

SESSION 13

Christ's friendliness

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Colossians 4:7–18

BUILDUP THEME

UPLIFT OTHERS

God wants believers to help each other grow in Christ.

MEASURABLE RESPONSE

The learners will recognize their friends as treasures and will commit to praying for them.

MEMORY VERSE

“Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God” (Colossians 4:12).

Teacher Preparation

- ☐ Paul knew the importance of close friendships as he ministered. No doubt they were instrumental in his growth as a believer and he to theirs.
- ☐ Read Colossians 4:7–18. What friendship qualities did Paul celebrate in his closing remarks? What might you say about a list of your friends? Do you have friends you could commend as dependable and encouraging? Do you have friends that pray with and for you?
- ☐ Encourage your students to seek friends that can help them grow and challenge them to be willing to help their friends grow in the Lord.

Session Summary

Paul sent greetings to the Colossians and commended friends who were with him. Some of Paul's friends had experienced heavy trials with Paul, proving that they were loyal to him and to Christ. Others were new friends.

Session Starters

Option 1—A True Friend

Gather

- Whiteboard and marker.

Steps

1. Write TRUE FRIEND vertically on the whiteboard. Have learners suggest traits of a true friend. Write their responses on the whiteboard. (Example: Truthful, Respectful, Understanding, Excellent listener, Faithful, Responsive, Interested, Eager to help, Noncontrolling, Devoted.)
2. Transition to the Bible study.

Paul listed many of his friends in the ministry to end his letter to Colosse. His statements give us insight into Christlike friendships.

Option 2—Defining Friendship

Steps

1. Work with your students to define friendship.

ASK: What would you say is the definition of true friendship? (Q1)

ASK: How has someone proved to be a true friend to you? (Q2)
2. Transition to the Bible study.

Believers ought to be the friendliest people on earth. They ought to project kindness and goodwill to those who need Christ, and they ought to offer unconditional love to each other. Paul commended his exemplary friends in his closing words of his letter to the Colossians.

Bible Study

We often talk about Christian fellowship, but do we value that fellowship as highly as we should? When Paul was under house arrest at Rome, he thought often about his Christian friends, and what he wrote in the closing verses of Colossians shows that he treasured them. Studying those verses gives us a clearer understanding of what makes Christian friends so valuable.

I. Friends Depend on One Another (Col. 4:7, 8)

Paul wrote that Tychicus would give the Colossians a thorough report on Paul's situation. Tychicus may have been converted to Christ at Ephesus. He had accompanied Paul to Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Rome (Acts 20:4—28:31). He had stayed with Paul through thick and thin (Col. 4:7).

READ: Colossians 4:7. **ASK:** What do you learn about Tychicus from the descriptions Paul used of him (beloved brother, faithful minister, fellow servant)? (Q3) *Beloved brother—He was saved. He must have been close to Paul, because he wasn't just a brother in Christ but a "beloved brother." Faithful minister—He was a steadfast and loyal assistant to Paul. Fellow servant—He was humble and served others, as Paul was and did. Presumably they served together.*

READ: Colossians 4:8.

Every believer is a brother, but Tychicus was a dear brother. He lifted burdens; he didn't create them. He was a spirit builder, not a spirit breaker. He would comfort the Colossians' hearts and return an accurate report of their affairs to Paul. In any church, a "beloved brother" like Tychicus is a delight, not a downer.

READ: Colossians 4:9.

Tychicus was also a "faithful minister" (4:7). He was dependable. Paul knew he could count on him to deliver a reliable report to the Colossians. The realization that Paul could depend on Tychicus must have been a constant encouragement to Paul. Having a faithful friend to depend on in times of trouble relieves the mind and rejoices the heart.

Furthermore, Paul called Tychicus a fellow servant "in the Lord" (4:7). Paul saw himself and his friend as equals in the Lord, both serving the Lord and doing whatever God had given them to do. Christian friends share this view of themselves and ministry. Snobbish pride is as unbecoming in ministry as a big wart on the Mona Lisa's nose would be. All believers, from custodians to theologians, are fellow ministers if they are serving the Lord. They are glad to be on His team, and they reject the notion that they are superstars. They all depend on one another.

ASK: Which of your friends could you describe as a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant? (Q4)

ASK: How valuable are your friends to you? (Q5)

ASK: Evaluate this statement: Friends are nice to have, but not every believer needs friends. (Q6) *Everyone needs friends. Believers are part of the Body of Christ and grow in the Body of Christ as they minister to one another. True ministry cannot take place between*

mere acquaintances. All believers should be friends with at least some of those they minister to and with.

II. Friends See Potential in One Another (Col. 4:9)

Tychicus would not travel alone to Colosse, since Onesimus would travel with him (4:9). Onesimus was from Colosse, where he had been a servant to Philemon, a member of the Colossian church. According to Paul's letter to Philemon, Onesimus had run away from Philemon and had made his way to Rome.

READ: Philemon 11. **ASK:** What actions and attitudes would you say characterized Onesimus, the unprofitable servant who ran away from his godly master? (Q7) *Actions and attitudes that may have made him unprofitable are pride, stubbornness, laziness, deceit, theft, stirring up others, carelessness, and belligerence.*

The church at Colosse may have been meeting in Philemon's house. If that was the case, then Onesimus would have known some teachings about God and Christ. At least initially he wanted nothing to do with God and His people.

ASK: If you had met Onesimus as he was running away, would you have seen him as a potential good friend? Why or why not? (Q8)

Paul saw Onesimus as a potential friend even when he was a rebellious, runaway servant. Paul took a risk and got to know Onesimus. Eventually Paul led him to the Lord. At the time of Paul's writing of the Colossian letter, Paul was preparing to send Onesimus back to Philemon as a profitable person. Onesimus was a twice-born servant. He had been born into servitude and born again into voluntary servitude to Jesus Christ! Paul called his friend Onesimus a "faithful and beloved brother" (4:9). The potential that Paul saw in Onesimus was realized.

ASK: What can you learn from Paul's befriending of the rebellious and sinful Onesimus? (Q9) *To look for potential in people.*

III. Friends Endure with One Another (Col. 4:10a)

Having alerted the Colossians to the fact that Tychicus and Onesimus would be visiting them, Paul sent greetings from three Jewish believers: Aristarchus, Marcus, and Jesus, called Justus. These good friends had won Paul's admiration.

READ: Colossians 4:10a.

Aristarchus was a prisoner with Paul at Rome, but he had been Paul's constant companion for a long time. Luke reported that Aristarchus had been with Paul in Ephesus and was accosted there by rioters (Acts 19:29). Later, when Paul was a prisoner aboard a ship sailing to Italy, Aristarchus experienced the shipwreck Luke described (Acts 27).

Aristarchus had learned by experience that following the Lord carries a cost. Nevertheless, he must have considered knowing and serving Christ to be rewards that far outweighed the cost of discipleship.

ASK: How might enduring a shipwreck and riot affect a friendship? (Q10) *Enduring hardship together would have drawn Paul and Aristarchus into a strong, trusting relationship.*

Paul and Aristarchus must have had a deep relationship, for nothing forges a relationship like enduring with one another does.

IV. Friends Seek Reconciliation (Col. 4:10b, 11)

READ: Colossians 4:10.

Marcus (John Mark) had known Paul for a long time, but early in the relationship, during Paul's first missionary journey, the two had had a falling out. Mark, who had accompanied Barnabas and Paul for a while, decided to leave the entourage and return home (Acts 13:5–13). Later, when Barnabas planned to take Mark on a second journey with Paul, Paul refused. The two missionaries went their separate ways. Barnabas and Mark became a team and departed for Cyprus. Paul chose Silas, and they departed for Syria and Cilicia (15:39, 41). In time, however, Paul and Mark reconciled. Mark had become a credit to the cause of Christ. So Paul asked the Colossians to put out the welcome mat for Mark if he should ever visit them (Col. 4:10).

READ: Colossians 3:12–15. **ASK:** How did Paul practice what he preached in his relationship with his friend Mark? (Q11)

Christian friends may not always see eye to eye. They may hold contrasting opinions or convictions and may even separate from each other, but they should be as quick to forgive as they were to separate. They ought to understand that people and situations do change. We are all imperfect, but the Lord is perfect. He can—and does—work patiently and perfectly in our lives to make us, like Mark, profitable for the ministry (2 Tim. 4:11).

READ: Colossians 4:11.

Aristarchus and Mark, both Jews, were joined by another Jew in sending greetings to the Colossians. His name was Jesus, but he was called Justus. Perhaps his humility would not permit him to be addressed by the Savior's name. This Christian worker, who anticipated Messiah's Kingdom, had cheered Paul during his long confinement.

Paul identified Aristarchus, Marcus, and Justus as his fellow workers for the kingdom of God. He noted that they had been a comfort to him. As devout saved Jews, these three men joined Paul in working for Christ in anticipation of His glorious messianic Kingdom. Those who work

faithfully for Christ, knowing that someday He will set up His Kingdom on earth, provide one another with friendly encouragement just as Paul's three friends encouraged him.

V. Friends Pray for One Another (Col. 4:12–16)

READ: Colossians 4:12, 13.

Paul sent a greeting from Epaphras. Probably the Colossians' pastor, Epaphras was a servant of Christ, meaning he voluntarily worked like a slave for the sake of Christ. As a faithful spiritual leader, he prayed fervently for the Colossians. He requested that God guide them to spiritual maturity. He wanted them to be so well armed with sound doctrine that they would repel error. Paul testified that Epaphras had a great zeal for the Colossian believers and for those in Colosse, Laodicea, and Hierapolis.

BIBLE STUDY: Have the students find characteristics of effective prayer in Colossians 4:12 and 13. They should note that it is constant, fervent, and specific. Furthermore, it has others' interests and needs at heart, and it values God's will.

ASK: Which of your friends do you count on to pray regularly for you? (Q12)

ASK: How would you describe the fervor of your prayers for your friends? (Q13)

READ: Colossians 4:14.

Paul greeted the Colossians on behalf of Luke, the beloved physician. Luke had joined Paul at Troas (Acts 16) and had traveled with Paul from Troas to Philippi and ultimately from Philippi to Rome. His medical knowledge and care must have helped Paul immensely. We can only wonder how often he soothed Paul's bumps and bruises after a persecution. Luke was still at Paul's side in Rome, perhaps providing medical relief for the sores that chains and shackles had inflicted. Even later, when Paul's execution was imminent, Luke was at his side.

ASK: What do you suppose Paul cherished more—Luke's physical help or spiritual help through prayer? (Q14)

In contrast to Luke was Demas (Col. 4:14). Paul didn't praise Demas. Nor did he describe him in any way. Perhaps he had begun to see in Demas indicators that he was falling in love with the evil world. Later he lamented to Timothy that Demas had forsaken him, having loved the world (2 Tim. 4:10).

ASK: What can you learn from Demas's example about the need to pray for all your friends? (Q15)

READ: Colossians 4:15, 16.

Paul asked the Colossians to convey his greetings to their believing neighbors at Laodicea, to a person named Nymphas, and to the church that assembled in Nymphas's house. Also, Paul wanted the Colossians and the Laodiceans to exchange their letters.

VI. Friends Encourage One Another (Col. 4:17, 18)

Do you feel discouraged or overwhelmed in a ministry the Lord has given you? Don't quit! Don't throw in the towel; use it to dry your tears or kneel on it and pray! Paul instructed the Colossians to encourage Archippus to take heed to and fulfill the ministry that he had received in the Lord.

READ: Colossians 4:17.

Archippus was apparently the son of Philemon and Apphia (Philemon 2). He must have held an office in the Colossian church. Perhaps the spread of Gnosticism had discouraged him. He needed to view his ministry as a gift from the Lord and to regard his obligation to fulfill it as a mandate from the Lord.

ASK: What is the difference between a friend who sympathizes with you and a friend who truly encourages you? (Q16) *A friend who sympathizes with your problems simply reinforces how you feel. A friend who encourages you helps you move beyond your feelings and grow because of your problems.*

Clank, clank! Scrape, scrape! We can almost hear Paul's chains clatter and rub the table as he signed the letter to the Colossians. His concern and love for the Colossians were so strong that he personally attached his signature to his letter.

READ: Colossians 4:18.

As he closed the letter, Paul urged the Colossians to remember his bonds. Their prayers would help him cope with the chains and maintain a joyful attitude. They would also support him as he witnessed to his guards and other unbelievers who encountered him. The prayers of Christian friends can turn trials into triumphs and oppressive situations into opportunities for sharing the gospel. We must pray more for one another and depend upon divine grace to sustain us. Praying friends help equip us for life.

Session Application

Gather

- Resource 63-R11.

Steps

1. Talk about the need for close Christian friends.

ASK: What are the risks of not having close Christian friends?
(Q17)

ASK: What benefits have you realized from close Christian friends? (Q18)

2. Distribute resource 63-R11. Encourage your learners to write the names of their friends on the handout and to use Colossians 1:9–12 as their prayer request list for their friends. (Q19)

ASK: What can you do this week to show your Christian friends that you appreciate them? (Q20)

[illegible]

63-R11

