

What do you think of when I say “ministry”? Sunday mornings? Church programs? Feeding the poor? Who do you think is responsible for it? Professional Christians? Staff? A select, gifted few?

As you saw in *Fellowship Weekly*, Gene Getz is about to celebrate his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. Gene is the founding pastor of our church and the founder of the Fellowship Bible Church movement, one that started nearly 50 years ago and has led to hundreds of churches in dozens of countries. He was a faithful visionary at a time when God was doing something new in the American Church and, in the celebration, Gene will likely tell that story. But as he does, do you think he’ll focus on himself? A few key people? Or the countless thousands who have faithfully labored together to do the work and ministry of Fellowship Bible Churches? My guess is he will talk about that and the joy that comes with co-ministering in the name of the Lord.

If we told the story of Fellowship Dallas today, what part would you play in it? What part would you want to play? Do you think you have a part to play at all? Consider those questions this morning as we close out our series in Colossians. These are always bittersweet for me, like the last page of a great book, the last bite of a great meal, or the last day of a great vacation...the last message in a series that God has clearly blessed, ordained, and used brings me great joy and a little sadness that it’s over. Good thing we still have his Word.

Paul is going to give his “final greetings”. It’s how he ends his epistles and it’s something we can often breeze past, thinking there’s not much to offer. But we’d be wrong, particularly in this letter. Paul’s final words tell the story of the Colossian church and show what can be in our church. We’ve spent nine weeks talking about the fullness of Christ. We close this morning talking about how that fullness fills the church...not necessarily in numbers, but in depth, joy, service, and community. I want to encourage you to find yourself in this passage and ask God to show you how you can play your part here at Fellowship. We need you!

**[Colossians 4:7] <sup>7</sup>Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord.**

I start with the description of Tychicus because what is said of him can be said of all of us. We have to get this settled before we can talk of any of the rest. **Ministry is not for a chosen few. It’s for all of us.** If you are a follower of Jesus, you are a brother or sister in Christ, he has a ministry for you and asks you to faithfully fulfill it, and we are to fulfill that ministry shoulder-to-shoulder. Ministry is a team sport.

Do you believe that is true of you? That you are a member of this family, that God has a ministry assignment for you, and that we get to do it together? All of us are at different places in our journey, so you may still be figuring that out. Some of you know I showed up at this church more interested in a girl than I was in God. I had no interest in ministering. But he got a hold of me, showed me who I was in him, showed me the beauty and potential of the church, and has ultimately led me to a role to shepherd the church in their relationship with Jesus and mobilize the work of ministry that flows from it. He’s got something for you too.

I've always struggled with the word "volunteer" because volunteers help someone else with their thing. Ministry isn't the work of staff that you help with. Ministry is a family affair that we all own together. You'd think I was crazy if I told you I was going home after church to volunteer as a husband and dad. If you are part of this family, you have a part to play in it, and when more of us play our parts, the fuller we'll be. So, what might those parts look like?

**A church full of encouragers is one with full hearts.** We have the great privilege of filling up one another's spiritual tanks.

**[Colossians 4:8-11] <sup>8</sup>I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts, <sup>9</sup>and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here. <sup>10</sup>Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him), <sup>11</sup>and Jesus who is called Justus. These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me.**

Following Jesus isn't easy. It's joyful, but it asks much of us, and we need each other to remain faithful. One of the best ways we do that is through storytelling. Paul has sent Tychicus and Onesimus to pass on all that's happening with Paul. It will likely include his imprisonment, but it will invariably include all God is doing in spite of it, and that will help the Colossians press on.

The same is true for us. Stories glorify God and tell us of his goodness and faithfulness. They illuminate the truth, remind us of his plan and how he is fulfilling it, and how he works all things for the good of those who love him. **Stories don't just tell us God is good. They show us how he pours out his goodness.** I have to be reminded to tell stories sometimes. I can get so wrapped up in explaining, defining, applying, and all that is important, but a story brings it all to life, fills up our hearts, and inspires us to follow faithfully. Do you know that every Monday our staff gathers to pray for our church, and we begin that time by celebrating? It's an open mic where each of us can come up and share some good news...a STORY about what God is up to in our church. It's some of the sweetest and richest time in the week, it reminds us of the God we love, and it inspires us to keep serving in his name.

Are you a storyteller? If you've trusted in Christ, you have one to tell. Are you in community/Life Group? Could you tell the story of Jesus to our kids?

That encouragement can also help us endure. Paul has a fellow prisoner in Aristarchus. Any trial is easier to endure when we have someone by our side. You see Mark mentioned. In Acts 13 Mark bails on the missionary journey with Paul and Barnabas. In Acts 15, Mark wants to rejoin them, but Paul says no, he's not ready. Paul and Barnabas split over it. But here, Mark is mentioned as a faithful few co-laboring with Paul. We will all mess up. It doesn't mean we are forever disqualified from ministry. Mark was encouraged and restored and is now in the middle of a great movement. And all these guys are said to be a comfort to Paul as he ministers faithfully in spite of calamity and persecution. If Paul ever wanted to quit, they wouldn't let him.

One of the greatest ministries of the church is when we look at someone and say “Keep going. God’s got you. And I’m here with you.” You all are a great encouragement to me to keep going. At just the right time I get an email or a card in the mail or you grab me on the concourse and tell me “Keep going.” Thank you. I covet and appreciate it. Our Care Teams are a ministry of encouragement.

**A church full of disciplers is one with full souls.** I took poetic license. Our souls are full because we are alive in Christ. But God calls us all to grow in Christ, and we need each other for that to happen.

**[Colossians 4:12-13] <sup>12</sup> Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. <sup>13</sup> For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis.**

Epaphras was the founder of the Colossian church. He was discipled by Paul and returned home bearing the Good News of the Gospel. His love and burden for this church continued. He emptied himself in order that they may be full. “Struggling” is *agonizomai*, where we get our word *agony*. He struggles on their behalf because he is passionate about them maturing in Christ and living the full life Jesus offers. He has done that face-to-face, presenting the gospel and discipling believers. Now, while he’s away, he continues his ministry for them as he labors in prayer, asking God to make himself known, grow them up in the faith, and guide their lives in Christ. In only a few words, Paul shows us this man’s unceasing devotion to the people he’s been called to. He is an example to us.

**We are all a product of someone else’s ministry.** None of us can do it alone. God has you in this faith family to take what’s been given to you and give it to someone else so they can grow in Christ and then help others do the same. Following Jesus is a lot like learning to drive a car or throw a ball. We watch others do it, we try it out and let them coach us, and as we grow, we get the awesome and joyful privilege of helping others do the same thing. I think of the multi-generational group of men who gather together and talk about life, Kristi McElheny discipling a group of young moms, or a number of one-on-one relationships that focus on God’s Word and what he’s up to in their lives.

God has someone for you in this church. He may be calling you to lead a Life Group, help disciple our kids, join our prayer ministry, or go to our Connecting events to meet someone and step into a relationship with them. But all of that begins with a gratitude of what Christ has done for and in you and the burden and desire to give that to someone else. Who is it for you? Ask God and I’m confident he’ll show you.

**A church full of inviters and welcomers is one full of people.** Each of us is a representative and ambassador for this church and the God who leads us.

**[Colossians 4:14-] <sup>14</sup> Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas. <sup>15</sup> Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.**

Paul mentions her quickly, but I'm always struck by Nympha and her ministry. She has opened her home to the church. She has made it a safe and welcoming place for people to come, investigate or experience Jesus, and grow. Life Group leaders, thank you for making your home a gathering place for our people. There is something that can happen when a few are gathered in a living room that can't happen when hundreds are gathered in a worship center. How is God asking you to use your home for him?

But what happens here is vital as well. One of the great ministries we have is to tell someone "You are welcome here and we invite you to belong." Yes, we want them to trust in Christ but, for many, they have to know they can show up just as they are and not fear being rejected. All of us crossed the threshold of a church the first time. Many of us were kids and didn't think much of it. But there are some in our church who would tell you it was the most courageous thing they've ever done. We can make that easier for them.

I'm so grateful for our Greeting, Hospitality, and Connect teams. It is my hope that someone is told "Good morning" at least five times between the parking lot and when they sit in their seat. Our greeters and ushers help people take one more step into church with a smile and welcome. Our coffee...let's be honest...it's not gourmet! But what does coffee do? I'd say it puts people on common grounds...but that would be a terrible joke. It's a vehicle for community. It puts people at ease. And our Connecting Team helps those who have the courage to raise their hand and say "I want to get involved" take a guided step into becoming part of this community. **When we make people feel welcome, we make it easier for them to have an encounter with God.**

**Come home and bring someone with you.** I have challenged you to this before and do it again this morning. The pandemic wreaked havoc on the church and most still have mixed results in their gathering. We have 1,200 people active in our database and about 600 who attend in person and online. I get it. It's kind of nice to stay in your pjs on Sunday morning. But hear me: we need you and you need us. We can't do this from the couch. We must be together. Digital ministry is good. It allows us to do more things and reach more people with the gospel, but it cannot replace the physical gathering of God's people to worship and glorify him and to encourage and serve one another. If you stay away you will struggle to grow, struggle to contribute, and struggle to live the full life we have read in this book over the last couple months.

And as you come, bring someone new. It's not about adding numbers so we can pat ourselves on the back for more attendance. **It's about being so full of Jesus that we can't help but want it for others and creating a community so vibrant and alive that others want it for themselves.** But for them to get here, they need to be invited and welcomed.

**See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord.** These are Paul's instruction to Archippus in v17, but they are appropriate for all of us. You have a ministry and God is asking you to faithfully fulfill it. If you don't know what it is, let us help you. Go the Serve Your Church table in the concourse. If you do know what it is but haven't started, today is the day. And if you know what it is and are doing it, keep going. It's going to take all of us. God continues to write the story of Fellowship Dallas, and you have a part to play. If you doubt that, let me remind you. Jesus is enough, and because he is in you, you are enough and the part he has for you to play is enough. When we do that, we make him known and experience his joy.