

Christ-Centered Relationships: Loving Each Other Enough

What's the Big Idea?

God's people should love each other enough to enter into rich relationship with each other and pray for, challenge, and comfort one another.

What's the Problem?

We focus on ourselves instead of Christ and others, so we don't enter into the kind of relationships with one another that God desires.

What's our Response?

We should draw on the Spirit's power and let Christ live through us so that we would enter into rich relationship with our brothers and sisters in Christ, pray for them, challenge them, and comfort them.

Memorize

Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bond-slave of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God.

Colossians 4:12

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

This passage concludes Paul's letter to the Colossians. It's filled with greetings and other seemingly random details that tempt us to view it as a "throw-away" passage. But it's still part of God's inspired word (see 2 Timothy 3:16-17) and gives a sweet closing snapshot of Christian love and community.

While this passage models several key expressions of Christian love, Christ exemplifies these things perfectly and empowers us through his Spirit to express them in our lives. Help your group not only look to the example of this passage but also to the perfect example of Christ and the power of his Spirit as they apply this passage to their lives.

Messengers of Encouragement-Colossians 4:7-9

Paul lets the Colossians know that he's sending Tychicus and Onesimus to them so that they may know about Paul's circumstances in prison. New Testament scholar Doug Moo says that these men likely carried the letter of Colossians to the Colossians. Not only did they deliver this letter and provide details on Paul's imprisonment, but also they would have been able to give further explanation of the things Paul addressed in his letter.

Help your group to see that Paul cares enough about the Colossians, whom he's never met (see Colossians 1:7, 2:1), to send personal messengers to inform them of his situation and encourage their hearts. Point your group to Christ as the perfect example of Paul's care: he loved people enough to enter into rich relationship with them by laying down his life for them (see John 13:1-17; 34). Help them see that Christ wants to love people like this through them as they are filled with his Spirit.

Greetings from Prison-Colossians 4:10-17

Paul relays greetings to the Colossians from a number of his associates (verses 10-14) and sends some greetings and instructions of his own (verses 15-17). Help your group to see that this is more than a paragraph full of strange-sounding names. This paragraph models people loving each other enough to enter into rich relationship with them, pray for them (verses 12-13), and challenge them (verse 17).

Point your group to Christ as the one who models these things perfectly, not only by entering into rich relationship with his people (see above), but also by praying for them (Hebrews 7:25) and challenging them in grace and truth (see John 21:15-17). He empowers us to do the same as we draw on the power of his Spirit.

Farewell-Colossians 4:18

Paul's farewell is short and sweet. After likely having an associate transcribe his words up to this point, he writes this final greeting in his own hand. He encourages the Colossians to remember his imprisonment. And he wishes God's grace to be upon them.

Have your group take note of Paul's encouragement for the Colossians to remember his imprisonment. Help them to see that this is yet another expression of Christian love in relationships: remembering and encouraging one another in the midst of hard times. God remembers his people perfectly, putting our tears in his bottle (Psalm 56:8), and Jesus is always with us in all our circumstances (Matthew 28:20). He empowers us to incarnate this kind of love as he fills us with his Spirit.

What Are the Questions?

Launch

What are some of the most significant things a person can do to communicate love to you?

Explore

Read Colossians 4:7-9

1. Why does Paul send Tychicus and Onesimus to the Colossians?
2. What does it say about Paul that he sends these men to the Colossians?

Read Colossians 4:10-17

3. What do we learn about what Paul values by his willingness to take space to convey all these greetings to the Colossians from his associates?
4. What do we learn about prayer from Epaphras' example (verses 12-13)?
5. What do these verses say about Epaphras' motivation for praying for the Colossians?
6. Explain in your own words what Paul was calling Archippus to in verse 17.

Read Colossians 4:18

7. Why do you think Paul wanted the Colossians to remember his imprisonment?
8. Read Romans 5:8; Hebrews 7:25; John 21:15-17; and Psalm 56:8. How do these verses show God (and Christ specifically) exemplifying a heart to enter into rich relationships (verses 7-17), a desire to labor in prayer for people (verses 12-13), a willingness to challenge someone in their faith (verse 17), and a mindset to remember someone when they're going through a hard time (verse 18)?

Apply

9. As you think about a life that enters into rich relationships, labors in prayer for people, challenges people, and remembers them in their hard times, what holds you back from growing as this kind of person?
10. Who in your life do you need to enter into richer relationship with for the sake of Christ? What's a step you can take this week in God's power to do that?
11. In what way do you sense God calling you to draw upon his power to grow as a person who labors for people in prayer?
12. Is there someone you need to challenge to be all God has called him or her to be? How can you issue that challenge in God's power and in a way that expresses his love to this person?
13. Who in your life is going through a hard time? What's a tangible step you can take in God's power to remember and encourage this person?

What Are the Answers?

1. He wants them to know what's happening with him, and he wants them to be encouraged.
2. He cares about them. This is true in spite of Paul never having met them personally (see Colossians 2:1).
3. He values rich relationships.
4. It's hard work.
5. He wants them to stand perfect and fully assured of God's will in their lives. He has a deep concern for them.
6. Paul called Archippus to pay attention to the opportunity for service that God had given him and make the most of it.
7. It would have been easy for Paul and his imprisonment to be out-of-sight, out-of-mind for the Colossians.
8. Jesus enters into rich relationship with us by laying down his life for us. He lives to make intercession for us. He is willing to call us to our potential in grace and truth. And he knows and cares about all our suffering and pain.
9. Allow the group to discuss.
10. Allow the group to discuss.
11. Allow the group to discuss.
12. Allow the group to discuss.
13. Allow the group to discuss.