on to the next thing, right? Christmas is done, what's next? New Year's. And what happens with New Year's, we tend to make these resolutions. We want to go after the next thing. I've got some really good friends. They always sit down at the beginning of January and they map out their entire year and all the things that they want to accomplish.

Could be fitness related. Sometimes they'll set out their financial goals, where they want a vacation, what they want to accomplish on the vacation. Perhaps it's a social goal or perhaps they're going to make an idea that they want to start a new hobby or make new friends. But inevitably, somewhere along the line, some people, perhaps some of you, are going to say, you know what, there's some spiritual things that I need to get in order next year. In fact, it's a very popular time to buy the one-year Bible, right? A lot of people set that goal. I'm going to read this year. I'm going to set my mind to it. I'm going to read the Bible in a year. For some of you, it means growing in your relationship with God. You're going to make a decision that you're going to have a regular time of devotions at a specific time. You're going to meet with your kids and your wife or your husband and you're going to set that goal down. Perhaps you'll set the goal of desiring to serve more. But behind that goal, you've made a decision that it's a time that you need to grow closer to God. You know there's some things that you can do that are going to help you accomplish that goal.

Well, in order to accomplish that goal, I believe there's certain things we need to understand about a healthy Christian life. The first aspect of a healthy Christian life is you need to know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Amen?

It's the understanding that you are a sinner. He is God. He's died on the cross to save you from your sins. You understand that. The second mark of a healthy Christian is one who desires not more than just salvation, but they want a living, breathing relationship with God.

[ 4 : 02 ] And they desire to practice what are known as the spiritual disciplines, right? Prayer, devotional life, active giving, active study of God's Word.

And there's this understanding as we grow in those spiritual disciplines that we're responsible for one another. That we desire that same growth in our family and friends as well. One of the things that I think this is really seen very clearly to us is in some of the lives of the Quest students. It's kind of an interesting journey that they're on. Many of them have come from faraway countries. They came on their own. They have no support system, no family or friends with them, but somehow they've managed to find each other, right? Those that love the Lord as well as they do, and it helps them keep accountable. They spend time praying for one another because they understand in order to continue to walk on this journey with Jesus Christ, you need a little help from your friends. Amen?

Now the third aspect, I believe, characteristic of a healthy Christian life is a desire to be used by God. It's a desire to come before the Lord and say, Lord, you have created me, you've endowed me with some spiritual gifts, and I need to use them for your glory.

They recognize that this gift they've been given is to build up the church. It's not a goal for personal gain, but Scripture teaches us that the spiritual gifts that we've been given are actually meant for other people's spiritual growth, not our own. So my gift of preaching and teaching is actually benefiting you, whereas your gift of mercy, kindness, love, service, whatever it is, actually benefits me. And it's kind of symbiotic relationship as we come together in one body to serve, love one another. So often at just this time of year, from a pastor's perspective, I usually tend to hear from people, I need to step it up in church more. I want to get involved more.

I want to use my gifts more. Because it's an understanding that it's not just pastors or missionaries or elders or leaders that have gifts, but many of us, actually the Bible tells us, every single one of us has these spiritual gifts. Now what's interesting, in my 10 years of pastoring, I run into a lot of people who are a little bit afraid to engage fully in church life.

[ 6 : 56 ] Sometimes it's because they're hurt. They've had a bad experience in church. They know they're supposed to come to church, but to really get involved and give of their gifts, kind of shaky.

Some believe that they're too young in the Lord. I'm not mature enough. I'm not old enough. I haven't been doing this thing enough. I fail all the time. Sometimes we feel like we're too immature. Or that's the work for super Christians, and I desire to remain a little bit distant, perhaps discouraged, and perhaps unsure. Today, what I want to do is I want to introduce you to four incredible human beings that God has used to grow his church. And through this study today, I'm hoping that you will be encouraged. Actually, I'm hoping that you will be tremendously encouraged because we're going to see the type of people God uses to build his kingdom. So today's title of the sermon, I know it says people that God uses, but it's the type of people God uses to grow his kingdom.

And I pray that you will be encouraged to pursue Christ's work as well. So please turn with me, Book of Colossians. We're going to go to the very end, chapter four. We're actually going to be reading actually Paul's concluding statement. If you're familiar, we've been in the book of Ephesians.

That's the main book we're starting, but I'm taking a little short hiatus here. Colossians actually written at the same time by Paul as he wrote the letter to the church of Ephesus.

[ 8 : 43 ] He's writing this from prison. And the church of Colossae was actually founded by a man. They believe his name is Epaphras. He had heard Paul preach in Ephesus, was so blown away by the gospel, as we all should be, that he took it home, shared all of a sudden we have a church, we have a letter that is written to this church. So Paul is writing these last comments to this church that he's never visited, but he has a great fondness for. So we're going to start in verse seven. I'm going to read all the way to 14. So Colossians four, verse seven, it says, Tychicus will tell you all about my activities.

He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant of the Lord. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, that he may encourage your hearts. Tychicus was the man who was delivering the letter to them. And with him is Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, one who is one of you. So Onesimus, if you know about the letter to Philemon, is actually a runaway slave who met Paul in Rome, got saved, and is coming back with Tychicus, who's got these letters.

So then he's continuing here. He goes, 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 is called Justice. These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God. What he's saying is, these are my Jewish brothers that are with me, and they have been a comfort to me. And Epaphras, verse 12, 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.

[ 10 : 56 ] 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.

It seems just like an innocuous letter. Hey, these are all the people that are saying hello, but there's much more here. What do we observe from this? There's three quick points I need you to observe

about this conclusion that's going to help us with our understanding of the text.

One, Paul's work was a team effort. Paul's work was a team effort. His ministry given to by God as an apostle did not do things on his own. He did things with a group of people that surrounded him. In fact, it was impossible for Paul to have done what he did without the help and support of other believers. And with that, he does not keep all praise and thanks to himself. He makes mention here of nine different saints that are working with him. Two, second thing we can observe from here is Paul inspired love and loyalty. He inspired love and loyalty. Paul was not a loner, but spread the work to everyone around him. He didn't keep it to himself. Hey, I'm the gifted one. You're all gifted. You all have a work in this kingdom. And the third thing I need you to understand is that early Christians relied on a network of friends. Just as we're learning just the example that I use of the quest students coming in not knowing each other, they rely on one another as friends. Without this, the gospel could never have gone out the way it did. So here we see that Paul traveled with slaves, a physician, Jews, and Gentiles, different people that God used to grow his kingdom. So what do we learn from Paul in these experiences? We learn that

Christian growth in Christ likeness doesn't occur unless we are in relationship with others. The Christian walk is not a solo walk. We require one another. We need one another. We will fail miserably if we think we can do this on our own.

[ 13 : 33 ] So now I want to introduce you to the types of people that God uses to grow his kingdom. The first type of person that God uses to grow his kingdom is people with servant hearts. It's people with servant hearts.

Check out verse 7. It says, Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. I have sent him to you for this very purpose that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts. I want to introduce you to this man named Tychicus this morning. He is actually, I believe, one of the unsung heroes of the faith. He's actually mentioned four other times in scripture. Acts 24, as in 20 verse 4, Ephesians 6 21, 2 Timothy 4 12, and Titus 3 12. He is a native of the province of Asia. He was born there. He lived there and he found new life there. And he ended up meeting Paul on one of Paul's missionary journeys. He heard the gospel that Paul shared and he actively believed in that gospel and he surrendered his life to Paul. Hey, I'm going to serve you, Paul. We know he became a servant of Paul from the silversmith riots and being forced to leave Macedonia. Tychicus was with Paul. He was with Paul when Paul was arrested in Jerusalem and he was with Paul when the Jews plotted to kill him. Tychicus was with Paul when Paul underwent trials before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa. Tychicus was there. In fact, Tychicus was shipped, wrecked with Paul. Tychicus was imprisoned with Paul. Tychicus was lost at sea with Paul. Tychicus was marooned with Paul.

In fact, when Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 11 25 27, this is the following which Paul wrote. He says, three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. A night and a day I was adrift at sea. On frequent journeys and dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers, and toil, and hardship through many sleepless nights, and hunger, and thirst, often without food, and cold, and exposure. You know who else was with Paul there? Tychicus. Tychicus was with Paul.

He didn't give up on Paul. Think a few of us along the way, hey man, shipwrecked, that's enough. Paul, that one beating by rods, that's enough. But Tychicus was driven by something more.

[ 16 : 35 ] Tychicus was a brave man, a loyal man. He was right there with Paul, not as a great missionary, not as a great orator, not as a great evangelist, or even a great thinker. But he was there with Paul, as a servant with Paul. So faithful was he that he was actually given the task to deliver three inspired letters. He was trusted. It was him who delivered the letter to the church at Colossae and the letter of a church at Ephesus. This is a man who had to travel from Rome with that letter from Paul, crossed the Adriatic Sea. He had to go across Greece, cross the Aegean Sea, enter into Turkey with these three inspired letters. His second duty was to give reports to all the churches along the way about what Paul was doing. Titus and 2 Timothy confirmed that Tychicus performed these humble functions, an errand boy as it were throughout Paul's life and ministry. So dependable, when Paul called

Timothy to be with him before his death, Tychicus took over for Timothy as the pastor in Ephesus. Reality is Tychicus left us no writings. He did no feats worth preserving by Luke.

He was a common man. He was a common man. But I want you to take note of the words that are said about him. He says, he is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant of the Lord. You know who else is called faithful minister? Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is called a faithful minister. Paul is comparing his service, that he is a faithful minister and the duties that have been dispensed to him. In fact, the matter is, if the greatest ability in the world is dependability, then Tychicus would be described as one of the greatest men that ever lived.

Notice it says, fellow servant of the Lord. A term used to express equality between Tychicus and Paul.

[ 19 : 08 ] As one writer states on this, it's almost as if Paul is saying, don't think because I write the letter and Tychicus is delivering it that I am better than he is. We are both servants of the same Lord who has given us separate tasks. I'm not Tychicus's master, although he serves me.

I think the lesson that we learn from Tychicus is there is greatness in the smallest things done for Christ. Amen? There's a greatness there. Reality is sometimes we think of things in terms of being religious or non-religious, sacred or secular, great or small.

But we need to understand that when we do this in a heart and a desire to serve God, it's done, all things are equal before him. We must understand that the momentary things done for Christ are eternal. In fact, the matter is, these letters outlasted the Roman Empire. These letters outlasted the city of Colossae. We may forget each other's works, but God doesn't. God used Tychicus to do great things, and he does the same with us to bring him glory. So that's the first person that, the type of person that God uses to grow his kingdom is servant-minded. The second type of person that God uses is people with sinful pasts. God uses people with sinful pasts. Take a look at verse 9. And with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother Onesimus, was a slave who served under Philemon. He robbed Philemon. He took his stuff and he ran away. Scripture tells us that Onesimus was a difficult person before he came to know Jesus. His master was actually a Christian man who was part of the church of Colossae. Philemon was a known Christian. They believe he was a leader in their Christian church, and he was not known to be overbearing. He was not known to be insensitive. He was actually a caring, loving master. Philemon's theology would have stated that he and Onesimus were equal before God, and that he would have to answer to God how he treated him. In fact, Onesimus himself says that he was useless. He was miserable and he was ungrateful. He had stolen from Philemon. He fled to Ephesus and there unto Rome became lost in the crowd. But instead, Jesus found him. And an amazing transformation took place in this man. He went from being restless and insolent to being clear-eyed and straightforward.

He went from being ungrateful and loving to being a man who is described in history as one of a man abounding in love. He went from being dishonest to willing to make restitution. The reality is, God is still in the business of changing lives today. Amen? He does. He takes unloving, inattentive husbands and turns them into encouraging, loving husbands. He takes gossiping, inattentive wives and he changes them into loving and supporting wives. He takes disobedient children and turns them into God-honoring children. And he takes lazy and disloyal workers and employees and turns them into men and women worthy of trust and admiration. We know the stories. Maybe it's one of your own, that God takes those who are lost in the world, whether it's they've turned to the world of sex and drugs or into materialism and greed, and turns them into servants of God who bring glory to himself.

[ 23 : 24 ] How does this occur? Colossians 2, 9, 10 tells us, For in him the fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him who is the head of all rule and authority. Fact of the matter is actually a good thing to be empty before God.

Because when we are empty, our weakness becomes his strength. Amen? Our thirst for his fullness, our misery becomes his joy, and our meaningless he turns into purposefulness.

As I alluded to earlier, whatever happened to Onesimus, church history tells us that he was released from being a slave, and he ended up becoming a major Christian leader, who Ignatius, one of the church's early fathers, described him as a man of inexpressible love.

So God takes those who are servant-minded. God takes those who have sinful pasts. And the third type of person that God uses is God uses people who fail.

God uses people who fail. Take a look at verse 10. Our Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, greets you. And Mark, the cousin of Barnabas.

[ 24 : 49 ] Mark, he's mentioning Mark. Do you remember Mark, if you know in Acts 15, they were on the first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas, and Mark came with them, and Paul would no

longer travel with Mark.

He found Mark too undependable. Mark had abandoned them, and therefore he did not want to trust them again.

Mark was the opposite of Tychicus. If Tychicus was a solid friend, Mark was the fair-weathered friend.

We now find Paul, 12 years later, in a prison in Rome, and who is there ministering to him?

Mark. 2 Timothy, Paul actually asked Timothy to bring Mark with him to see Paul in prison as he is described as a man helpful in ministry.

[ 25 : 54 ] Somewhere along the line, those 12 years, Mark changed. Perhaps he was young and he got scared, but now he was restored to usefulness.

You see, Mark is a testimony to God's ability to use failure. In fact, Mark would eventually be given the privilege with three other men to write one of the Gospels.

A guy who had failed, probably one of the greatest missionaries the world had ever seen. But he came back.

God used him. Reality is, in Mark, we see a God who can redeem failure. Failure happens, but it doesn't have to be final.

One author calls failures underpasses that lead to success. C.S. Lewis comments, No amount of falls will really undo us if we keep picking ourselves up each time.

[ 27 : 00 ] We shall, of course, be very muddy and tattered children by the time we reach home. But the bathrooms are ready, the towels put out, and the clean clothes in the airing cupboard.

The only fatal thing is to lose one temper and give up. It is when we notice the dirt that God is most present in us. It is the very sign of his presence.

So the key to overcoming failure is that one has to turn to God in repentance and trust God for renewal. That is who we see in God.

So we see that God uses those with servant hearts. We see God uses people with sinful pasts, and God uses those who failed.

The fourth type of person that we see here that God uses is people with incredible passions. That God uses people who have passions.

[ 28 : 02 ] Take a look at verse 12. He's talking about Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus. It says he greets you, always struggling on your behalf of his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God.

Now what's interesting about Epaphras, he was one of them. Like I said, he was saved by Paul in Ephesus. And now he's being used for something more. He was so excited about this word that he heard.

He ran, started this church. That word struggling, struggling, that he's using there. It's agonzi, which is the same word for agony.

That God uses these people who, the whole idea is that Epaphras wrestles for them in prayer. That is how great his love is for these people.

He's passionately agonizing in prayer, in service for them. The same word is used of Jesus Christ in Gethsemane, the night before he was crucified.

[ 29 : 18 ] Epaphras wants them to stand mature. My friends, God has given you a passion, a gifting. Sometimes it's quiet. You don't know what to do with it. But you need to seek how to use that passion.

Whether it's to reach the people who do not have homes in this town or food. We've got a great many people that are passionate about seeing their kids coming to Christ.

It's why we have people serving in children's ministry. It's what we see people in hospitality ministry. They're passionate about seeing people come to this church and feel welcome there.

We see people's passion used in the music ministry here. We see it in the hilltop ministry. And the fact of the matter is, even here at SBC, we still need more people with passion.

People who are willing to serve the kingdom. There truly is no shortage of needs. One of the areas that I'm in agony over, praying over, is you've seen all these young kids that are up here.

[ 30 : 25 ] they're going to be teenagers eventually. My heart's praying that God would raise three or four families in this church who will desire to disciple them, to see them grow, be part of a youth ministry that's going to eventually need to happen here.

I'm praying those people will want to start now, start planning, start growing in their faith, start thinking through those things that these kids need to know and understand in order for them to come and see Christ.

You see, passion adds life. Passion adds commitment. See, when we work for Christ, we are to be passionate about what we are doing.

Whether it's small things such as serving, as Tychicus did, or leading a ministry, the requirement is the same. God requires a surrendered heart that's willing to be used by God in sometimes in uncomfortable situations.

God uses people who are faithful, who are going to commit over time, hey, I'm going to be here and I'm going to continue to be here even when I don't feel like being here. You know, sometimes God surprises even Chris' short testimony today about small groups.

[ 31 : 53 ] Sometimes it's not until he's there until he realizes how much he really needs it. You know, to be in that growth group, to be loved, encouraged, to serve. And God needs people that are available and people that are teachable.

I believe there's a great many people still to be reached in this city, my friends. I do. It's ripe for the gospel. It's ripe for revival. God happens to have some pretty solid churches here already that are all struggling for the same thing.

We want to see people come to Christ, Lord and Savior, and to surrender their entire lives to him. As we go into this new year, I'm going to ask you to pray along with me and the elders as we come, we pray about this.

Who is God going to raise up? I know Dave and I are the two guys on staff, but we can't do everything. We can guide, give leadership, give ideas, but we need people who are willing to be sold out to come and say, hey, I want to make a difference.

I got this gift. How can I use it? Sometimes it's really small right now, but in a couple years sometimes God can use it to be something really big. So today, I hope you're encouraged by meeting these individuals that were in Paul's life.

[ 33 : 16 ] You guys are in my life. I'm in your life. You're in each other's lives. We're here to encourage, love, support one another, to pray for one another. And I don't mean that flippantly.

There's some real struggles that are going on. Sometimes we feel like we can't go on anymore. Sometimes we need people to lift our arms and make our legs walk because we are so spiritually tired.

My word to you as a pastor is don't hide. Reveal yourself. Trust, even when you've been hurt. and put great hope in God. Pray with me here.