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Speaker: Pastor Mark Hanke  
Bible passage or verse: Col. 4:7-18  
Title of sermon: **You Can't Make It On Your Own**  
Series: Against the Tide - #12

**Colossians 4:7-18 NIV:**

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

<sup>10</sup>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.) <sup>11</sup>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. <sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis. <sup>14</sup>Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings. <sup>15</sup>Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.

<sup>16</sup>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.

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

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

Let's turn in our Bibles today to Colossians chapter four, and we are bringing this fun series to an end. Next week we're going to be focusing again on Christ, as we do in every month of December, so it's going to be incredible. But this has been a great time, and it ends in such a kind of unique and weird but really powerful way. I remember when I went to school, one of the profs that was teaching me says, "When you get to those passages where there are the lists, they're some of the hardest to preach." But as you kind of dig into it, with the conviction that it's God's Word, therefore, there's something there -- ah, this thing becomes kind of alive to us. In the Christian life, in some ways there's really kind of two paths that people choose. One, I'm going to call the "small-hearted person." Another, naturally, is the "big-hearted person." What's the difference? Well, small-hearted people kind of have a philosophy of kind of life. They minimize relationships, they minimize risk, they kind of scale their life down. There's things that they just don't want to expose themselves to. They shy away from big dreams. They just kind of try and make life manageable. On the other hand, there are people I consider big-hearted people. They are people of vision, they are people of dreams, and yes, they are people of risk. But probably the distinguishing mark is, big-hearted people tend to be people of relationships. They have relationships, they make relationships oftentimes in the context of mission. And as Paul's closing this, this letter to the Colossian church, he finishes it in kind of just this litany of people. It could be just a list. It's not something driven in terms of a family line. It's actually Paul's ministry line. And as you look at the people, it begins to tell you a story of what it looks like when you're a big-hearted person. Because big-hearted people are people with friends. Why? Well, friends, as Paul teaches us, help you bear the weight of the journey. Paul's life was not easy. His ministry was not a cake-walk. He had challenges. He had barriers, shipwrecks. And it's interesting as you study this list, it's almost like Paul gives you an indicator of this person was with me at this time, this person partnered with me at this time. Why? Because that's what friends do. They make the journey of life bearable, but also, they make it effective.

Let's dig into this together. Chapter four, and we're going to start at verse seven, and Paul starts off with a name, his name is Tychicus. "I want to tell you about the news about this faithful dear brother." Who is he? Well, he's a gentleman that's listed only five times in the Bible, though in many ways he far exceeded that in impact. What is he? Well, he's a faithful friend. And they're the kind

of people that bring encouragement to the journey. They're people who are marked, Paul identifies in this, in three ways. Number one, they're willing to endure hardships. That's what Tychicus was. Who is this young guy? Well, he's probably, most likely, the text of Scripture tells us he's from Asia, and so, the largest city in that region is Ephesus, and more likely than not, that's where he came from. But he didn't stay there. Oh no, he was with Paul in moving about. He witnessed the riots there in Ephesus. Chapter 19 of Acts kind of indicates this. I've stood there in Ephesus looking at the amphitheater where the riot occurred. Tychicus was also there. That's probably where he met Paul - it's most likely where he got saved. It was a time where Paul was whisked away. His life was in danger. And to be quite honest with you, anyone that was with him, their life was in danger. That's what friends do -- they endure those things, those journeys in your life. And he was with Paul when he was arrested in Caesarea. Tychicus was a young man who, when you trace through his life with Paul, he was always willing to endure hardships with him. Shipwrecks? He was most likely there. Prison? Sometimes he sat next to Paul. Sometimes when Paul was arrested, it was Tychicus who delivered him food, because in those days, if you were in prison, they didn't have three square meals of the day. It was this young guy who was a faithful friend. That's why Paul mentions him.

There's another characteristic, and that is, that faithful friends oftentimes aren't the ones who do the big things -- they are the ones who do the menial things. Like -- he was a delivery boy. What is that -- delivery boy? That's not very significant. Unless you're delivering the letter to the Colossian church. Unless you're delivering the letter to the Ephesus church. Unless you're delivering the letter to Philemon. He was the one who delivered all of those. He was the one who took the supernatural word of God and got it to the very people who read it. If it wasn't for him, Paul's great writing would have sat there in prison with him. If it wasn't for Tychicus, the church of Colossae wouldn't have gotten a letter. The church in Ephesus wouldn't have been inspired about what the church is and the mystery of God. If it wasn't for this guy -- think about all the things that would not have happened. That's what a friend does. They're not just with you in the hardships, but they're the ones who are willing to clean the tables, make the delivery, and finally, I think they're the ones who are passionately committed to the work of the Lord. Where does Paul indicate that? He says, notice, "He's a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord." There's a lot of ways you make friends. Paul's probably number one criteria of the people he mentions in this have this in common -- they're really not serving Paul first, they're a fellow servant of God. I find it interesting, because Paul introduces himself the same way. As a servant of God. And here's a guy who writes two-thirds of the New Testament that characterizes and names his friend Tychicus in the same way he identifies himself. That's what a faithful friend is. It's a person who encourages you along the journey.

Secondly, in this text, we see another person, and it's a faithful friend by what? A godly transformation. Well, this is a guy -- you've probably heard of his name, his name is Onesimus. He comes in verse nine. Who was he? Well, he was a slave of Philemon. And he stole from Philemon, and he ran, and he actually ran to Ephesus and from there went to Rome. And he was going to get lost in the obscurity kind of, of Rome, and yet -- what? Paul speaks to him. Paul ministers to him. Paul challenges him. Onesimus comes to Christ and Paul challenges him to go back. He challenges him to make restitution. Oh, he has challenges for Philemon, too. But to Onesimus, he's saying to this man, who genuinely struggled -- I think one of his great struggles is, "How do I as a follower of Christ come and submit myself to another follower of Christ as his servant?" He struggled with that. And Paul challenged him to go back and make amends. That's one of the things that marked Paul, is the number of people, Tychicus included -- Onesimus, John Mark. What marks all of these? It's the radical transformation of their life. And they make the best friends in the world. They are people whose values have been changed; they are people whose minds are being renewed; they are people whom, at the end of the day, loved Paul but served Christ.

I have a friend -- she was transformed. It's a really remarkable story. She got married, and on the day of her wedding, she was married to another woman. Of all the strange things, in the midst of her reception, she went to church. It's not what I did when Kari and I got married, but this lady did. She went to church -- on the day she got married, to another woman! And of all things, she got saved that day. She went back to the reception, went on a honeymoon, and was tormented by the Holy

Spirit. She's changed. One of the most beautiful, radically transformed individuals I've known. A partner in the ministry. A testimony of God's grace. They make the best friends. Why? Because their whole value structure has been changed. Their mind is being renewed. Oh, they're faithfully serving you, but their real loyalty is to Christ. That's Onesimus.

Paul lists another group of individuals -- there are six of them here. And I think Paul mentions in particular, there are three Jews and three Gentiles in this list. "My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings," and Barnabas, and -- all of these guys. What do you make of this? Well -- it was back in a day when the issue of nationality was kind of like everything -- it was their identity. "I'm a Jew, I'm a Gentile, I'm a Samaritan." And we hear the term today, kind of, "identify politics" -- that's not new. For them, it was their identity. "I am a Jew, and I will not eat with a Gentile." "I am a Samaritan" -- and for 400 years they had a hatred of Jews, and likewise the Jews had a hatred of them. Why does Paul list these guys? Well, it's because one of the things that when you become a believer, there's a unifying factor that is no longer your nationality. The unifying factor for these six individuals was Christ. When Christ is the thing that pulls you together, it helps you overcome language. It helps you overcome culture. It helps you overcome all of the things that sometimes, even today, tragically, race and gender and all of those things that are the identifying passion -- it's our relationship to Christ that caused these six people to become teammates, to become friends with Paul.

My friends, I think that's a message that is so needed today. What binds us together in our church? It's not going to be our economics. It's not going to be our cultural background. We're all from maybe different places. May not even be our ethnicity. But if we're going to be the kind of friends that Paul had, and the kind of impact that Paul had, there needs to be a unifying factor. And Paul tells us what it is. It's not their nationality. It's not their culture. It's not their language. It's not their diet. It's their Christ -- it's their Savior. When that becomes your and my primary identity, when who I am in Christ is the most important thing to me, when I am defined as an image-bearer made in the image of God, as you are -- that begins to transcend everything else. What do friends do? Well, they help you bear the challenges of life. They help you to become more effective. How do you get them? Well, Paul understood that -- I mean, "I'll pull them from Jews, I'll pull them from Greeks. I'll grab a few Samaritans" -- and he'll put them all in, and he'll say, "You're my team." Why? Because Christ was what was most important to them. It's what makes good friends. Yet another one that he identified -- he lists a guy in here, oh, he's had a long-standing relationship with him. It's kind of an interesting one. His name is John Mark. Yes, the author of the gospel. Yes, a good friend of Barnabas. And yes, there was a moment in he and Paul's life they didn't see eye to eye. Mark went on a trip. John Mark went on this trip, and yes, he didn't make the journey. He wanted a short-term mission trip, and Paul wanted a long-term mission trip. Oh, it was not easy. It split probably one of the most incredible relationships in the New Testament -- Barnabas and Paul. They split over what? John Mark. Paul was angry. Barnabas was defending John Mark, wasn't done with him. Paul was done with him. He wasn't faithful. He didn't endure. And Paul was a Type-A-squared kind of individual, and he was about the mission, and he wasn't gonna let anything stop the mission! And Mark wanted out. Twelve years later, here we find ourselves. What does he say? There's a passage of Scripture in II Timothy where he's writing to Timothy, and he says, "Hey -- bring John Mark to me." To me, that's one of the most encouraging passages in the Bible. Why? Because, it is in that text that Paul says in his dying days, II Timothy chapter four, verse 11 -- "Bring the one guy that I probably had some of the biggest difficulty with. Bring him. I need him. He's my friend. Would you allow him to come and encourage me and nurture me?"

What does it tell you? My friends, if you're gonna have good friends, you're gonna need to forgive. You're never going to have somebody who's perfect. And you're not going to be perfect. You're never going to have somebody who marches to your drumbeat every step of the way. You're never going to have somebody who's as committed like you are. You're never going to have somebody who thinks always like you do. Paul didn't. But the hope of this text, and really the message of this text -- good friends overcome grievances. Through what? It's called the gift of forgiveness. It's the willingness to apply to them the grace that has been applied to you. Oh, Paul was a hard-charging guy. But the fact that he lists John Mark here, the fact that he asked for him in II Timothy chapter four

tells me that Paul understood, "If I'm gonna have friends, I'm gonna need to forgive them." And they him.

Here's the last one -- faithful friends have a big heart. Paul's finishing in this text, and he starts in verse 15, he says, "Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters at Laodicea." Well, that's interesting. He's never been to Laodicea. "And to Nympha and the church in her house." Well, that's interesting -- there's no record that he's ever been there! What's he greeting them for? Because that's the way Paul was. Paul had the biggest heart in the world. "I want you to relay this message to my friends. I want you to -- people I've never met, let them know I'm praying for them." To people who Paul is proud of -- she has a church in her home, and they're opening the door. Paul says, "Let them know I'm praying for them; and by the way, I'm gonna send Tychicus, and he's gonna encourage them. I'm gonna send Mark, and --" Paul is thinking, not just about his world. He is a big-hearted person. How do you get there? Big-hearted people face huge challenges. And in all honesty, I don't think Paul would have made it had he not had Tychicus, Onesimus, Titus, Timothy... the list goes on. They help you bear the burden of the challenge, and they make you more effective. Paul more effective? Yeah. If Tychicus hadn't delivered his letters, they'd be still buried somewhere in a pile of stone. If Onesimus hadn't gone home, it's a relationship that would've never been restored. Might it be even one of the names he lists here, "Tell Archippus" -- who's he? Well, if you put it together, there's many who believe that this is Philemon's son. See, this whole ending is the story of grace and transformation, forgiveness. That's a big-hearted believer. That does what? Has some great friends.

What's the lesson to you and me? I think there's three. Number one, if you're gonna make a huge difference and you're gonna make a significant impact -- you need friends to do it. You do. You're never going to realize what God wants you to do apart from friends. The Apostle Paul didn't, and nobody else has. You're gonna need friends. They will challenge you, they will exhort you, they will encourage you, they will pray for you. You've got to run the risk of having them.

I think a second great lesson for us is, you've got to be a friend. You have to risk being a friend. You have to be that kind of person who's willing to sacrifice. You have to be the kind of person who's willing to sit outside the jail cell and feed your friend Paul. You have to be the kind of person who will do the menial task and deliver a letter. You have to be the kind of person that will help restore a relationship. I was listening to a guy -- talking to a guy this week, and he's a mature believer, an exceptional leader, accomplished in his vocation. To be quite honest with you, I kinda look at the guy, he's got it all together! This week he told me -- because of some of the issues of isolation, and the lack of relationship, and the lack of meeting, and all of those things -- he just looked at me and said, "Mark, I'm not doing well." And he wanted to make sure I got it. He goes, "I'm not doing well at all." In that moment, I have a choice. I could say, "Hey, I'll pray for ya." And that's not a throwaway line -- sometimes it can be. Maybe what he needs is for me to go and sit with him. Maybe I just need to see him, not as this strong, mature, unbelievable believer, but actually one who's in this moment, like Paul had those moments where he needed a friend. Am I willing to be that? Because good friends make the journey bearable and effective.

And, third, not only do I need to be a friend, do I need friends, but where do we get the best friends? I think it's in the context of ministry. I think over my life, the people that I am closest to. I have a good friend, today he's in surgery. He's been my partner in ministry -- though we haven't been together for years. He's truly been a partner in my ministry for 40 years. That's where we formed our friendship. And that's where it's always been around. Why have friends? Well, you're gonna need them. Like my friend this week said, "I'm not doing well." And there's gonna be days that you're not gonna be doing well, and you need a friend. There's gonna be days that you're gonna have a friend who's not doing well, and they're gonna need you. The best friends, I think, as Paul says -- and I've experienced -- they're made in the context of mission and in the assignment of accomplishing something for God. If that's the case, then be a friend. Get a friend. You don't just go buy one at the store. You make them in the context of mission.

Ask yourself the question -- what has God called me to do? Where's He asking me to make an impact? And it's in that place God will give you your friends. Let's pray.

*Father, I thank you for this incredible, strong, Type-A individual who lets us know that so much of the success of his life is because he had great friends. It's risky. Some of us have tried it. Some have made the commitment to be a small-hearted person. They don't want any. They're messy. And they are. But would you enable us to risk again how important it is, so that we might bear under the weight of the journey and be as effective, God, as you design. We pray in Christ's name, amen.*

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