

Series: *Serving in the Shadows* # 3
An Encourager like Epaphras
Colossians 1:7-8; 4:12-13

Today we have read of another servant of the Lord who served in the shadow of the apostle Paul. Other than the verses we have read, Epaphras is only mentioned one other time in Scripture. [Philemon 1:23 – There salute thee Epaphras, my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus](#). Although we don't have a wealth of information on him, Epaphras stands as an example to be admired in service for the Lord.

Most agree that Epaphras was likely the pastor of the church in Colossae, possibly even planting the church there. This would have been a difficult place to minister since Colossae was a Roman province, heavily influenced by the Roman culture. Colossae was situated 90 miles east of Ephesus and within the same fertile valley as Laodicea and Hierapolis. Colossae was only 12 miles from Laodicea, situated on the banks of the Lycus River. Colossae was the smallest of the three cities within the valley, but the main road from Ephesus to the Euphrates ran through Colossae. It would have hosted many travelers on their journey to and from Ephesus.

As we continue to consider those who served faithfully in the shadows, the contributions Epaphras made to the church cannot be ignored or minimized. He was not as well-known as Paul, but played an integral role in the advancement of the churches in Colossae and Laodicea. We need those like Epaphras among us today. Let's examine the [contributions](#) he made as we consider: [An Encourager like Epaphras](#).

I. The Dedication of Epaphras (1:7-8) – As Paul opens his letter to the Colossian church, he mentions their pastor, Epaphras. The name Epaphras means “lovely.” Paul appreciated the fellowship and support he received from Epaphras. We find Paul mentions:

A. His Cooperation (7a) – [As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellowservant](#). They both shared a common trait, they were fellow servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. This was a title that literally meant “*a fellow bond slave*.” Paul recognized that Epaphras possessed the qualities of a true servant, a willing slave to his Lord and Master.

- We need those who possess those qualities. You don't have to be a pastor to be a servant of the Lord. Few are willing to truly be a servant, one who is sold out and submissive to the Lord and the Master of their lives.

B. His Conviction (7b) – *who is for you a faithful minister of Christ*; Epaphras was a man of compassion and submission, but he was also a man of conviction. He was a man who preached the gospel without compromise. The idea conveyed here for a faithful minister is “*one who executes the commands of the Master.*” Epaphras didn’t waver in his allegiance to the Lord, even in adversity.

- It is my heart’s desire to be a faithful minister. I want to carry out the Lord’s command at all cost. I want to be one who will preach the truth without compromise and stand firmly on the Word. You ought to desire that in your life as well. You may not be called to preach, but you can faithfully carry out that which the Lord desires of you. The modern church desperately needs those of conviction, those who will faithfully execute the commands of the Master without compromise!

C. His Commitment (8) – *Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.* It is clear Epaphras had a heart for the church at Colossae. He had talked with Paul about them, seeking godly counsel in order to be of benefit in their spiritual lives. Epaphras was a man who loved the flock that God had called him to pastor.

- There can be little doubt we need more men like Epaphras in our day. We need men of God who are more concerned about the sheep than they are the salary. We need pastors with more desire for the people than the prestige. We need preachers who are more concerned about needs than numbers. I pray that God will allow me to grow in my compassion and desire for you.

- We need those within the church who are committed to the wellbeing of the entire church as well, those who possess a deep love and commitment for the Lord and His church. We must be like the church in Colossae, serving the Lord and one another with love in the Spirit. Far too many today are consumers instead of servers. They attend church solely for what they can receive. We should not attend just to see what the church can do for us, but come seeking to serve the church!

II. The Desire of Epaphras (4:12-13) – As Paul concludes his thoughts in the Colossian letter, he again mentions Epaphras. Here he reminds the church of the great desire Epaphras has for the church and the ministry as a whole. Consider:

A. His Identity (12a) – *Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you.* Paul reminds the church that Epaphras was one of them, a servant of Christ just as they were. He did not view himself any differently or of higher position than other servants within the church. It is apparent that Epaphras was happy to identify with the church at Colossae and the church at large.

- This is an essential quality of a true servant of the Lord. I am pleased to identify with the church. She is the body of Christ; He died to purchase her redemption and provide her eternal life. It is impossible to truly serve the Lord and refuse to identify with the church. In fact, I am convinced there is nothing else that compares to the church in this life. I have been involved with various organizations over the years that provided different services and benefits to the community, but nothing compares to the church. I can always identify with you. We are family in the Lord. You understand me much better than the world does. We share a common faith and love for one another! It is a privilege and a joy to be identified with the church!

B. His Fervency (12b) – [always labouring fervently for you in prayers](#). Paul also spoke of the fervent labor of prayer Epaphras exercised for the church. He was concerned with her wellbeing, desiring the help of the Lord for her, and this led him to fervent prayer for the church. He was committed to praying for the church and the work she was engaged in. I am convinced these weren't casual, habitual prayers, but genuine and sincere prayers. He was willing to take the time and put forth the necessary effort to pray for the church.

- This is something we all can do, and in fact, we all should do. If you are part of the body of Christ, His church, you have a responsibility to pray for the church. This is a labor of love that will go largely unnoticed by those around you, but we must be willing to put forth the effort anyway. Our churches are weak and lacking because we are not committed to prayer. I can think of nothing more important or needed in our day than fervent prayer for the church. If you want to be a true servant of the Lord, commit to praying for the church on a consistent basis.

C. His Consistency (12c) – [that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God](#). Epaphras had received Christ as his Lord and Savior. He enjoyed fellowship with Christ and sought to serve Him in every way he could. He longed for the church to share in this loving, committed relationship. This desire wasn't reserved for the leadership or a few choice servants. Epaphras desired the church as a whole to stand mature in the Lord, fully knowing and surrendered to His will for their lives. Paul reveals Epaphras was never satisfied with a half-hearted effort. As long as the church existed there would be room for growth and he longed to see every believer come to fulness within the faith.

- Should that not be our desire as well? Epaphras modeled discipleship for us. He wanted to help every believer mature in the faith. Often we get so busy and consumed with our own lives and responsibilities that we fail to see the needs of others. Fellowship will never reach her full potential until every member has grown in their faith and is well on their way to spiritual maturity. You might think that is a process we will never see fulfilled, and you are right; but we must make every effort to disciple those with whom we serve and worship. The mature believers must be

willing to invest in the lives of others, sharing your wisdom, gifts, and abilities with them in an effort to produce mature believers who in turn disciple others!

D. His Legacy (13) – *For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them *that are in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis*.* We may not know a lot about Epaphras due to the limited information we have, but it was quite evident he had impacted the lives of many. Paul knew he was zealous for the church in Colossae and the churches in Laodicea and Hierapolis as well. It is apparent that Epaphras had been instrumental in the founding and flourishing of all three churches. A single life had made a tremendous difference in the lives of many. He left a legacy of love, commitment, and service for the Lord and His church.

- I realize the work we do isn't about us or for our personal recognition, but I would hope we are able to leave something of lasting value behind. Wouldn't it be a tragedy to spend a lifetime in a particular church and never make an impact on anyone there? I want to leave a legacy behind. I want to invest in the lives of others, seeking to help equip them to carry on after I am gone. I will likely not be able to leave a lot of material or monetary possessions behind, but I can leave a legacy of love, commitment, and service to the Lord.

Conclusion: Epaphras was a faithful servant who served in the shadows, but he made a large and lasting impact on those around him. His love and faithfulness helped ensure the wellbeing of the church and must have encouraged and equipped others in the faith. Although we don't know much, we do know he made a difference. Wouldn't you like to make a difference for the cause of Christ and the good of the church? Are you willing to be used of the Lord and invest in the lives of others? Will you commit to serve the Lord alongside others, striving to strengthen Fellowship and ensure her longevity? You might argue that you don't have much ability, but I would argue otherwise. You can pray unto the Lord for the church. There is nothing greater one can do that is more needful.

If you are yet unsaved, I urge you to respond to the call of Christ in salvation. He wants you to be part of His body, the church. He wants you to be of service to Him and possess eternal life when life on earth is over. Come to Him if He is dealing with you about salvation!