

The Deep Dive — Lesson 25: Colossians 4:16-18

COLOSSIANS 4:16-18 (WEB) · SMALL-GROUP LESSON · DIGDEEPER.AI

The Big Idea

Paul finishes this whole letter with a to-do list nobody would remember him for: pass the letter along, tell one quiet servant his work matters, don't forget I'm in chains. And that's the point, because the ordinary stuff you pass along and the quiet person you encourage this week is exactly how the gospel keeps moving.

Opening Lines

The most famous letter Paul wrote to Laodicea is the one we don't have. God let it disappear. Watch what he kept instead, and watch what he tells these people to actually go do with it.

Before You Teach

- Goal: Get the room to see that these three little errands — pass the letter, name a quiet servant, remember a prisoner — are the gospel in motion, and to walk out with one of those errands assigned to a real name.
- If you're short on time, cut: If time runs short, cut the historical detail about the lost Laodicean letter and go straight to Archippus and the chains.
- Where the moment lives: Not in the travel logistics but in the moment a person in the room writes down a real name — the quiet servant they'll thank, the prisoner they'll remember before bed.
- Your prep: Come in already knowing your own Archippus by name and your own person in chains. If you can't name them, you'll teach this passage as information instead of an errand.

Run It In Your Setting

The same lesson, sequenced three ways. Pick the one that fits your group and your clock.

CLASSROOM · ~20 PEOPLE · 45 MINUTES

Classroom opening (3 min). Read 4:16-18 aloud, then the historical picture of the letter traveling hand to hand (7 min). Teach 'fulfill'/plēroō with the water-glass image (7 min). Questions 1-3 in pairs, then report to the room (15 min). Land on the quiet-servant name and out-loud commitments (10 min). Close in prayer over their actual names (3 min). Transformation happens when they write and say a real name. Cut the Laodicean-letter detail first if you're behind.

SMALL GROUP · ~8 PEOPLE · 60 MINUTES

Small-group opening with Bibles/phones held up (4 min). Read the passage, tell one of your story prompts (8 min). Teach 'fulfill' with the water image (8 min). Walk questions 1-5, going slow on 3 and 4 with real silence (28 min). You go first on naming your own half-poured ministry and your own quiet servant. Commitments around the circle (8 min). Spontaneous prayer over their names (4 min). Transformation lives in questions 3-5. Cut question 2 if time is tight.

COFFEE · 2-3 FRIENDS · 30 MINUTES

Coffee opening — 'who's the quietest person at your church?' (3 min). Read 4:16-18 off a phone (3 min). One sentence on 'fulfill' meaning fill it to the top (3 min). Talk questions 3 and 5 only, personally (14 min). Both of you commit to one text you'll actually send today (5 min). Pray for each other's named person before you split (2 min). Transformation happens the second you both name and commit. Cut the teaching of 'fulfill' to one line if needed.

The Follow-Up Text

This is a habit for every lesson you'll ever teach — this week we drill it deliberately. You've done the follow-up before (week 5, week 15, week 20): a short message a day or two after class that lands the lesson on one real person. This week we go harder, and the passage hands you the assignment. Paul says 'Tell Archippus' — deliver a direct word to one quiet servant. So your follow-up this week isn't to a class member about the lesson. It's you doing what Archippus's people did: message the sound tech, the nursery worker, the person who sets up chairs at your church, and name their actual work out loud. Not 'thanks for serving' — name the specific thing. Then, separately, follow up with your class the way you always do. Two texts, two different kinds of remembering. Report back next week on the one to the quiet servant.

Why This Passage Matters

Most people skip these verses. They read like the address on an envelope — pass this along, tell so-and-so, remember I'm stuck here. But this is the last thing an inspired apostle chose to leave a church he'd never met, and every word is doing work. This is the seam where the letter you're holding actually became a letter that survived: read aloud, copied, carried down the road, hand to hand, until it reached you. The Bible in your lap moved through rooms exactly like the one you're about to teach. And notice what Paul does with his final breath of the letter. He doesn't ask for rescue. He asks them to remember his chains and hands them grace from inside a cell. A prisoner's last word is grace, not because his day was good but because his God is. Then there's Archippus — one ordinary servant Paul makes the whole church stop and encourage by name. You are teaching people how the gospel actually travels: not on spectacle, but on passed-along encouragement and quiet, finished work. You get to hand that to a room and then watch them go do it. That's a privilege.

Catch the Fire First

Before the room does the exercise, you do it. This week, before you teach, actually send it. Pick the quietest servant at your church — the person nobody thanks — and text them, naming the specific thing they do. Then think of one person you know who's in a hard place right now and text them so they know they were remembered. Walk into class having already done both. When you tell the room 'name one quiet servant tonight,' you're not assigning homework you haven't done. You'll be able to say, plainly, 'I sent mine this morning. Here's who.' That changes the whole air of the room.

Bring Your Own Story

- PROMPT: Tell about a time someone named your quiet, unseen work out loud when you didn't expect it — what it did to you.
- PROMPT: Tell about a piece of encouragement someone passed along to you — a verse, a note, a link — that you almost deleted but it landed exactly right.
- PROMPT: Tell about the person who first handed you the faith, or handed you this Bible, and how it reached you hand to hand.
- SAMPLE (polished vs. real) — Polished: 'God taught me the profound value of servant leadership through faithful believers.' Real: 'A guy named Ray restacked the chairs after church for eleven years and nobody said a word to him. When he died, four hundred people showed up. I never once thanked him.'
- GUARDRAIL: Keep it one notch rougher than feels comfortable — not raw, not a performance. If it wraps up too neatly, it stops sounding true.

Three Ways to Open

CLASSROOM: "The most famous letter Paul wrote to Laodicea is the one we don't have. God let it disappear. Watch what he kept instead — three little errands that don't look like much, until you see they're the gospel actually moving."

Start with a concrete historical hook that reframes what feels like filler.

SMALL GROUP: "Hold up your Bible or your phone with the app open. This thing reached you because a courier handed a scroll to a room like ours, someone read it aloud, and it got copied and walked down the road to the next town. Tonight we're in the last three verses, and they show you exactly how that happened."

Open with a shared physical action that makes the abstract concrete.

COFFEE: "Who's the quietest person at your church — the one who does a real job that nobody ever notices? Hold that name. Paul does something with a guy exactly like that in three verses, and I want to show you."

Lead with a single arresting question that goes straight at the heart.

Teaching the Word

The word to teach is 'fulfill' — Greek plēroō, in Paul's charge, 'that you fulfill it.' It doesn't mean 'do a little of it' or 'get it started.' Plēroō means to fill something all the way to the top, to complete it, to carry it clear to the end. Picture pouring water into a glass and not stopping at halfway — you fill it until it's brimming, right to the rim. That's the word Paul lays on Archippus about the ministry he received. Not begin it. Not dabble in it. Fill it up to the top. And here's the weight of it: the same word shows up in Paul's charge to Timothy — 'fulfill your ministry' — and it's what he says of his own life. A ministry received from the Lord is meant to be carried through, not left half-poured. So look at Archippus, whoever he was, and hear the one line the whole church was told to deliver to him: 'Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you fulfill it.' [Let that sit in silence.]

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think Paul ended a whole letter about the cosmic Christ with what looks like housekeeping — pass this along, tell Archippus, remember my chains?

Coaching note: Let them wrestle with the mismatch. Don't hand them the answer that ordinary errands are how the gospel travels — draw it out of them.

If it stalls: If Paul only had three lines left, why spend them on a to-do list instead of one last big truth?

2. The letter to Laodicea is gone — God didn't keep it. What does it do to you to know Scripture is exactly what he meant us to have, no more and no less?

Coaching note: Some will get anxious about a 'lost' book. Steer them to trust: nothing needful was lost. The Spirit kept what we were meant to keep.

If it stalls: Does it bother you that a letter Paul wrote just disappeared? Why or why not?

3. 'Fulfill it' means fill it all the way to the top. Where in your own life have you started something for God and left it half-poured?

Coaching note: This turns personal fast. Go first — name one of your own. Don't let anyone off with a churchy non-answer.

If it stalls: Is there one thing you meant to keep doing for God that just quietly stopped? What was it?

4. Paul is in chains and his last word is 'grace.' What would it take for grace to be YOUR last word on your hardest day this month?

Coaching note: Don't rush past the silence here. Grace does not wait for good circumstances; let that truth land before anyone speaks.

If it stalls: Think of your worst day recently — what actually came out of your mouth at the end of it?

5. Whose faithful, unseen work could you name out loud before this day ends — and will you actually do it?

Coaching note: This is the hinge. Push for a real name, not a category. Get them to say it and, ideally, commit to when.

If it stalls: Just say one name — who at your church does a job nobody thanks them for?

Questions You May Hear

"What happened to the letter from Laodicea — did we lose part of the Bible?"

Paul wrote a letter to Laodicea that didn't survive; we don't have it and Scripture never tells us its contents. God preserved exactly what he meant his people to have, so nothing needful was lost.

"Who was Archippus?"

A believer connected to the Colossian church who had received a specific ministry from the Lord. Paul had the whole assembly deliver him a direct word: take that ministry seriously and carry it all the way through.

"Why does Paul say 'I write this greeting with my own hand'?"

A scribe wrote most of the letter as Paul dictated, but he signs off in his own hand. He did this in other letters too — it authenticated the letter as genuinely his and guarded the church against forgeries written in his name.

"What does 'remember my chains' actually ask of them — pity?"

No. Paul asks them to remember, not to feel sorry for him. His chains are proof the message cost him something real, and the remembering is meant to steady them, not sadden them.

For Experienced Leaders

- Don't over-explain the lost Laodicean letter. Answer it plainly, refuse to speculate, and move on — the errands are the meat, not the mystery.
- When you teach 'fulfill,' physically pour water into a glass to the brim if you can. The image does more than three sentences.
- The temptation here is to make this lesson about you being encouraged. Flip it: the whole payload is the room going and encouraging someone else by name.

Landing the Lesson

Commitments: Before anyone leaves, go around and have each person say out loud one name — the quiet servant they'll thank, or the person in a hard place they'll remember — and when they'll do it.

Close by praying out loud over the actual names people just said — their quiet servant, their person in chains. Don't reach for a written prayer; naming their real words back to God, out loud, is the whole point.

If you run out of time: If the room only gets to question 3, stay there. Someone naming a half-poured ministry honestly is worth more than rushing all five.

Midweek follow-up: Next week, ask who actually sent the text to their quiet servant — and

what came back. Let the ones who did it tell the room.

Free at digdeeper.ai/devotionals/colossians/4-16-18/lesson

Handout

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During the lesson:

- The quietest servant at your church, by name — the person nobody thanks:

- One thing for God you started and left half-poured: _____
- 'Fulfill' means fill it all the way to the top. Write what filling YOUR ministry to the top would look like: _____
- Someone you know who's in a hard place today, by name: _____
- On his hardest day, in chains, Paul's last word was 'grace.' Write the last word that usually comes out of you on a hard day: _____

Take-home actions:

- Pass the encouragement along: send one believer you've lost touch with a thing that fed you recently — a sermon link, a verse, a paragraph you read — with a line saying you thought of them.
- Deliver the direct word: tell one quiet servant at your church plainly, 'I see what you do, and it matters. Don't stop.' Name the actual work, not a vague thanks.
- Remember the chains: pray for someone in a hard place by name before bed tonight, then text them so they know they were remembered.

Grace be with you. — Colossians 4:18