

More People, More Ministry

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Date: 28 June 2026

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[0 : 00] Very cool, all right, enough said about that. Now we get to jump into Colossians, and if you have a Bible, go ahead and turn to Colossians 4. If you don't, we're gonna have the verses on the screen as well.

And I do have to say, this part of Colossians, it's at the very end, and I get really excited when I read these verses, because for me, as a pastor of a church, and like, man, when I see the church, and my understanding of the church is that this is Jesus' bride, this is what he came and he died for and gave his life for, to create a people unto himself, a gathering, a community, a household, a family, that's who we are.

And there's a way that we operate and manifest in that, the way that we can live that out. And so these verses, I see like this vision of what can be.

And I think a lot of ways, we're already doing this really well, but there's always ways to improve, there's opportunities to grow as a church in the things that we're gonna talk about today. And the way that Paul communicates this, you walk away from this vision of community that I find so compelling, that I wanna see lived out more and more here.

So community's a tough thing, right? Because people bring with it their own set of problems. The world says, more people, mo' people, mo' problems. It's kind of the world's like saying, and that's because it's prevailing ethic is towards individualism.

[1 : 20] And this individualism, it says, hey, you should live in a way, the most important way to live, the wisest way to live, is that you prioritize yourself. You prioritize your needs and your wants.

And because of that, we enter into every relationship in a transactional way. If you got what I need, whether that is prestige or power or influence or money or comfort, and I would like to have those things, then I'm going to use you, I'm gonna sidle up to you to get a little bit of that for myself.

And because of that, you'll probably feel used by me. But that's the same is true for the rich and the famous and the powerful and the other side of that. They do the same thing. They use people to build themselves, to build their brand, to build their fame, and to build their own wealth.

Every celebrity needs a fan club and every fan club needs a celebrity. It's a transactional relationship. And we are all too ready to live in that world where we are the hero or we look to someone out there as our hero.

Who is that great man or that great woman that we can tuck into and glean off their greatness? How can we leverage people to build our name and our fame? But the gospel, it comes in and it changes how we do relationships together.

[2 : 34] It changes how we live life together. It says more people is great because more people means more ministry. And that's because Jesus is the hero in our story.

And because he's the hero in our story, it means he's given us all we need already. And he continues to give us his grace and what we need in abundance. And so we live out of that abundance in order to glorify him, to serve and to minister his grace to others.

And today's passage, when we read it, you can read it and just be like, ah, it's the end of the book. It's pretty pedestrian. Nothing to get out of this. Paul's dropping a bunch of names and not even cool ones.

They're not even like the real apostles, like big deal, but it is a big deal. God wanted Paul's name dropping here in scripture for a reason because through the gospel and by God's grace, more people means more ministry that gives God more glory.

And that's an important thing that we all need to realize in our togetherness as we do life together. That's what we're on about. So with that in mind, let's read this incredible passage that closes out the letter to the Colossian church.

[3 : 41] Colossians 4 verse 7 says this, Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and a 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. 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 is also called Justice.

These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God and they have been a comfort to me. Epaphras, who is one of you, he's a Colossian, a servant of Christ Jesus, he 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 in Hierapolis.

[4 : 52] Luke, the beloved physician, greets you, as does Demas. Give my greetings 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 in the Lord.

I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you. This is God's word. Paul throws out ten names and he gives some descriptions that kind of make these nobody somebodies.

They suddenly come alive a little bit more and on close examination of this passage, you learn God's intention for ministry through the way Paul does ministry. And we see that what it shows us is that ministry is meant to be done in team, not in isolation.

See, gospel leadership and gospel ministry like Paul's, what it does, it divests itself and it multiplies impact by reaching, raising, and releasing disciples to do more ministry.

[6 : 07] More people, more ministry. Paul was all about spreading the gospel and living out his calling from God. Yes, he was an apostle separated by God, sent out for this, that specific assignment to spread the word of Jesus, about Jesus into new places.

That was his unique calling. He was confident in that calling. He knew God had called him into that. No problems there. But also, his calling was to build and strengthen these new faith communities called churches as they sprung up, as they heard the message and believed in all these new areas that he was going into.

And some of the ways that he built and strengthened and brought order and encouragement was that he would go and he would set in elders and deacons to provide leadership for those reasons. But additionally, he would visit himself or he would send people from his ministry team to churches to touch base, to gauge health, see how things are going, field any questions they might have, any concerns that might be arising or give corrections as needed.

Or they would just, he would be there to celebrate the evidences of grace among them. Paul, God's apostle, God's man to spread the word of Christ, he multiplied that calling and that effectiveness of that calling by doing ministry and team.

Paul wasn't afraid to share the spotlight so to speak. And this shouldn't be a surprise as our ministry for God should reflect the nature of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, right?

[7 : 38] They are God, three persons as one. They're of one purpose, one heart, one mind. But ministry responsibilities, their operation within the purpose of redemption that they have planned are shared.

And there's different roles that each play. The Father decrees, the Son accomplishes, and the Spirit applies redemption for us. These are different roles and yet, in the Godhead, those differences don't create imbalances with regard to who is greater in power and glory.

We don't say, oh, if the Father's really up here and Jesus is like, maybe here and the Holy Spirit's way down here. That's not how it works. And also between them, they don't seek to elevate themselves above one another.

Jesus didn't come to earth to show everybody that he just got a little more glory and a little bit more going on than the Father does. And the Father doesn't flex at times to say like, hey, you know,

Jesus, I need to put you in your place.

You're getting a little too up there, buddy. They don't do that. They're always giving honor and glory to one another. And as it is with God, so it is with God's children.

[8 : 40] We may have different roles and ministries in the household of God for his redemptive purposes, but that doesn't mean we are of different value. We don't do anything in this household.

We don't work out any calling that God and assignment God may give to us so that we can gain some kind of advantage over each other, nor to use our ministry to earn more power and glory for ourselves.

In fact, if there is any hierarchy in the kingdom of God in God's house, it's a little bit inverse. It is inverse. Leadership among God's people isn't top down, it's bottom up.

Gospel leadership, it gets lower to lift people up and to give them honor. Every disciple in Jesus' church, from the youngest to the oldest, we all have equal value as children of God.

I mean, Paul, he uses these terms for these different names that he talks about. He calls them beloved brother, a faithful minister, a faithful servant, like we're serving on behalf of Jesus and they're faithful or a fellow servant, a fellow part of God's household who has been given assignments to take care of and we're all fellow servants in God's household, not one above the other.

[9 : 56] One example here I would like to point out is Onesimus because it really proves the point and we kind of know about his background more than a lot of the other guys that Paul names here.

Onesimus, we know from the letter Paul wrote to Philemon, a few pages to the right in your Bible from the letter to Galatians, Onesimus was a slave of this man named Philemon or Philemon.

Depends on if you're English or British, how you want to pronounce that. All right. This man named Philemon, he was a Christian in Colossae who owned Onesimus as a slave but at some point Onesimus stole from him and fled.

But then we see Paul write this letter to Philemon in the Bible and what it uncovers is this great plan God has.

Onesimus crossed Paul's path and turned from runaway slave and thief to a Jesus follower. And in great irony, Onesimus' name actually means useful.

[11 : 02] And Paul at one point in that letter to Philemon plays off this reality. He says, man, before he was useless to you but now he's coming back to you and he's useful. He's coming back to you useful.

Not as a runaway thief who deserves punishment. He is a useful guy. In Christ he has been lifted up and made useful not only to me, Paul, but now to you, Philemon, as well.

Not in the old way that you knew him as slave to master but in the new way of Christ as beloved brother and faithful servant. And Paul goes on to say to Philemon, whatever this guy owes you, Onesimus, put it on my tab.

Release his debt. And then he says, and by the way, don't forget Philemon, all the debts you have been forgiven by Jesus. Paul, he is this great example of what a spiritual leader is supposed to be. Lifting people up, serving them, advocating for them, spending time with them, disciplining them, helping them mature and grow, celebrating and giving honor to the things that they are doing.

[12 : 08] Spiritual leaders in God's church are called to do that. They aren't called to seek glory for themselves or crave the spotlight. Which goes against the pastor as celebrity phenomenon that we tend to kind of live in.

It's, you know, it's one thing to appreciate the pastor in the pulpit. It's entirely different to build a church around him. The celebrity phenomenon in the church is not unique to our day.

Paul had super apostles that he talked about in his day that lived off the hype of a devoted fan base. The common theme between the guys today and the guys in Paul's day is this need for more people to follow them, to follow their teachings so they can elevate themselves and prove how great they are.

And yes, they would go about proclaiming Jesus, but they figured out how to do it to benefit themselves. Paul warns about these kind of ministers. You go to 1 Corinthians 11, chapter 11, the first half of that is him saying, watch out.

He says, these guys, in verse 12, he says, these guys, they boast in their mission, which means they are boasting in themselves, in their calling, in their gifting, in what they're doing. They're always throwing up the scoreboard.

[13:18] Hey, look at my wins, look at my wins, check out what I'm doing, notice what I'm doing, look how awesome I am. They're boasting in their calling and gifting rather than in the one who gives them. They boast and they pivot from boasting by saying, hey, look, I'm so great, you should support me.

I should benefit from this. They point out their superior gifts and reach in relation to other ministers, but with Paul, you don't see him doing that. You don't see him boasting in those things.

He does a lot of celebrating the saints who are doing ministry, and this is how it's supposed to be. I think we get back to Christ-shaped ministry when the saints in the seats are more celebrated than the preacher in the pulpit.

I just want to let that sink in for a little bit. Now, we should honor and appreciate the calling of those who preach in the pulpit. That is important work, but we should be wary and watchful that we don't exalt in them over and above the saint who serves in the nursery on a Sunday or prepares the communion or does the slides from the back or prays for someone who needs it or holds the door open and offers a friendly hello on the way in.

Look, everyone wants their ministry to be appreciated and received. I do. Paul did too. He says to the church in Corinth in his letter to them, guys, please receive us.

[14:43] Open your hearts to us. Our hearts are open to you. Can you guys reciprocate that? Like, everybody wants that. Everybody wants their ministry to be appreciated and received. Faithful, mature ministers still need that too.

That's just the nature of relationship. It's just that being appreciated is different to being elevated. Appreciated, man, it's okay to want that. The need to be elevated, that's not good.

Paul was very intentional not to boast about himself and when he did, he did so for a reason. He's like, I don't like doing this. I feel like I'm going out of my mind. This is not natural to me.

He kind of prefaced it before he got into those things. And famously, he said, I will boast only in the cross of Jesus in which the world has been crucified to me and I to it.

Christ-shaped ministry dies to the world's ways, seeking accolades, celebrity worship, money, fame, leveraging yourself to benefit yourself over others.

[15:49] Christ-shaped ministers, they don't need greatness. Their reference is the cross being poured out for the sake of others. For the Christ-shaped minister to see the saints flourishing in their ministry calling, that's the joy, that's the fulfillment.

Because when that happens, Jesus is getting more glory and that's what we want. And when we live for Jesus' glory instead of ours, what we start to do in our togetherness and our life together is we start to really live under Jesus' light and easy yoke that he calls us to take upon ourselves.

And it shouldn't be surprised when we see scandals related to burnout or related to pride amongst ministry leaders who have made an idol out of their ministry. Because when you make ministry about yourself, what happens is at some point your relational world is going to shrink.

It's going to shrink to those who are really devoted to you, to sycophants who won't call you out.

Your world's gonna shrink and it's gonna be filled with less and less people who know the real you.

They just know the persona that you're putting forward, the public persona that you're putting forward. And what you do is you start to operate like an island to yourself.

[17:08] And as that authentic relational world shrinks, ministry burdens grow until they crush you. And that's just not for guys in the pulpit. That can be anyone out there.

You can do any kind of ministry that way. And it will end up crushing you. And that's not what Jesus wants. He wants us in the game for the long haul.

He doesn't want us to burn out. So to do ministry for the long haul means that we have to build meaningful relationships. Paul's honoring of those 10 names is authentic, not generic.

He isn't just like, well, this is kind of a part of the letter where I gotta do the thing. And he's just kind of like, well, I guess I'll throw out that person's name and throw out that person's name. No, these are guys that he lived life with.

They did time together. Some of them literally in prison. They were doing time together for the gospel. They did time together traveling.

[18:09] They did time together doing ministry. They shared in triumph and trial. And the thing about generic relationships is that they avoid the showing up and the sharing life together part.

Generic relationships avoid the difficult parts of relationship. Like sharing and sufferings. Being vulnerable. Going deep.

Exposing our weaknesses and our wounds. I'm gonna say something, but just give me a chance to just get all the way through this.

Okay? I'm concerned for Christians who have a professional counselor that knows them better than any of their Christian friends. That's not good.

Now, I say that and I am for counselors. I'm a very pro-counselor. They aren't the problem. My concern is that Christians are starting to replace authentic Christian relationship with professional ones.

[19 : 13] Now, I say that because professional relationships can be very helpful, especially for life-dominating things where we are stuck.

They bring a skill set and a training and an ability to help that is unique and so I am not saying like professional counselors bad, stay away.

No. Like, they have their place. But you can't compartmentalize your life where they are the only place you go to to confess sin and hope someone will share in your suffering and pain and hurt.

So, use professional relationships but just use them to supplement deep Christian community.

Never use them as a replacement. I want to ask you this.

Is there anyone in your life beyond your immediate family that you would call a beloved brother or sister? a faithful ministry compadre?

[20 : 16] A fellow sufferer of your same affliction? We see from this passage that we just read that Paul had all of those in his life. He had all of those sitting around his table so to speak.

And he embraced them as God's provision of grace. He said, you know, these are good things.

here's the thing, friends. Your family, your spouse, children, your parents, they can't be enough to fill all those important roles of care, comfort, and ministry collaboration in our lives.

Christian community, we need it because it expands those possibilities, expands who is available to us in those roles. but that requires something of us.

We gotta show up, we gotta be faithful, and we gotta be vulnerable. To be vulnerable, our hearts have to be open to let people in. It's risky. That's why we don't do it, right?

To be vulnerable is one of the most scary things you're ever going to step out into, especially if it's the first time doing it. You're not gonna wanna do it. And as risky as it is, it's the only option that the gospel calls us to in doing life together.

[21 : 33] It doesn't have another option of, well, there's another road B, option B over here where you can just walk this out, you and Jesus, by yourself. It just doesn't work.

One of the benefits of doing ministry this way, doing ministry together, is that we are strengthened by each other. Because, what we do is, we minister to each other.

We see it all throughout this passage today. When we partner in ministry together, we are strengthened by mutual comfort and encouragement. You know, when you're on the front lines of ministry, it's gonna be tough.

It's exciting. It's tough. It's full of blood and sweat and tears. It's anything but dull. Sometimes it enters you into seasons of discouragement and weariness.

Me and Elliot were just talking the other day. I was in a season of two weeks of discouragement. He was like, man, Jesse, this is crazy. I was like, the last week, like, it was crazy how discouraged my heart was.

[22 : 36] We go through that too. And we need each other. We need people that know us that can bring comfort and care and encouragement. Because in ministry, what you do is you work hard sowing and watering and then looking for change and looking for change and looking for change and wondering like, okay, when's it gonna happen?

When's it gonna happen? Why isn't it happening? When's it gonna happen? I'm working really hard. I'm working really hard. I'm getting really tired. What's going on? Lord, I could use a little bit of evidence here. You know, some kind of change, some kind of movement.

It's just sometimes it can seem like it's never gonna happen. That can be discouraging in ministry when you do ministry. And then you add to that beyond ministry just like tough life circumstances.

Right? You add that to the mix. You lose a job. You get sick or someone in your family gets sick. All of a sudden, you're under financial stress.

You can start to lose heart in those moments. When our hearts, in those moments, our hearts can get confused or even despairing. And when we do that, yes, there is a, we should be running to the Lord, right?

[23 : 48] We should be strengthened in the Lord and running to Him. Absolutely. But in addition to that, Jesus says, in addition to that wonderful grace that I am here for you, come to me and I will strengthen you.

He says, you know what? You can receive my comfort and my care and my support from your fellow ministry partners as well. Verse seven to eight, one of the reasons Tychicus is coming to the Colossian church, Paul states, is to encourage the Colossians' hearts.

He is being sent there and one of his task lists, one of his assignments is encourage their hearts.

Paul references three guys, Demas, Justice, Mark, who comforted him.

He talks about Epaphras. He says, this guy Epaphras, you know him. He was one of you. He came out from you. You know what he's doing all the time on your behalf?

He is praying and praying and praying. He is praying for you to be strengthened. He is praying for you to grow in maturity so that you can be fully assured in God's will for you. And then Paul says at the very end, hey Colossian believers, can you do me a solid?

[25 : 02] Can you remember my chains? Think about what Paul is saying there. Hey, I'm doing redemptive work. I'm doing God's purpose.

And instead of saying, yeah, look at me, I'm awesome. I'm doing it when chains, y'all like have no idea you should suck it up because look what I'm doing. He's like, man, remember my chains.

Remember the state I'm in.

I would like to be released from these chains. There is a sharing of comfort and care and encouragement happening between Paul, his ministry team and these Colossian believers.

More ministry partners, more people doing ministry means more encouragement. It means more comfort, more care. It means more grace is flowing through us and to us.

It lifts the tide of grace among us and you know what that does? It makes us more resilient and we need resilience. Being a faithful ministry partner means we are encouraging to one another.

[26 : 09] We're thankful. We say those things. We're prayerful. What does that mean? Well, think about encouragement as this. Look what Paul does. He calls out God's grace on people's lives. He says, look what they're doing.

They're amazing. They're wonderful. Call out those God graces you see in other people. Be thankful. Be thankful. Name the hard work you see people doing in ministry.

This guy has worked hard for you guys, he says about Epaphras. He gives thanks for what that guy is doing. He notices it and he names it. And prayer, we need to hold each other up in prayer.

When you do ministry together in this kind of environment where there's shared encouragement, care, we're praying for one another, man, ministry doesn't stop being hard, but it just doesn't feel as heavy and wearisome.

In this environment, the soul gets strengthened. Our ministry capacity enlarges. It amplifies our impact. Like when this happens, one plus one equals three.

[27 : 21] The math doesn't compute, but that's how it works in God's kingdom. There's a sweet grace there where you operate in Jesus' light and easy yoke this way.

Again, you feel like, yeah, we're still working hard, but you feel like, you know what, we're going further with the same effort. It's like walking on those conveyor belts in the airport. You're still going at the same speed as everyone else. You're just like, hmm, I'm going a little bit further, a little bit faster.

I'm not as tired. Doing ministry and team, it increases resilience and impact from mutual sharing of care and comfort and encouragement, but I think there is another aspect of ministry partnerships that increases our resilience and our impact in that it expands our vision.

When we partner in ministry together, our world is enlarged. Along with our faith. Verse nine, Paul's talking about Tychicus and Onesimus and he says, these guys are going to tell of everything that has taken place here.

They're going to give a report of how the gospel is advancing around the world and in different places. Think about this, the Colossian believers, for most of them, back then, people didn't have cars, like they didn't go on long vacations elsewhere, there wasn't airports to get to you and fly around the world.

[28 : 43] It's like most of the time, wherever you were born, that's where you spent about 99% of your life. Sure, you had some merchants that traveled for merchant reasons and that kind of stuff, but your city is where you lived.

Your town is where you lived. The Colossian believers, they were saved into the gospel work at Colossae. And then they had other cities in their Lycus Valley region, Hierapolis, Laodicea. They heard about those things as well, they're closer in, but their understanding of things extended further out to Paul's ongoing ministry and chains in Rome.

They got to hear about those things, right? Those other parts of the world where the gospel was advancing. And we need our heads lifted to see that God's grace is at work in other parts of the world.

I read a monthly cyclical called The Voice of the Martyrs. And the reason that I read it, it is so good from my heart, it brings me into stories of Christians in other places where the gospel is gaining traction and growing, but it's not so easy.

[29 : 52] And it enlarges my faith of what God can do. Real miracles are happening out there. There are Christians living in persecution, but they are still loving and praying and doing good to their enemies.

There's brothers and sisters in Christ that are seeing the most unlikely people get saved because they have an uncommon boldness to keep sharing Jesus in the face of opposition. You see Christians living in places with very few resources and a lot of scarcity and they pray and they have this robust prayer life because God has to come through and there isn't another option.

And you know what? They say he does. Hear my story of what happens. And I'm just like, wow.

Faith explodes. Those stories, they encourage my heart, they strengthen my faith and I need my vision enlarged beyond my newborn context and the USA context because when we lift our heads and look further, what we see is that what Jesus has begun, but what he came to do and what he began on earth, he gave to his church to continue on and he is still doing those things.

He still saves, he still rescues, he still comforts, he still heals. He still reconciles and he does that through people just like you and me doing ministry together.

More people, more ministry, more of God's grace and glory. glory. And here's the thing, as the band comes up and we look to respond, when God's grace and glory are on display, it demands a response.

[31 : 38] People have to respond. In a moment, we're gonna take communion and as we come to the table, it reminds us that, you know what, we need God's grace and we need that before we can become ministers of his grace.

I wanna say to you, if you're not yet a follower of Jesus, before you come to the communion table, come to Jesus. Because here's the thing, there is no amount of work you can do, there's no amount of good you can do, there's no amount of ministry that you could do in the name of Jesus if he hasn't saved you.

You can't earn your way into heaven, you can't minister your way into heaven. You have to start with believing on him and what he has done for you in his life and his death and his resurrection. You have to get the cross for yourself before you can minister the cross in a cross-centered way to others.

But I want you to know he's done it all for you, all that you truly need. Put your faith in Jesus, the one who died for you so you could live in him and if that's you today, there's gonna be a prayer on the screen for you to pray and I encourage you to pray that prayer and I encourage you afterwards to come to talk to myself, Jesse or Elliot or Kirk, any of the pastors that are gonna be up at the front at the end.

We love to know that you've given your life to Jesus so that we can come around you and encourage you and build you up and strengthen you and help you get connected to other believers that can do the same.

[33 : 01] If you're already a follower of Jesus, I want you to think about this as you come to the table. We get to celebrate our Savior. He gives us all the grace we need.

He invites us to come to him. You don't have to jump through hoops to get to that table. It is saying, Jesus, you are enough.

Thank you. Thank you for the sacrifice. Thank you for the cross. Thank you for dying in my place.

Your grace is sufficient for me. And as we come to the table, I want you to understand that, man, as you receive Christ, you're receiving his grace.

And we need that. We need to receive his grace daily because we can't give what we don't have.

And ministry is a lot of giving. We can't give what we don't have.

But this remembers that in him, we have it all. He's enough and there is no lack. Pray with me. So Jesus, do exactly that.

[34 : 08] Meet us right where we're at. You are our everything. As we sing the very end of our time together, Jesus be the center of our lives.

Let your name be lifted high. That's what we desire in our hearts. And where that isn't so, please make that so. We thank you for the gift that you are to us.

We thank you for the grace that flows to us. And as we come to the table, may that be reinforced. May that grace be, we be refilled in that as we eat and drink. I pray that in your name.

Amen. So when you're ready, you can get up and go to the tables around the room, get the bread and the cup and take it back to your seat and you can take the bread and the cup when you're ready.

Amen. Amen.