

Janice Munson, 39, and her husband, Dan, were on a shopping trip in Littleton, Colorado, when they came up behind a silver minivan traveling along the road at a snail's pace. The minivan swerved first onto the shoulder, and then in the other direction towards oncoming traffic. Janice glanced into the minivan and was startled to see that the driver appeared to be asleep.

Dan turned on his emergency flashers – blinking his headlights on and off, and he began waving his arm out the window to warn the oncoming traffic that something was wrong. Janice knew she also had to act, and without a word to her husband, she jumped from the car and within seconds, she was running alongside the van. She grabbed the door handle, banged on the window and yelled, “You’re going the wrong way!” The woman only stared back with a “deer in the headlights” look.

Janice then swung the door open, vaulted inside the moving van, and slammed the gearshift into park, bringing it to an abrupt stop. Seconds later, a stream of cars coming from the opposite direction whizzed safely past the van and its occupants. Afterwards, police told Janice that the van driver was a diabetic who was suffering from insulin shock. She was taken to a nearby hospital, treated, and released.

In his book “A World Without Heroes”, George Roche defines heroism as “*an extraordinary act of goodness, performed by ‘ordinary’ people from whom we do not expect it.*” This was true of Janice Munson – a 39-year-old wife and mom – just an ordinary person who performed an extraordinary act – a selfless act – whereby she put her own life on the line for the sake of another.

By definition, Janice was a hero, and this morning as we dive into the closing part of this letter to the Colossians, we are going to work our way through a list of heroes – not “super saints” – but ordinary people who counted the cost, who took the risk, and performed selfless acts for the sake of another – the Apostle Paul.

So, if you have your Bible, turn to **Colossians 4** and we will pick up where we left off beginning with **verse 7** where Paul shines the light on these ordinary people who helped him to accomplish God’s work. He says,

⁷ As to all my affairs, Tychicus, our beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant in the Lord, will bring you information. ⁸ For I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts; ⁹ and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your number. They will inform you about the whole situation here.

As a reminder, Paul is in confinement in Rome, and he will be there for two years, but even so, given the circumstances, Paul continues to do the work he was called to do, and he does it with the help of others.

In this passage, at the top of his list is **Tychicus**. Tychicus was a native of Asia, and he traveled with Paul a lot. They met towards the end of Paul's third missionary journey when Paul planned to collect a special love offering from the churches in Macedonia to deliver to the poor and the needy in Jerusalem. On this mission, a delegation was chosen to accompany Paul, and Tychicus was one of them. As a messenger, he joined Paul in this mission to Jerusalem, and from that point on, he remained on as a faithful and capable partner in the ministry.

If you recall in our study through the letter of **Titus**, Tychicus was one of two men mentioned by Paul who could be sent to island of Crete to relieve Titus as the pastor, and later on, Paul sent Tychicus to Ephesus to take Timothy's place as the pastor, so Timothy could visit with Paul before Paul was to be executed.

So, Tychicus spent a lot of time with Paul – regarded as a beloved brother, a faithful minister, and a fellow bond-servant – suggesting that he was permitted by the Romans to spend time with Paul and to meet his needs while in confinement. Tychicus was an ordinary person who was loyal and dependable – *something we all can be* – and he was someone who was very familiar with Paul's situation and could be trusted with that information. Paul tells the Colossians, that if you have any questions about me, about the ministry, about anything – just ask Tychicus – he will fill you in.

Now, Tychicus carries this letter to the **Colossians**, he carries a letter to the **Ephesians**, and he also carries a personal letter to **Philemon**, but he's not alone. He's accompanied by Onesimus, and together, they travel some 1000 miles, one way, from Rome to the western region of Asia Minor to hand-deliver these letters – the very same letters that you and I get to read in our day.

Onesimus – and that's a name you might know, especially if you've read the small letter of **Philemon**. If you recall, Onesimus was a slave – a runaway slave. Onesimus was the property of Philemon, from the town of Colossae, and he ran away with some of his master's money and made his way to Rome, and it just so happens that he ran into, of all people, Paul who apparently led him to Christ.

Onesimus was a runaway slave – good for nothing, and in those days worthy of death on the spot if caught, but if you notice, Paul describes him as **faithful**. He

had only been with Paul for a short time, but he had already proved himself as a dedicated helper to Paul. Onesimus is hard at work – not because he has to, but because he wants to. He has a different motivation for service – it’s God’s grace, and he has a new identity in Christ. Paul calls him a **beloved brother**, and as a beloved brother, he needs to make things right with Philemon – another Christian brother, whose 1000 miles away. *That’s something we should do as well. No matter what it takes, at least on our end, we need to try to make things right when things are wrong.* So, Tychicus, a veteran minister and Onesimus, a new convert, travel together with a personal letter from Paul asking Philemon to forgive Onesimus and to receive him back as a brother. It’s a great picture of reconciliation.

Do you want to hear something interesting? Early church history tells us that some 50 years later, the pastor of Antioch named *Ignatius* sent a letter to the church in Ephesus. In his letter, Ignatius praised the wonderful pastor in Ephesus – and the name of that pastor was *Onesimus*. Now, I’m not sure if this was the same *Onesimus* or not – but I would like to think it was because it brings his story to a beautiful conclusion. This ordinary person, who was once a runaway slave, was forgiven, treated as a brother, and later he became a pastor. It’s a great ending to his story.

Next, beginning with **verse 10**, Paul mentions six more ordinary people who were remaining with him in Rome: Aristarchus, Mark, Justus, Epaphras, Luke, and Demas. The first three are Jews and the second three are Gentiles. Now, Paul has already mentioned Epaphras earlier in this letter. Two of them – Mark and Luke – are well known to us because they are gospel writers, and three of them are probably new to most of us – Aristarchus, Justus, and Demas. So, Paul writes,

¹⁰ Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings; and also Barnabas’s cousin Mark (about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him). ¹¹ and also Jesus who is called Justus; these are the only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are from the circumcision, and they have proved to be an encouragement to me. ¹² 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. ¹³ For I testify for him that he has a deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea and Hierapolis. ¹⁴ Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings, and also Demas.

Aristarchus was a Jewish believer from Thessalonica who had essentially given up his life to fearlessly serve the Lord during Paul's third missionary journey. Paul calls him my **fellow prisoner**, which may suggest one of two things: Aristarchus had been arrested, taken prisoner, and he ended up in confinement alongside Paul – or it could suggest that he had arranged with the Romans to enter into confinement with Paul even though he had not been arrested of a crime. In either case, we might say this guy is *all in* to help Paul.

Now, there is something else about this ordinary person that's not mentioned here, but it's worth pointing out. It would seem that Aristarchus had a habit of being with Paul when there was trouble. *He was like tube of toothpaste. When it's squeezed, when there's pressure, it appears.* For example, in Ephesus, when Paul started a riot over idols made to their goddess Diana, an angry mob tried to seize Paul. Paul escaped but Aristarchus didn't. He was dragged off by the mob, and probably he took a few lumps on Paul's behalf.

When Paul was shipwrecked on the island of Malta because of a terrible storm on the high sea, Aristarchus was also there. Now, as Paul is in confinement in Rome – there he is too – no matter what – he's stuck to Paul like glue. *That's how we should be described. When the going gets tough – through thick or thin, we are sticking together until the end* – and speaking of the end, tradition tells us that Aristarchus was martyred in Rome by Nero.

Okay, that brings us to **Mark**, and his name takes us back to the first missionary journey of Paul when the apostle, together with Barnabas, were sent out from the church at Antioch. On their journey, they took with them Mark who was the cousin of Barnabas. It would seem that Mark was a little spoiled – a little soft around the edges, and when things got tough on the journey, Mark wanted to go home – so he took off and abandoned them.

Well later, in preparation for their second missionary journey, Barnabas wanted to take Mark again. Paul said *“no way Hosea – he's not ready”* and that led to sharp disagreement between Paul and Barnabas – so sharp that Paul and Barnabas decided to go their separate ways. Paul partnered with Silas while Barnabas took Mark to Cyprus, and there they ministered.

But it's here in this letter that we learn – years later – after spending some quality time with the Apostle Peter, that Mark ends up with Paul in Rome. Somehow, Mark had won his way back into Paul's good graces and everything that had happened years before was but a distant memory. Now Paul considers Mark

profitable to the ministry and wants to send him to Colossae with instructions that he be welcomed.

Mark is an encouragement to every one of us who has failed. He had strayed, he took off when the going got tough, but he was given a second chance. Mark took advantage of it, he proved himself faithful, and eventually he was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write a gospel – the Gospel of Mark.

In **verse 11**, Aristarchus and Mark are linked with another name – Jesus who is also called **Justus**. We know nothing about Justus except he was Jewish believer who took on a Roman name – which was common in those days, he was a fellow worker in the ministry, and he was said to be a great encouragement to Paul or we could say from the Greek that he was like soothing medicine to him. *That's the kind of man Justus was, and that's the kind of people we should be – encouraging and soothing and comforting to one another.*

In **verse 12**, Paul mentions **Epaphras**, and if you recall, we met him at the beginning of this letter. Epaphras had started the church in Colossae – he was their pastor, and it was he who traveled 1000 miles from Colossae to Rome to share with Paul the concerns he had about the false teachers who were threatening this young church – concerns which prompted this very letter. So, we already know about him, but there's one thing here that Paul says about him I want to focus on – Epaphras **labored** or we might say *agonized* in prayer for the Colossians. This man loved his brothers and sisters so much that he agonized in prayer on their behalf. He wanted to see them grow in their faith, to learn the will of God, and to honor Him with their lives. *In a nutshell, Epaphras prayed well because he cared well, and that's something for all of us to think about.*

Then we come to **Luke**, who's not just a physician – he's a **beloved physician**. **How many of you have beloved doctors and dentists?** Luke was a Greek believer – a well-educated and highly trained man – an ordinary person uniquely prepared by God for a man like Paul. Luke was important to Paul, traveling with him on his second and third missionary journeys – documenting what he experienced in great detail, and I suspect that as a physician, Luke cared for Paul when he received his beatings, when he suffered from various ailments during his imprisonments, and as he coped with a condition he referred to as a *“thorn in the flesh”*.

Luke was a gifted researcher and writer – he's the only Gentile writer in the Bible, and by volume – by the sheer number of words, he wrote the majority of the New Testament when you add the **Gospel of Luke** and the book of **Acts** together.

In his second letter to **Timothy** – Paul’s very last letter before his execution, we learn that Luke was the only one left by his side, for it would seem that the rest had been sent elsewhere to serve in the ministry. Luke was in Paul’s corner and he stuck with him until the very end.

In contrast, we come to **Demas**, and look at what Paul says about him in **verse 14** – nothing except for he says “hello” to the Colossian believers. That’s it. Nothing else. **So, what’s that all about?**

Well, Demas was from Thessalonica – he traveled with Paul to several places, and for a while, he worked out really well, but here it would seem Paul was sensing that something wasn’t right, and sure enough, it would eventually bear itself out.

In Paul’s last letter, the second letter to **Timothy**, Chapter **4:10**, in prison for a second time and near the end of his life, Paul says this:

Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica.

Demas was the one close partner of Paul who left because he traded the things of God for the things of this world. It would seem that Demas tried to serve two masters which Jesus said cannot happen, and his affections turned from the things above to the things below – to the things this world prizes and values.

A man bought a new hunting dog. Eager to see how the dog would perform, the man took him out to track a bear. No sooner had they gotten into the woods than the dog picked up the trail. Suddenly he stopped, sniffed the ground, and headed in a new direction. He had caught the scent of a deer that had crossed the bear’s path. A few moments later he halted again, this time smelling a rabbit that had crossed the path of the deer. On and on it went until finally the breathless hunter caught up with his dog, only to find him barking triumphantly down the hole of a field mouse.

This is a warning for all of us, for if we’re not careful, we can backslide and become just like that hunting dog. We start out on the right trail, following Christ, but soon our attention is diverted to things of lesser importance. One pursuit leads to another until we’ve strayed far from our intended purpose. Apparently this is what happened to Demas. He drifted away, until eventually, he deserted Paul.

Okay, beginning with **verse 15**, Paul wraps it up with these final words:

¹⁵ Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house. ¹⁶ When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea. ¹⁷ Say to Archippus, “Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it.” ¹⁸ I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my imprisonment. Grace be with you.

We know nothing about **Nymphas**, other than she is in **Laodicea** and a church met in her house, and so moving onto **verse 16**, we read something interesting which is the subject of debate amongst theologians. Paul says there is a letter that was sent to the church of the **Laodiceans**, and this letter would be coming from them to the Colossians. Some suggest that Paul wrote a letter specifically to the Laodiceans – a letter that we do not have in the Bible – a letter that seems to be missing and lost.

I take a different view. I think this letter that Paul is referring to is the letter to the **Ephesians** and let me explain. As I already mentioned, Tychicus and Onesimus were carrying several letters from Rome and one of these letters was to the church in Ephesus – and this letter is what we call a “*circular*” letter – a letter that was to be passed around from one church to another – and this is how it worked. A church would receive the original letter and a scribe would make a word for word copy of it, even count the words to ensure the copy was exact. Then that church would forward the letter to the next church on the postal route until the letter made its rounds. So, in this case, I think Paul is saying that when the Laodiceans get the letter from the Ephesians, they will make their copy, and then forward it to the Colossians, and likewise, as a swap, the Colossians are to send their letter from Paul to the Laodiceans. That’s what I think Paul is referring to.

Now, if you will notice, the last name listed by Paul is **Archippus** – and I’m not sure, but I think Archippus is son of **Philemon** and the pastor of the Colossian church in the absence of Epaphras. I say that because Archippus is also mentioned at the very beginning of the personal letter to Philemon.

Paul says to him, “*Archippus, take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, and fulfill it – just like Tychicus has, Onesimus has, Aristarchus has, Mark has, Justus has, Epaphras has, and Luke has. I want to see you to do the same. So, Archippus stay at it!*”

Then in the last verse, Paul takes the pen from the scribe, and in his own hand he writes,

Remember my imprisonment. Grace be with you.

In his closing remark, Paul wants the Colossians to remember his confinement because his confinement represented the cost and the commitment he made to the Lord and to those who needed to know Him, and his hope was that they may be blessed with God's grace as a result.

I want to close with a quote from D.L. Moody who said,

“The world has yet to see what God can do with, and for, and through, and in, and by, the man who is fully and wholly consecrated to Him. I will do my utmost to be that man.”

Moody, who was a shoe salesman before dedicating his life to Christ and becoming one of the greatest evangelists of all times, was talking about ordinary people who are willing to surrender their lives totally to the Lord. Who knows what God can do – but Paul gave us a clue with a list of ordinary people who sacrificially gave of themselves, who took the risk, who performed selfless acts, who endured great hardships, and who were committed to the very end – no matter what.

So, like these ordinary people, will you be counted among them?

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