

# Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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## There's More: Reaching Beyond

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“We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, <sup>4</sup> since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints; <sup>5</sup> because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel, <sup>6</sup> 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; <sup>7</sup> just as you learned it (discipleship) from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, <sup>8</sup> and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit. <sup>9</sup> For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, <sup>10</sup> so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.”

Colossians 1:3-10

“Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bondservant 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. <sup>13</sup> For I testify for him that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis.”

Colossians 4:12-13

*It is interesting to note a change in Paul's methodology as time went on in his church planting work.* On his first journey, he and Barnabas went through preaching the gospel and starting home church meetings. They moved along relatively rapidly, staying only for weeks at a time. Then, after a couple of months, they came through again, visiting the groups they had started. They often appointed leaders from those who had naturally surfaced during their absence. Paul and Silas followed much the same strategy on their second missionary journey, until they came to Corinth.

**On the first and second missionary journeys, they were looking for select people who were gifted, responsive and capable of working with others, and he recruited *them* to join with them.** It was Barnabas, Paul and John Mark. Then it was Paul and Silas, and they invited Timothy to join them. Along the way, they picked up Luke (the “we sections” in Acts show that he was with them – Acts 16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16). In these churches, Barnabas, Paul and Silas seem to have been the main speakers, while John Mark and Timothy initially served as ones who instructed new converts. In Acts 18, Paul met Aquila and Priscilla, who became co-workers not only in tentmaking, but also in the gospel. A man named Titius Justus converted, and his house was right next door to the synagogue. The church began meeting there. Crispus, the leader of the synagogue came to Christ, and was baptized by Paul (1 Cor. 1:14). Later, when the Jews tried to bring charges against Paul, and Gallio refused to listen to their case, the Jews beat up Sosthenes, the replacement leader of the synagogue. He later came to Christ as well (1 Cor. 1:1). **In response to a word from the Lord, they remained in one town for over a year and a half** (Acts 18:9-11).

When he headed back to Jerusalem at the end of his second missionary journey, Aquila and Priscilla were with him. When Paul preached at the synagogue in Ephesus, some wanted to hear more. Paul, however, was under a vow to return to Jerusalem, so he left Priscilla and Aquila there, who continued to work with those who were interested. However, later, **Ephesus was where Paul focused his work for most of his third missionary journey.**

When he had returned to Ephesus in Acts 19, he preached in the synagogue for three months, until the unbelieving Jews began to speak evil about the Way. He withdrew and took the disciples away, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. **Paul must have seen that what he had experienced at Corinth was a better strategy, because when he came to Ephesus on his third missionary journey, he stayed there for three years** (Acts 20:31). He remained in the city of Ephesus, and worked with the people there, and found a way to interact with those who heard of what he was doing, and were interested in learning more. **The power of the Lord was at work, as He bore witness to His word by answering prayers, healing people and casting out demons** (Acts 19:11,12). *God* was establishing the ministry, *not* Paul.

Instead of him going from place to place with his team, recruiting a few select individuals to leave their communities and join him along the way, we see that he apparently invited others he had worked with before, Gaius and Aristarchus from Macedonia (Acts 19:29), Erastus and Sosthenes from Corinth (Acts 19:22; Rom. 16:23; 2 Tim. 4:20; 1 Cor. 1:1) to join him at Ephesus. **The shift in Paul's approach was that *he* tended to stay in one place, while others he had trained and trusted *joined him* in the work where he was, and *they* went out to start new churches. *He was not only preaching the gospel, and making disciples, but he was also sending out others to do ministry work.***

It was at this phase in Paul's ministry that Epaphras met him and was influenced by him. Epaphras was from Colossae. **Colossae was a city that was 120 miles to the east of Ephesus**, in the Lycus river valley. **It was 13 miles from Hierapolis and 10 miles from Laodicea**, both towns mentioned in the NT. The Lycus river flowed into the Meander river, just west of these cities, and the Meander flowed westward to the Mediterranean, at Miletus (the main seaport of Ephesus), coming within just 10 miles south of Ephesus. As such, this waterway offered a good pathway for

transporting goods. Colossae stood at the top of the gorge where these two rivers combined, and also on a major highway from Ephesus to the Euphrates River to the east. **Its location facilitated a prosperous growth and importance.** Eventually, however, it was eclipsed by the growth of Laodicea and Hierapolis.

**Epaphras was apparently converted by Paul while he was at Ephesus.** Paul had secured access to the lecture hall of Tyrannus, and met daily to teach and discuss with inquirers there for a period of two years. The book of Acts says that “all Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 19:10). **Since Ephesus was the capital city of Asia, and was easily accessible by land and sea, it was the most important hub of commerce in that region.** It is not surprising, then, that business people would be traveling back and forth from the inland cities to Ephesus, either to bring their goods for sale, or to purchase wares for their businesses back home. They heard reports of what God was doing there, and came to hear this Paul that people were talking about, and see for themselves. Epaphras was apparently one of those who came to Christ during that period.

**We don't know the details of Epaphras' involvement with Paul.** We don't know if he planted himself for some time under his instruction, or if he just invested time when he was in town, and was faithful to share what he was learning with interested people back home in Colossae. **It was Epaphras who had informed Paul about the gathering of believers who were at Colossae** (Col. 1:8). Since that time, Paul had been praying for this fledgling fellowship of Christians there. **We know that Paul had not visited Colossae before writing his letter** (Col. 2:1), **but he had already come to know not only Epaphras, but also Philemon, Apphia, and Archippus,** who were also from this town. Philemon is referred to by Paul as “beloved” and as a “fellow-worker”. The church in Colossae met in Philemon and Apphia's home. Archippus was their son, whom Paul referred to as a “fellow-soldier” (Philem. 1:1,2). Paul referred to Epaphras as “our beloved fellow-slave, who is a faithful servant (*diakonos*) of Jesus Christ on our behalf” (Col. 1:7). Clearly, Paul had spent significant time with these people, in order to describe them with this level of familiarity.

**It seems quite evident that Epaphras had been the one to bring the good news to Colossae.** In Col. 1:5-7, the sentence indicates that they heard the gospel and understood the grace of God, just as they learned it from Epaphras. This last verb, “learned”, is significant. It is the verb related to “disciple” or “making disciples”. It refers to hands-on, practical, experiential learning. In other words, **Epaphras was not just telling them the gospel message, he was demonstrating it to them by his own life and example, and he was experientially-training them by getting them involved in becoming active participants in following Jesus as their King.** He was influencing them to not just *believe ideas*, but to *embrace a lifestyle*. **He was training them in the step-by-step process of developing a relationship with Jesus, learning to be led by the Spirit, and becoming engaged partners in the work of the Kingdom. He was a true disciple of Jesus, ...and he was making disciples of others, ...active, hands-on learners, participants, doers of the word.** As a result, *he* took the gospel message to Colossae, Hierapolis and Laodicea.

**Another important quality that Epaphras had picked up from his mentor was that he had become a prayer warrior.** Just as Paul prayed for the Colossian disciples, so did Epaphras. **In fact, he “wrestled-intensely” for them** (Col. 2:1; 4:12). **Note what Paul was teaching the disciples at Colossae about the importance of their prayer, and the connection to expanding the kingdom of God,** “Devote *yourselves* to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving; praying at the same time *for us* as well, that God will open up *to us* a door for the word, so that *we* may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned, that *I* may make it clear in the way *I* ought to speak. Conduct *yourselves* with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let *your* speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that *you* will know how *you* should respond to each person” (Col. 4:2-6). **Clearly, Paul was looking for them, the followers of Christ in Colossae, not only to be supportive of his ministry work, but also to be engaged in actually doing the ministry themselves.** What was Epaphras *wrestling* in prayer for them? He was “always laboring earnestly *for you* in his prayers, that *you* may stand perfect (mature) and fully assured (brought to full measure) in all the will of God” (4:12). **These men were disciple-makers.** The passion of their hearts was to encourage and agitate the believers to *take responsibility for their spiritual walks, to deepen and establish their relationships with God,* so that *they* could become effective in *displaying the life of Christ to those around them,* and to *be able to communicate clearly about Him* to those people God would prepare for them to speak to about Jesus. **We are all to be about “doing the work of ministering to others”, in some way or another.**

**Epaphras was an example of what God wants to do in the lives of His people, and in the church groups He is developing.** We are *all* to become activated, engaged followers of Christ. **God will enlarge our outreach, to not only other relationships, but in expansive outreach groups. We should even see people who will grow and mature in our midst, ...and be called out by God, ...sent out by us, ...to reach into other communities for Christ.** By the end of his time at Ephesus, Aquila and Priscilla had left to return to Rome. They even already had a church meeting in their home (Rom. 16:3-5). **There's more! The work of the Kingdom is always reaching beyond our own lives.** Look at a dandelion. It is in its nature, if it matures, to produce seeds that the wind (Spirit) will carry elsewhere. May it be so!