Remember My Chains

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

The Big Idea

The whole letter about the King who holds the universe together ends with a prisoner scribbling 'don't forget me,' and that's not a comedown, that's how the gospel has always traveled: in weak hands that pass it on.

Opening Lines

Look at how this letter ends. Not with a flourish about the cosmic Christ, but with a man in chains asking his friends not to forget him. Let's talk about why that's the point, not the anticlimax.

Before You Teach

- Goal: Get the room to feel the weight of a prisoner's scrawl at the end of a letter about the King of the universe, and to send the Word on to someone else this week the way Colossae sent it to Laodicea.
- If you're short on time, cut: Cut the deep dive on 'the lost letter from Laodicea' if time runs short. It's fascinating but it's not the heartbeat of the passage; the chains are.
- Where the moment lives: It lives in the moment a person actually names the friend they've quietly forgotten and commits, out loud, to send one message tonight. Not in the historical background about scroll-carrying couriers.
- Your prep: Prepare to send your own follow-up text before you walk in the door, so you're not asking the room to do something you dodged. Know the difference between the two letters (Colossians survived, Laodicea's didn't) cold.

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

Use the classroom opening with the phone (3 min). Read the passage aloud (2 min). Teach how the letter traveled and became Scripture (8 min). Teach the word 'fulfill' with the cup, land on the charge, silence (7 min). Questions 1, 2, 5 — skip 3 and 4 for time (15 min). You send your own follow-up text in front of them, then commitments out loud (7 min). Close praying their names (3 min). Transformation lives in the out-loud commitment. Cut the Laodicean-letter detail first.

SMALL GROUP · ~8 PEOPLE · 60 MINUTES

Use the small-group opening about going silent on someone (5 min). Read the passage (2 min). Brief on how the Word traveled (6 min). Cup exercise for 'fulfill,' silence (7 min). All

five questions, giving real space at 3 and 4 (25 min). You send your follow-up text where they can see it (3 min). Commitments — each person speaks one name (7 min). Close praying their actual words back (5 min). Transformation lives in questions 3 and 4 and the named commitment. Cut the historical background before you cut the personal questions.

COFFEE · 2-3 FRIENDS · 30 MINUTES

Use the coffee opening about the strange ending (3 min). Read verses 16-18 together (2 min). Skip the full history — just say the letter was passed church to church and became Scripture (3 min). Do the cup idea verbally with your actual cup, land on 'fulfill it,' pause (5 min). Questions 3 and 5 only (10 min). All of you send a follow-up text right there at the table (4 min). One-line prayer over what got said (3 min). Transformation lives in actually sending the texts together at the table. Cut nothing but the history.

The Follow-Up Text

This is a habit for every lesson you'll ever teach, and this week we drill it deliberately because the passage hands it to us: Paul's closing lines are all follow-up. He sends the letter onward, he sends a word to Archippus, he asks to be remembered. This week's rep is not just 'send a follow-up.' It's this: before you teach, pick one person from your last gathering — someone whose comment or silence stuck with you — and text them something specific about what THEY said or carried, not a generic 'good to see you.' Then, at the end of tonight's lesson, tell the room you did it. Make the drill visible. A teacher who follows up is a teacher whose people know the lesson didn't end when the door closed.

Why This Passage Matters

Most people skim the end of an epistle. Greetings, names, a signature, done. But these four verses are where the New Testament shows you its own bones. A letter is being handed from town to town, read aloud to people who mostly couldn't read it themselves, copied, and walked on to the next church. This is partly how the book in your hands came to exist. And right at the close, a different handwriting takes over. Paul takes the pen himself and writes three words that should stop you: 'Remember my chains.' The man who just told them Christ holds all things together couldn't hold anything without a guard's permission. That's not a contradiction. That's the pattern. The gospel of the enthroned King came into the world through a man in fetters, and it still comes to people through servants who are spent and poured out. When you teach this, you're not teaching a footnote. You're teaching the church how the Word travels, how ministry gets finished, and how grace has the last word over real chains. You get to hand people the same thing Colossae handed Laodicea. That's a privilege.

Catch the Fire First

Before the room does anything, you do the exercise in front of them. Pull out your phone. Tell them, 'There's a friend of mine walking through something hard, and I realized I've gone quiet on them.' Then type the message right there — one line, that you're praying

for them and you haven't forgotten what they're carrying — and hit send while they watch. Don't perform it. Just do it plainly and say, 'That's the whole assignment. That's what Paul is asking for at the end of this letter.' When they see you actually send it, the exercise stops being a nice idea and becomes something they can picture doing.

Bring Your Own Story

- PROMPT: A time someone remembered YOU when you were the forgotten one — a message that came when you thought you'd dropped off everyone's radar.
- PROMPT: A person you know who serves quietly, like Archippus, and wondered if it mattered — and what happened when someone finally said 'keep going.'
- SAMPLE (polished vs. real): Polished — 'God taught me the beauty of encouragement in a difficult season.' Real — 'I was ready to quit teaching, and one guy texted me three words: don't stop teaching. I still have it.'
- GUARDRAIL: Keep it half-a-notch rough, not raw — a story you've made peace with, not one you're still bleeding from.

Three Ways to Open

CLASSROOM: "Hold up your phone. 'This is roughly how the New Testament traveled — hand to hand, read out loud, copied, passed on. Except it was a scroll and a courier walking a river road. Today Paul shows us the machinery of how his letters became Scripture, and then he signs off in his own shaky handwriting.'"

Start with a concrete object to make an abstract point physical.

SMALL GROUP: "'Think of the last time you realized you'd completely gone silent on someone who was going through it — not on purpose, life just crowded them out. Hold that person in mind. Paul ends this letter asking his friends not to do that to him.'"

Open with a shared human experience before the text.

COFFEE: "'Here's something odd. The most cosmic letter Paul ever wrote — Christ holding the whole universe together — ends with a prisoner writing three words by hand: remember my chains. Doesn't that seem like a strange way to end it?'"

Lead with the strangeness that hooks curiosity.

Teaching the Word

Teach the word Paul uses in his charge to Archippus: 'fulfill it' — Greek 'plēroō,' to fill something completely, to fill it up to the brim. It's not 'try hard' or 'be busy.' It's finishing a thing until nothing's left undone. Do this physically: pick up a cup and slowly pour water into it while you talk, right to the very edge, and say, 'That's plēroō. Not half a cup. Not a cup you started. The ministry poured out to the full.' Notice Paul doesn't say 'the ministry you invented' — it's the ministry 'you have received in the Lord.' It was handed to Archippus, and grace supplies what the charge demands. Set the cup down full and land

here: 'See to it that you complete the ministry you have received in the Lord.' Then stop talking. Let it sit.

Discussion Questions

1. Paul arranges for this letter to be read in Colossae and then in Laodicea, and for Laodicea's letter to come to them. Why do you think God wanted his Word to travel between churches instead of staying put?

Coaching note: This is the warm-up. Let a few people answer factually before pushing. If someone lands on 'so it wouldn't just belong to one group,' pull that thread.

If it stalls: Simple version: when a verse or a message really helps you, do you keep it to yourself or pass it on? Why?

2. Paul takes the pen and writes 'Remember my chains.' What does it do to you that a letter this glorious ends with a prisoner asking not to be forgotten?

Coaching note: Don't let them rush to a tidy lesson. Sit in the strangeness. If someone says it's sad, agree, then ask whether it's also strong.

If it stalls: Easier way in: has anyone here ever felt forgotten while you were going through something hard? What was that like?

3. The charge to Archippus is 'fulfill' the ministry you received — fill it to the brim. Where do you feel like you've started something for God and left it half-full?

Coaching note: This gets personal. Give real silence. Do NOT fill it for them. Count to thirty in your head.

If it stalls: More concrete: name one thing you know you're supposed to do for someone and keep putting off. Just name it, that's all.

4. Paul's chains weren't a break from his ministry — the source card calls them his pulpit. How could a hard, limiting thing in your life actually be where God is doing his work through you?

Coaching note: Careful here — don't let anyone tell someone their suffering is 'a gift.' Let people speak for their own chains, not each other's.

If it stalls: Gentler version: is there something you've resented as a limitation that later turned out to matter to someone else?

5. The whole letter opens and closes on the word 'grace.' If grace has the last word even over real chains, what does that change about the thing you named earlier?

Coaching note: This is the landing question. Tie it back to what specific people said in Q3 and Q4. Name their words back to them.

If it stalls: Direct version: does knowing God supplies the grace before he asks anything of you make the hard thing feel any different tonight? Yes or no — then tell me why.

Questions You May Hear

"What was the letter from Laodicea? Do we have it?"

No, it didn't survive, and Scripture never tells us what was in it. Some guess it was Ephesians circulating through the region, but that's just a guess — the honest answer is God preserved exactly what he meant us to have and nothing needful was lost.

"Why does Paul write the greeting 'with my own hand' if he wrote the whole letter?"

He didn't write the whole thing — he dictated it, which was his custom, and then took the pen at the end. His signature was a mark that certified the letter was genuinely his, the same practice he mentions in 2 Thessalonians 3:17.

"Who was Archippus?"

A believer connected to the Colossian church who had received a specific ministry 'in the Lord.' We don't know the details of his role, but Paul singles him out by name to press him to finish the work he'd been given.

"How did letters actually get read if most people couldn't read?"

A courier, likely Tychicus here, carried the scroll, handed it to the gathered church, and it was read aloud to the whole body. Then it was copied and the copy was carried on to the next town along the river road.

For Experienced Leaders

- When you pour the cup for 'fulfill,' fill it a little too full so it nearly spills. The near-overflow does more teaching than your explanation will.
- Somebody will want to spend the whole hour on the lost Laodicean letter. Give it ninety seconds, say 'God kept what he meant to keep,' and steer back to the chains.
- Don't rescue the silence after 'where have you left something half-full.' The discomfort is the work. If you break first, they learn you'll always break first.

Landing the Lesson

Commitments: Go around and have each person say out loud one name — the friend they're going to send a message to before they sleep tonight. Just the name. Speaking it makes it real.

Close by praying out loud over the actual names people just spoke and the half-full ministries they admitted to. Don't reach for anything written — say their real words back to God, thank him that grace comes before the charge, and stop.

If you run out of time: If the room only gets to question 3, stay there. The confession of a half-finished thing is worth more than racing to the tidy grace ending. Let it be enough.

Midweek follow-up: A week later, text each person: 'Did you send that message to [the name they said]?' Nothing else. That single follow-up will do more than the whole lesson did.

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

Handout

COLOSSIANS 4:16-18 (BSB) · DIGDEEPER.AI

During the lesson:

- One verse or message that has fed you lately — write it here so you can send it to someone tonight:

- Someone you know who serves quietly, like Archippus, and might be wondering if it matters:

- A ministry or a good work you started for God and left half-full:

- A 'chain' in your life right now — a hard limit you resent. Write it, and next to it, one way it might be your pulpit:

- The name of one friend you'll message before you sleep tonight:

Take-home actions:

- Text a passage that has fed you lately to someone in your group today — type it out, add a line about why it stuck, and send it. Let the Word move between you.

- Call the quiet servant you named and tell them the specific good you see them doing — teaching kids, visiting the sick, whatever it is — and tell them to keep going.

- Before you sleep tonight, send one message to the friend walking through something hard that says only this: you're praying for them and you haven't forgotten what they're carrying.

Remember my chains. Grace be with you.