

The Way We Were – And The Way We Should Be

1. Warm up: If we were flipping through your family photo album, what's a memorable picture you'd want to show us?
2. On Sunday, we wrapped up our study of Colossians by exploring a passage that's kind of like an ancient family photo album. Paul concludes his letter by sharing personal messages to various individuals connected to the Colossian Church. In the process, he gives us a glimpse into what the earliest churches were like – and helps us envision what kind of church we want to be. Let's read together Colossians 4:7-17, as printed on p. 3
3. The first thing we notice about our passage is the **incredible diversity** of the key leaders mentioned. Paul mentions three who, like him, came from a Jewish background, but goes on to mention seven others who were Gentiles. Back then, Jews and Gentiles kept a safe social distance. But here they're working side-by-side, sharing power and responsibility.
 - a. In our culture today, who are some groups of people that keep a safe social distance from each other? Why do you think this distancing persists? What are the causal factors?
 - b. Paul says Jesus is the reason the "walls of hostility" between Jews and Gentiles were tumbling down in early Christian communities. Ephesians 2:13-16. Jeff said, "Wherever the Spirit of Christ is allowed to reign, you will see incredibly diverse communities of believers – and amazing signs of reconciliation." Do you agree? If so, what is it about Jesus that causes this phenomenon?
 - c. In our passage, Paul also mentions Onesimus, whose backstory is recorded in the book of Philemon. Onesimus was a slave owned by Philemon. Onesimus ran away, encountered Paul, and became a believer. Paul pressured Philemon to emancipate Onesimus and Philemon complied. In our passage, it appears that Onesimus became a prominent leader in the early church. Paul also mentions Nympha, a prominent female leader. Although we no longer have a slave/master dichotomy in our culture, we do have dramatic socio-economic differences. And women also still encounter many barriers, especially in religion. It's ironic that the radical inclusivity of first century Christianity soon gave way to radical exclusion in subsequent centuries as Christianity became more institutionalized. Why do you think things snapped back so quickly?
 - d. Although LifeJourney is *far* from perfect, we are striving to restore the early-church ideal of radical equality and reconciliation. Jeff said, "The world needs to see churches like ours. So many people in the world today need churches like ours." Do you agree? Why or why not?
4. Our scripture passage also reflects how **incredibly close-knit** early Christian communities were – to the point that they referred to each other as brothers and sisters. They were tight; they were spiritual family. Elsewhere Paul sums it up like this, "If one

member suffers, all members suffer with them. If one member is honored, all the members rejoice with them.” I Corinthians 12:26.

- a. How well or not do you think our church is doing in fostering closeness and connection? Do you personally feel closeness and connection? If so, what fosters that sense of connection for you?
 - b. How can we foster even greater closeness within our church community? (If you come up with some ideas, please share them with someone on staff.)
 - c. Tell us about a time when you’ve experienced a real sense of closeness with someone in our church community.
 - d. A recent Harvard University study documented the dramatic health benefits of being a regular participant in a spiritual community, including a 33% lower chance of dying during the 16 years of the study. Why do you think that is?
 - e. Proverbs 18:24 says, “A person who has friends must themselves be friendly.” What do you think that means?
5. Our passage goes on to remind us that participation in church community is not just about connection and companionship. It’s also about **actualizing your soul**, which is yet another reason why we desperately need spiritual community. In verse 15 of our passage, Paul says, “Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus . . . , is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.”
- a. We pray about a lot of things for the people around us, but we usually focus on situational needs. Rarely do we pray for those around us to live into the fullness of God’s will for their life. Why is that?
 - b. In Jeremiah 1:9, God says, “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you. Before you were born, I consecrated you.” Consecrated means to dedicate formally to a divine purpose. Do you genuinely believe that about yourself?
 - c. Jeff suggested that we’re never going to be able to figure out God’s will in advance. Instead we discover God’s will, as we go, when we respond as Jesus would to the various situations of our life. Read the Halverson statement on p. 3. How do these words make you feel? Do you embrace them? Why or why not?
 - d. Paul’s final statement is found in verse 17. “Tell Archippus, ‘See to it that you complete the ministry you have received in the Lord.’” We all have a ministry, *i.e.*, divine purposes, to accomplish for God. What factors are most likely to knock you off course and keep you from accomplishing the divine purposes for which God created you?

Colossians 4:7-17

⁷ Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant^(a) in the Lord. ⁸ I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts. ⁹ He is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here.

¹⁰ My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.) ¹¹ Jesus, who is called Justus, also sends greetings. These are the only Jews among my co-workers for the kingdom of God, and they have proved a comfort to me. ¹² Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured. ¹³ I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis. ¹⁴ Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings. ¹⁵ Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.

¹⁶ After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea.

¹⁷ Tell Archippus: "See to it that you complete the ministry you have received in the Lord."

¹⁸ I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

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Wherever you go, God is sending you.

Wherever you are, God has put you there.

God has a purpose in your being right where you are.

Christ, who indwells you by the power of his Spirit,

Wants to do something in and through you.