The Chain of Grace: The Legacy of Epaphras

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Preacher: John Hopkins

[0:00] So if you're like me this morning, you walked in, you saw these boxes up here, and you thought, are these the Christmas decorations? Are we doing a new version of breaking of bread where we use! Frosted flakes and life cereal? Well, you think about it, the gospel, we're all frosted flakes, and we come to Jesus, and then we get new life. How's that for a spontaneous illustration off the cuff?

But that's actually not why these boxes are here. These boxes are a tangible evidence of hard work. Operation Christmas Child, there's 112 boxes in these big boxes. Isn't that cool?
That represents growth of a vision that I think Kathy Ludwig brought before us and challenged us as a church. It's the fruit of a craft fair a few months ago. It's a fruit of hard work of assembling these things, and you think, what does that do? Just a box. Jesus said that if we give a drink of water in his name, we don't lose a reward. Just a drink of water. There's a lot more than a drink of water in here. And for the boys and girls that open these boxes and see that somebody in Dubuque, Iowa, which they probably never heard of, and to be fair, you probably haven't heard of the place where these are going. But they're seeing a tangible connection between the promises of the Bible and that it really matters. That the things we talk about, they're kind of hard to understand, especially as a child, that some man dying on the cross makes a difference in my life today.
Maybe a kid can't get that. But then they see that somebody in Dubuque put this together because of Jesus. It's a touchpoint. It's a bridge. This is a tangible expression of the gospel.
So we're going to take a moment, we're going to pray that God would use these tangible touchpoints to lead boys and girls to Jesus. And then we'll get on with our sermon this morning. So God, thank you for the hands that assembled these boxes, for the work that was involved in putting them together, the money that was raised to send them, the vision just to make it happen. Lord, we're grateful for all these things. We're grateful that we have the means to give and bless other people. And Lord, I pray that those who are seeking to share a blessing, that you would bless them in turn. Let them see themselves as the hand of Jesus in the lives of children all over the world, because that's literally what we are. You take our offering, might be as small as a couple of dead fish and some loaves of bread.
[2:48] And you multiply those gifts and you feed a multitude. We pray, Lord, that you would do that same thing with these boxes, that there would be a multiplication that we can only come to see once we're in heaven. I think part of heaven, Lord, is you showing how you used our small gifts and multiplied them to create great blessing. We look forward to that day. Lord, we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. So Colossians chapter 4. Like I always do, we're going to take a little stroll down memory lane. And you'll remember last week, we talked about, and actually for the whole bulk of the series on Colossians, we've talked about the fact that life is a mystery.
There's so much that we don't understand. We just don't get it. We come hard against some truths that we don't want to really think about.
What are those truths? Life is hard. The unexpected hits us right in the face. I had a guy stop by my house yesterday to, he bought a bunk bed from me.
And we got to talking about this fancy car he was renting. He had a rental car because he'd been in a car accident. The same woman hit him four times.
[4:14] I think there may have been a problem. She rear-ended him. He pulled off. She pulled off as well. She hit him again. Then she thought I need to fix, correct where my car is.

She backed up and hit him again. And then the officer came, wrote a ticket, big surprise. Told the lady, I want you to back up to give him room to get out.

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Don't hit my squad car. She backed up and hit the squad car. Went forward into him. And I hope they took her keys. What an illustration.
I mean, it's funny. I couldn't believe, when he said the same woman hit him four times, I thought, do we need to talk about the relationships in your life? What's going on there? But we're blindsided by the circumstances of life.
And frankly, they're not always funny. I'm sure he wasn't laughing. He laughs now, but I'm sure he wasn't laughing when that happened. It's more a case of, what's going on? And we don't understand.
[5:16] And then there's a challenge that comes with us seeking to obey the Lord. Each of us has a calling. We have a calling to follow Jesus. To allow him to do his work in our lives.

To bless us. He blesses us so that we can bless other people. And shockingly, that's hard. It takes work. It pushes us beyond what we think we're capable of doing.
And so again, we're left either blocked by our own sin, or just the fact that we're finite and we're not enough. And even when we're trying to do the right thing, we need help.
It doesn't work. It's a mystery. But the key, and this is the message of Colossians, is the gospel is the answer to every question.
Jesus' death on the cross. The initiative that God sent. The initiative that God showed in sending his son. God demonstrates his love for us.
[6:16] And it's while we're still sinners, Christ died for us. He sent his son. And in coming and living life where we could see it.

You can read about it in the gospels. We saw life live the way God intended men and women to live. In concert with God himself. In obedience to God.
And then Jesus died on the cross to make it possible for us to live that life. And to follow in his footsteps. And in the contemplation of Jesus' life.
Of looking how he lived. And following his example. In accepting Jesus' death on the cross for us. We begin to discover meaning in the midst of these mysteries.
And what did Paul tell us in Colossians chapter 1? The mystery revealed. The answer to all the questions. Is this. Christ in you. The hope of glory. Christ in you.
[7:17] That's the hope of the gospel. That when we accept Jesus as our Savior. When we accept the free gift of eternal life. Jesus literally resides within us. Do you remember when Jesus told the disciples, I'm going to leave?

And they mourned. No, no, you can't go. And he said, no, it's actually better for you that I leave. How is that possible? Because there's separation. And Jesus said, because.
I'm actually going to get closer to you by leaving. Because what did he promise? I'm not going to leave you as orphans. The Holy Spirit's going to come. And he's going to live inside of you. We become the temple of God.
And God lives in us. We literally experience every day. Whether we know it or pay attention to it or not. That Jesus' name, Emmanuel. God with us.
Is lived out. Every single day. That's the answer. And then last week. We started looking at the last portion of Colossians chapter 4.
[8:21] The end of the book. Where Paul lists all the people. That he's hanging out with when he wrote the letter. And I told you your homework was to look up Tychicus. Because I didn't have time to talk about him.

We talked about Onesimus. If you recall, Onesimus was a lot like us. Onesimus was a fugitive. He'd been a slave. And he ran away from his master, Philemon.
And he ran to Ephesus. A big city where he could hide. And because God, I think, has a great sense of humor. In this big city of Ephesus.
Who does Onesimus run into? The one man who knows his master back in Colossae. The apostle Paul. And so Paul, as we talked about, led Philemon to Christ earlier.
And then leads Onesimus to Christ. And then with a little imagination, we imagine the scene where Paul connected the dots and realized, I remember Philemon telling me about this slave who ran away.
[9:25] Onesimus, it's you. We need to put this fugitive lifestyle to an end. You've discovered life in Christ.

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You've discovered new life. You've been set free from the law of sin and death. But you're still in chains by Roman law. Because you broke the law and running away from Philemon.
And you need to do the hard thing. I want you to remember this phrase. You need to take the risk of obedience and go back to Philemon. And see what happens.
Because Philemon is a brother as well. He got saved too. And of course, Onesimus, as you would imagine, is not too keen on the idea of going back to Colossae at the risk of being put back in chains and punished for running away.
But he obeys. And he went back to Colossae with the letter in hand, the letter of Philemon, where Paul says to Philemon, Philemon, your slave is now your brother.
[10:31] And he's beloved to me. He's my son. And so I want you to forgive his debt. And even though the Bible doesn't tell us, we saw that Philemon did forget Onesimus' debt.

Because we know, or we think we know, that Onesimus went back to Ephesus and became one of the key leaders of a key church, the church of Ephesus.
Onesimus became a leader. The slave not only was free, but he was able to play a key role in the spread of the gospel from that church in Ephesus.
That's the story of the gospel lived out. Not just what happens when we go to heaven, which is awesome. Never lose sight of that. We don't have to fear death. But also, God is at work in our lives today.
So think, I just want you to listen to this. This is Colossians 1, 11, and 12. And this is kind of a summary of Onesimus' life, of our lives. This is from the message.
[11:34] Paul is speaking. He's talking to the Colossians. We pray that you'll have the strength to stick it out over the long haul. Paul is acknowledging life is hard. Following Jesus is hard.

So he's praying that they'll have the strength to hang in there, to keep going over that long, long, long journey of life. But not the grim strength of gritting your teeth, but the glory strength that God gives.
There's something different about how God empowers us to go through life. And I love the way Eugene Peterson translated this. This strength is strength that endures the unendurable and spills over into joy.
That was Onesimus' experience. He goes back to Colossae, seriously concerned that he's going to lose his freedom.
But he takes the risk of obedience. He's enduring the unendurable. And when he gets there, what does he discover? That Philemon agreed with Paul.
[12:36] And he's embraced as a brother, no longer a slave. It is strength that endures the unendurable and spills over into joy. And this last phrase, Kara and I have taken as our own as we walk our journey, as we're recovering from this stroke from a month ago.

Thanking the Father who makes us strong enough. It's God who's giving us what we need.
Thanking the Father who makes us strong enough to take part in everything bright and beautiful that he has for us.
What Onesimus discovered was that when we take the risk of obedience and when we follow the Lord Jesus and take him at his word, it's scary, it's hard.
But at the other end, there's light. But there's beauty that God has for us. And it results in the ability to share the way we've been blessed and to share that blessing with other people.
You know, one of the things that's interesting to me, as Kara and I have been the recipient of so much generous love and care, I mean, honestly, it's overwhelming. To be so much the focus of people's love.
[13:52] But what's really interesting to me, not surprising, is that some of you have walked this road personally. And not to diminish the giving of every gift that we've received.

Please don't misunderstand. But those who have walked this road, it's a different... There's a familiarity and wisdom that's only learned by facing trial.
It's the only way. And so some of you, when they sit down with Kara, talk from experience. And it makes a difference. That's part of the bright and beauty.
The light and beauty, we're benefiting from it. But the giver benefits as well, because suddenly that thing that was hard is redeemed. Look how God works.
That hard thing is redeemed as it becomes the very thing that you can use to bless somebody else. And I can tell you, we have been blessed. God gives us the strength to endure, to give us the

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strength so that we can literally experience the bright and beautiful things that He has for us.
[15:12] Let that be your hope. That's part of the gospel. So we saw that lived out in Onesimus. Now this week, we're going to turn the corner and we're going to talk about Epaphras, who was a really key player from Colossae and ended up planting the Colossian church.

Now remember, there's a theme that I talked about that are going to be in this last week's sermon, this week and next week. That theme is 2 Timothy 2.2. You can turn there in your Bible. It's going to be up on the slide here as well.
Paul is writing to Timothy, who is a leader. He planted churches. Now he's appointing elders. And this is what Paul charges Timothy with.
You, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. That's the starting point. He centers or roots Timothy in his relationship with God.
As Timothy does the work of planting the seeds that will yield strong and healthy churches, Paul says, You, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.
[16:20] Now this is the thing that we see played out in Colossians 4. The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

There is this thread that weaves itself through the story that's really easy to miss. So I'm going to show it to you, and then we're going to look at another link in the chain.
So we're going to step back. Maybe a better way to look at it is we're going to go up, and we're going to look at this chain of God's work from a higher vantage point so we can see the whole thing. We were focused in Onesimus and Philemon last week.
We're going to pull up to a bigger view, and then we're going to go back down again and look at Epiphras. So from the high view, look at this chain that predates Paul.
In Acts chapter, I don't remember. It's 1 or 2 or 3 or 4. It's actually Acts chapter 4. It's in there. See, this is homework. If I don't remember where a verse is, it's your homework to figure it out where it is.
[17:22] I did that on purpose. Acts chapter 4, at the very end, we meet this guy whose name is Joseph of Cyprus. If I said, quick, who's Joseph of Cyprus?

You would go, I don't know, but I'm guessing he's Cyprian. And you would not be wrong. You know him well because he got a nickname that so caught his character that we know him by his nickname.
And everybody called him by his nickname. As a matter of fact, I'll bet you, if you said in Antioch, hey, do you know Joseph of Cyprus? Even the people of Antioch in the first century would say, uh, no.
The only Cyprian I know is Barnabas. Who was Joseph of Cyprus.
Joseph became known as Barnabas, the son of encouragement. A man who was a persecutor of the church, who probably saw Jesus crucified, who endorsed and encouraged and helped in the murder of Stephen, had a close encounter of the divine kind on the road to Damascus.
[18:44] You know who I'm talking about. Saul's knocked off his horse. Why are you persecuting me? Jesus said to Paul, or Saul. Who are you?

I'm Jesus who you're persecuting. I have a plan for your life. You're going to be blind for three days. You know the rest of the story. But not surprisingly, the people of the church said, this is just some evil plot of Saul trying to work his way in.
He's pretending to be a Christian. But we don't trust him. Because this guy clearly hated us. My cousin is in jail because of him. Stephen is dead because he helped.
We don't trust this clown. Why did they suddenly, what changed that they began to trust that Saul really was a new man? That he was Paul. It was Barnabas.
Barnabas took this man under his wing, taught him the things of Jesus, equipped him, and then let him take the lead. And we see that.
[19:45] Barnabas is the lead dog. Saul is his follower in Antioch. And then all of a sudden, the script flips. And Paul is the one who's leading the charge.

Paul is the one who wrote a good chunk of our New Testament. But it's because of Barnabas. So Joseph of Cyprus gets saved.
His character is transformed. He becomes Barnabas, the son of encouragement. Saul becomes Paul. And ends up in Ephesus. And in Ephesus, he meets a slave owner named Philemon.

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And Philemon gets saved and goes back and hosts a church in his home. Paul meets Onesimus, an escaped slave, leads him to Christ, challenges him to take the risk of obedience, and he goes back, repairs the relationship with Philemon, becomes a leader in the church of Ephesus. Ephesus. Epiphras is a man of Colossae. Somehow, he shows up in Ephesus. You're going to see a theme here.
[20:54] Paul leads him to Christ. He goes back and he plants the church in Colossae. We're going to see a lot about Ephesus this morning. And then, in next week's sermon, we're going to talk about Luke.

Luke. So we see this chain of people handing the gospel from one to the next to the next. Now, we're going to talk about this in a lot more fullness coming after the first of the year, but I just want to give a plug really quick for the model that we see in this chain.
Because there's no substitute for it. None. And a lot of the problems that we see in the American church today are because we try to figure out a more efficient way than the Bible tells us to do things.
That's a mistake. What we see here is one person sharing the gospel with another person, leading them to a relationship with Jesus, engaging them in studying the Word, studying the life of Jesus, and learning what it looks like to be a follower of Jesus.
An apprentice of Jesus brings on a new apprentice of Jesus, teaches him, and then the cycle repeats itself and repeats itself and repeats itself. Brothers and sisters, that's the way the gospel goes forward.
[22:16] Period. Period. It's not through mass events. It's not through even Billy Graham with all the things that he did. deeper and more lasting fruit comes in the very slow, plodding process of a believer sharing the hope of Jesus with somebody who needs to hear it and then showing them the way and releasing that person to repeat the process.

That's the apprenticeship to Jesus. That's what we should be doing. Each one of us. We might say, I'm not an evangelist.
That's okay. Because the other thing that we see in this chain is a real rich diversity of gifts. Tim talked about this a few weeks ago. We all have different gifts and yet those gifts all came into play in the spread of the gospel.
The weight of the work doesn't rest on an evangelist. We all have a role to play. And I'm not going to say any more about that. You'll just have to come back in two weeks because next week is our Thanksgiving sermon.
But we're going to talk about that more, about the diversity of gifts and how you with your gifts, whatever they are, have a place in the kingdom of God and are essential to lead people to a closer walk with Jesus.
[23:34] I don't care what your gift is. I can show you how it connects with God's plan to reach and redeem people without question. That's what we see woven through this narrative of these names at the end of Colossians.

So let's read Colossians chapter 4 and then we'll pray together. So Colossians chapter, actually we're going to read, this is going to take some gymnastics, but Colossians is a short book so I think you can handle it.
I'm going to read Colossians 1, 3 through 8 and then Colossians 4, 12 through 13. So you only have to turn one page. You with me? All right. So let's start with Colossians 1, 3 through 8.
We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints.
Because of the hope laid up for you in heaven of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth.
[24:47] Well, how did it get there, you might ask? Just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bondservant who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit.

Now turn over a page, chapter 4, starting in verse 12. Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bond slave of Jesus Christ, sends you his greeting, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God.

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For I testify for him that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Heropolis. Laodicea and Heropolis were very close to Colossae.
Those cities were actually on the major trade route. And Colossae eventually kind of wilted on the vine, if you will, and was absorbed into those other cities. But Epaphras, that was the focus of his interest because that's where he was from.
Let's pray together. God, it's amazing. we see again how you take little, weak offerings, us, and you make glory.
[26:12] You change the world through the faithful obedience of whatever we have, whatever we've been called to give you.

Lord, we want to be people like that. I pray as we look at the life of Epaphras this morning and see how you used him to impact a significant part of the world because he was faithful, let us follow in his steps and be faithful as well in following you.
I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. So quick disclaimer before we get a little bit of background. I believe very strongly in a command that Paul gave to Timothy.
Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness. Physical discipline has some value, but spiritual discipline has value in this life and in the one to come.
Now, in my passion to encourage people to live disciplined lives, I think I make the mistake at times of appearing to say that discipline saves you, that discipline is the end that we seek.
[27:29] So we want to be disciplined people. And as soon as we're disciplined, ta-da, we're what God wants us to be. No, actually, if we're just disciplined people, you're actually a Pharisee. And it doesn't take long in the Gospels to figure out that Pharisee is not what God wants us to be.

He wants us to be like Jesus. Discipline is important, but it's a means to an end. And this is what I want, desperately want you to see.
the end is glorious. It's worth any sacrifice to gain. Paul said, to live is Christ and to die is gain in Philippians.
when we submit our lives to Christ, what we gain in response completely eclipses whatever we gave up to receive that.
And that is what I want you to see is the beauty of Jesus because ultimately when I talk about God makes us strong enough to take part fully and completely in all things bright and beautiful that He has for us, ultimately what that is, it's not a what, it's a who.
[28:43] It's Jesus Himself. We actually need to be made strong enough to stand in His presence. But what I want you to see as we look at these examples, as we talk about the importance of being people of the Bible, of being people who pray, of being people who are in community, all of those are means to gain more of Jesus.

And when you gain more of Jesus, you become the person God made you to be. You become fully alive.
So if you feel like, oh, John's putting all these requirements on me, I want you to stop yourself and say, oh no, he said he wasn't doing that. No, what we're looking at is this is the means of you getting to know Jesus Christ.
And in getting to know Him, seeing that there's nothing that compares. And He gives us everything that we need. Keep that as your focus. These things, we do them because they lead us to Jesus.
So Epaphras. Very quickly. We know that Epaphras was from Colossae. He probably met Paul in Ephesus, was introduced to Jesus through Paul's ministry, became a disciple of Paul.
[29:55] So he apprenticed himself to Paul, and through Paul, apprenticed himself to Jesus. We talked about Acts 4.19 last week.

Paul was in Ephesus for two years. In that two years, the gospel went out from Ephesus and spread throughout all of Asia. An enormous area was impacted by the gospel.
And make no mistake, they didn't have social media, they didn't have Facebook, they didn't even have cars. The gospel spread like wildfire as people like Epaphras carried the gospel along as they went along their daily lives.
Whether they were tradespeople who were carrying goods and services or whatever they were doing, they took Jesus with them and the gospel spread. Epaphras, in particular, we know, went home to Colossae.
And we see what he did, he planted a church. We saw that in Colossians 1. The people of Colossae who came to Jesus first heard the gospel, not from Paul, but from this faithful man, Epaphras.

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[30:59] And I suspect that the people he talked to were people he knew. Colossae was a small town. And so he's saying, look, I went to Ephesus to do business and I came back with Jesus.

Let me tell you about my Jesus. And people responded and they got saved. And so that's the church of Colossae. Let's talk a little bit about the common traits.
We talked about this chain of disciples. Barnabas to Paul and on and on and on to Ephesus and the church of Colossae. There's things that pop up that are common in these people.
Number one is the faith in Jesus. They trusted Jesus as their Savior and they trusted Jesus enough to obey him and go where he sent them. whether it was Onesimus taking the risk of obedience to make things right with Philemon or Epaphras taking the risk of obedience and going back to Colossae to bring this new message that nobody had ever heard before.
He wasn't Jewish. He wasn't sharing the gospel with Jews. He led Gentiles to Christ. This is a whole new thing. But Epaphras was obedient.
[32:12] There's that trust and the trust led to God, I will go where you send me. I will say what you want me to say. I will be who you want me to be. That's a common theme.

These disciples had it in common. And what did Paul say in chapter one? That the gospel was bearing fruit in the Colossian people.
Why? Because they had trusted Christ. We see that. That's one of the traits of a follower of Jesus that's transmitted from a disciple to an apprentice to the next apprentice and so on. We see a love for God and people.
You can't read Paul without saying that he loves the people that he ministered to. There's none of this idea of I'm a leader so I have to keep you at a distance. That's not how the gospel works.
When we were in the Dominican Republic, one of the, probably my best moment in time there, I was sitting down with my boss who was on a visit from headquarters in Phoenix and the school bus pulled onto the orphanage property.
[33:17] And as I'm sitting there, Tom is my boss, as Tom and I are sitting there talking, each of the boys got off the bus from little five-year-old boy all the way up to big strapping high school kids and every one of those boys sat in my lap or touched my shoulder.

They didn't interrupt us but they acknowledged me. They said, with their touch, they said, I see you, I love you, and I know that you love me.
Here's where it gets weird. So the boys went to do their chores or whatever and Tom looks at me and says, what are you to these boys? I thought, that's a strange question.
I'm their dad. They're orphans. I love them. They love me. You just saw. And he said, do you think that's appropriate? That's a view that we have of leaders.
I've heard it in churches. Pastors should keep a certain level of distance to maintain the decorum of the office. If I get stuck in decorum, call me out on it.
[34:29] Some of you are really good at that so I don't think I'll have to get to that point. But you do the preventative work of keeping me humble. And I love it. But you see that mistake?

Love gets right in the trenches with people. I played with those boys. I wrestled with them. They did practical jokes on me, which I returned. They knew that they were loved.
That's what Paul brought. That's what he received from Barnabas, the son of encouragement. And that's what he practiced and that's what you see as a theme. Each of these links in the chain loved the people they were around.
You need to pray that God would help you to love the people that you work with that are in your neighborhood that cut in line in front of you at Starbucks or whatever.
I was telling somebody this morning in my updates when Carol was in the hospital I shared stories of a couple of people. I can't remember if I told all of you this story but both of those two that got highlighted.
[35:30] Romano's family, I never met him but Romano's family, he was a patient in the ICU and Sidney, who was a nurse, the beginning point of our relationship was they irritated me.

Romano's family was talking after lights were supposed to be out in the common area where we were sleeping and they were up talking at 4.30 in the morning. I was not happy. And the Lord says, divine appointment.
Go talk to them. And I got a chance to talk to them, hear their story, hear their grief, what they were going through. And then Sidney was very loud in the ICU in a place that I thought was inappropriate.

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She was coming on shift and a group of the other nurses were laughing about something. I'm not opposed to laughter but you're in ICU for crying out loud. People are trying to sleep around here and you keep interrupting their sleep all night long.
And the Lord again says, divine appointment. And Sidney spent some time in our room serving Kara and I got to hear her story and share the gospel with her.
[36:38] You all prayed for her. You never know but you look for these divine appointments and then you love people. You figure out how to love them. What is the way to touch them? That's the hallmark of a follower of Jesus.

Love. Now sometimes you may need to fake it until you make it. That's okay. Our bodies are designed in such a way that if we do an activity the emotions follow.
Do loving behavior and the feelings will follow. Think about ways that you should love the person who's annoying to you in my case. But whatever the case may be we need to grow in love.
Love like Jesus shared. Love that means self-sacrifice. I'll put you ahead of me. That's what we see as a consistent hallmark of these people that are mentioned in Colossians chapter 4.
They loved. They loved God and because they loved God they loved other people. They bore fruit. Living things bear fruit.
[37:46] Always without exception. Now for some of us for whatever reason you may think I'm not bearing fruit or it's been a long time since I last bore fruit.

What's wrong with me? That's a conversation one-on-one but I'll give you some hints. First of all pray about it. Look to God and look inward first.
Look for the fruit of the Spirit. Spirit. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.
Look for those things and don't look for them in a way that says well I don't look like that person I don't look like that person so I must not be bearing fruit. No. The comparison game doesn't work except in one direction.
Look at where you are today and look at where you were. And you may discover you've traveled a whole lot further than you thought and God has been doing the work in you and will continue to do the work in you but we need to see fruit.
[38:52] Fruit is evidence that we have the Holy Spirit within us. And I would not be faithful to my calling if I didn't say this. If you can't find fruit maybe you haven't trusted Christ yet.

Maybe you've thought because you attend this cool group of people that you're a cool kid too. That you're part of the family just because you come here from 9 to noon on a Sunday.
God doesn't care. Not in terms of your salvation. There's one way you receive the gift that God gave.
If Jesus does on the cross for you you recognize that your sin completely severed you off from contact with God. Jesus rebuilt that relationship cleansed you from sin and now you have access to God but you have to accept that gift.
And when you do fruit bearing will begin immediately. Love you a little but it starts. Look for it. And it starts internally.
[39:59] We begin to see our character change because the process is making us look more like Jesus. But then it becomes external and we begin to share the gospel with people.

We begin to share our hope and they see the love of Jesus and they respond. Now here's another thing I don't want you to make the mistake of. Fruit I'm just going to use one example.
I'm going to trust you to be able to see how this applies in other places. You might say well I've been sharing the gospel with people but I've never led somebody to Christ so I must not be bearing fruit. Don't make that mistake.
The fruit in your life is not somebody else coming to Christ. That's between them and God. The fruit in your life is the faithful execution of the task that you've been given.
And if God puts somebody in your path you need to be thinking how can I pray for them? How can I love them? How can I serve them? How can I show or tell them about Jesus? And if you do that you're bearing fruit.
[41:07] The fruit of their soul is up to God. Does that make sense? That's true of a lot of areas of our lives but fruit is a part of being a follower of Jesus. And then the last one I couldn't think of a better word as passion.

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We're not passive. The analogy that people use all the time is look at a Packer fan when they're playing the game and they're winning.
The fans go crazy. They decisively beat the Patriots last week. I'm sure the Packer fan I'm sure Michael was ecstatic. Or the Bears start the game strong four interceptions.
The fans are weeping and wailing and pulling out their hair. And then they come back and they win. That's passion about really trivial stuff. Now you can tell what value it has in my life because I know all that stuff.
But passion passion for each other passion for our good passion for Jesus' glory everywhere we go. if you truly understood what we sang this morning about how our lives are redeemed and we have hope that we have we don't have sufficient merit but we receive merit that's more than sufficient to go before God.
[42:30] To go through the veil and stand in the Holy of Holies. You would be passionate. You would not be able to keep your mouth shut. We need to develop that passion because that is a picture of a follower of Jesus.

Now one thing to be clear some of you say John you're loud. Your passion's obvious. I'm not wired that way. Passion shows itself in different ways.
Whether you're loud or quiet or somewhere in between the passion isn't just vocal. It's our lives just expressing consistently what we have in Christ. So those are the pictures.
Those are the things that we see consistently through this chain of disciples. They bear fruit. They love God and people. They bear fruit and they have passion. Passion for God and passion for other people.
Passion for the glory of God. Those are the common marks of a disciple. people. So let's bring it home. Just look in your Bibles at 412.
[43:35] Epiphras who is one of your number a bond slave of Jesus Christ sends you his greetings. We're going to end with this. Always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers.

What does that mean to labor earnestly? Well if you've had a child who was sick or who was away from the Lord and you just prayed and you prayed and you prayed and you prayed for God to bring a breakthrough that's laboring earnestly.
That's Jesus praying all night long for the men that he would choose to be his disciples. That's Jesus getting frustrated and then going up onto the hillside to pray all night long.
and coming back and continuing to minister. It's this refusal if I can put it this way to let God off the hook.
We don't have time to turn there but I'm going to read Isaiah 62. This verse really struck home to me in the last few weeks. Psalm 62. On your walls O Jerusalem I have appointed watchmen we are the watchmen in this picture.
[44:50] All day and all night they will never keep silent. You who remind the Lord take no rest for yourselves and give him no rest until he establishes and makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth.

Now they have a specific concrete thing that they were praying for. This sounds like totally out of line. It's in the Bible so it must be we should do this. Don't give God rest.
Continually pray. Continually pray for God to work in you and through you to affect change. That's what followers of Jesus do.
We express in many ways but this way in particular we are people who pray. We need to be people who pray individually and corporately. come out tonight at 630.
I know it's a little bit dark. That's alright. We'll just pray that God gets you home safely. But come out and pray together. Let's go before the throne together as God's people to talk with him about the things that matter and to see him develop this fruit in our lives.
[46:02] That's the man that Epaphras was. And because he was who he was the gospel thread throughout Asia as we faithfully follow God the fruit will continue and continue and continue.

You will have spiritual children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren as you faithfully follow God and pray and ask him to show you what to do and to do his work in the people you cross paths with.
Let's pray together. God, we want to be like Epaphras. We want to be people who are servants of Jesus. We want to be people who are passionate for you, who love you and who just consistently and faithfully share what we have with the people who cross our paths.
Lord, we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

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