



Christ Over All
Part 8 – Helping Each Other Cross the Finish Line
Pastor Ted Cunningham

If you didn't know where we were going with that, we're talking about teamwork today. We're ending out our series Christ Over All. I had the opportunity to grow up in Chicago in the 90s. I never went to the NBA finals, but I had the opportunity to see that.

Today, we're talking about... If you are a follower of Jesus and this is your church home, you are on the team and you are a part of the team. We are going to talk today about how we want you to be a part of the team and not just a fan. Can I get an amen on that one? We don't need any more fans; we need those who are running the ball down the field with us. This pudgy little preacher is going to give you three sports illustrations this morning. I'm the least athletic on the teaching team. We have all those other teaching team members who are awesome athletes for the sole purpose of connecting with the part of the congregation that I can't.

We're going to see the value of teamwork today. Before we jump into this last part of our series through Colossians, *Helping Each Other Cross the Finish Line...* We're crossing the finish line with this series. We want to welcome all of those who are at home. All of our Church at Home family, we know many of you are staying home through this pandemic and plan on staying home for some time to come. As we talk today about being on the team, we want you to know that even though you are at home and not with us in person each week, we very much consider you a part of the team, part of the family. As we go through this message today, we hope that you see your part in that, and ways that you can continue to serve the family here and the team here. For all those at the Chapel, all of those outside... I saw people all bundled up outside. We have a new gathering place. I think it's our fourth venue on campus. It's the gathering place right across from the Castle here and I'm sure there are many of you in overflow there as well.

We take an offering at our church and as we take this offering, many are giving online. We're seeing over half of our giving can come in online. We've received several gifts in the last couple of weeks that have allowed us to have some moments of generosity as a church that we weren't planning on. Travis Brawner said at the beginning of this pandemic, "Hey, this is not a time, church family, for us to hold back. This is a time for us to be generous." That's probably one of the most important things said from this pulpit, and how true is that? This week, after giving \$103,000.00 already this year to Care for Kids, because of your generosity in October, we were able to write another \$40,000.00 check to Care for Kids, taking that to 143,000.00. Then we also wrote a check, on top of all our giving to missions to the children that we feed in Haiti. As a church family, through the schools there, we wrote them a check last week for \$40,000.00 as well. We've given out about \$100,000.00 in the last week alone.

If you are new to our church, just know that 13% of everything that comes in on a weekend goes straight to missions and to ministry outside of this church. So, because of your generosity, we went into the pandemic with a reserve, thinking that we would need this reserve throughout 2020, but actually the reserve has grown, ministry has grown, and your generosity, we say thank you for it, and we look forward to what the Lord continues to do in this church.

If you are at home wanting to give, you can hit that “give online” now button as part of worship today. The rest there can do that, or you can give in the boxes in the back.

Today, we’re taking... There are a lot of sports analogies today. I have no idea why I’m finishing out the series. I’m going to raise my hand on this as I ask this question, so don’t be embarrassed to raise your hand. Have you ever tried out for a sports team and you didn’t make the team? Look around for a second. I’m feeling at home with all these people. All the athletes are going *no way. I’m a starter on everything I ever tried.*

Well, at Traughber Junior High, they bought 18 brand new basketball uniforms when I was in 7th grade. I hadn’t been on a sports team, other than the little league stuff and the stuff you would do in the community. This was my first official school sports to try out for. This year was their first year with these 18 brand new uniforms. Just so you know, that’s when basketball uniforms were still pretty shorty shorts. Does anybody know what I’m talking about? So, I wasn’t thrilled about that part, but 20 7th graders tried out for the team of which I was one. I remember the coaches chit chatting on the day they were going to say tryouts were over. They decided that since they had 20, they would just let them all be on the team. But that meant that two of the players of the 20 would have to wear a uniform from 1956. Which one do you think I got? I got the 1956 uniform. It was faded. I’m so glad I don’t have that picture to this day. And you won’t find it online, and don’t try. If you do and post it, I will sue you for slander. I will take everything you’ve got.

It was embarrassing, but I was that player that when there were 30 seconds left in the game and we were down by 40, it was “Ted, this is your moment.” Or if we were up by 40 and they knew I couldn’t screw it up that bad, they would put me in. I just remember sitting at the end of the bench. I was an encourager. Does anybody know what I’m talking about? I just liked to help the moral of the team. The coach would say, “Cunningham, you’re in.” I’d always be like, “Nooo, I don’t want to go in. You’re just patronizing me.”

When we talk about the church and we talk about being a team, today we are going to see that ministry can’t be done by a handful of people. It just doesn’t work that way. We’re going to see in Verses 7-18 of Colossians 4. I have to be honest. This is one of those text that if you’re not careful, you’ll treat it like we often treat the list of names in the Old Testament, or maybe even the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1 where we just skim it, we read through it really fast and we don’t understand why it is there.

Today, the bottom line of all the names that we’re going to read... A lot of people, when they go verse by verse through a book of the Bible, will just speed through this part even in a message series. But today, the main point of the text that we’re looking at is Paul was a highly relational leader. Paul had a team surrounding him to do what he was unable to do.

He had people that gathered around him that he invested in, realizing ministry takes a team. We say we're Woodland Hills Family Church, but today, you can say we are Woodland Hills Team Church.

In 2 Timothy 4: 6-7, Paul writes... And we are going back to this passage in a few weeks as we start next week's sports themed series called *The Great Race*. We're going to let the athletes kick that series off. I love this passage. Maybe you've read it before, but I want you to see this passage in light of the text we're in today in Colossians 4. In 2 Timothy 4, he says, ***6 For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near.*** He's not talking about leaving a city, he's talking about leaving this earth. The time for his death is approaching. And then he says... and you've seen this in Christian book stores, on coffee mugs, and plaques. ***7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.***

What we're going to see today... He didn't fight the good fight alone. He didn't finish the race alone. There were plenty of people, friends, co-laborers, co-workers who surrounded him to help him cross the finish line. That's what this text is about. We're going to get a lot names of a lot of people who served alongside Paul as a co-laborer, as a co-worker to help him cross the finish line.

Heres' the bottom line today. **We want to help each other win, not just cheer each other on.** We don't want to be just a room full of fans watching a few people do all the work, do all the ministry, and be like, "Good job! You've got this, keep going!" Because what we are experiencing a little bit right now, during all the regulations and everything we have to do to make church happen with every other row and all of that, is that some of you that were cheering us on are getting a little tired of everything we have going on. We're going to talk about that at the end. But we don't need just the cheers. The cheers are important and it's the third point of team work today, but we need people who are actually in the race with us, running alongside with us.

I couldn't pick just one of these vides, so I asked Matt for a compilation, for a visual for all of us today on what it means to help someone cross the finish line. [video plays] There is a story behind every one of those races from the wounded soldier to the young man giving up first place allowing many runners to go by so that he could help someone cross the finish line to the one that really gets me which is the dad that runs out to help his son. What a picture of the church for us.

Today, here's where we want to head with this message as we look at the final chapter of Colossians. **We need more runners, not fans.** Today, we're going to look at three aspects of teamwork. This is so important for the church.

The bottom line is we're hoping to move many fans of Woodland Hills today to runners, to being a part of the team. You're not going to have a spotlight on you like we opened up with from the Bulls 1996 NBA Finals, but we want you to know that at this church, every member of this church is a minister of the Gospel of Jesus. And we believe that every ministry performed in this church, for this church, outside of this church is significant, it's important and you have a part to play. That's what we are going to see as we read through these names.

Here are three aspects of teamwork that I would love for us to explore today as we finish this great book:

1. Teamwork requires that you deploy others to do what you are unable to do. Here is where the apostle Paul starts that list. Colossians 4 - ***7 Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord.*** These two are close. ***8 I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances...*** Why is he sending him? Why is he deploying him? Because he is imprisoned in Rome. He is unable to do it. Sometimes we think, *If I'm not able to do it, if I can't get the job done, no one else will be able to do it.* He says, "No, I'm sending him. I'm getting someone else to do this." ...***and that he may encourage your hearts.***

Maybe some of you grew up in a church. Maybe it was a smaller church and one or two or three people did the majority of the work. Maybe you grew up in a medium size church and there was a handful of people, a few families that you could count on to open the building, to close the building, to do the hospital visits, to prepare the meals, and that was your mindset that you pay people to do that. That is not the mindset here at Woodland Hills. The mindset here is that we are all a team and it takes all of us running together, working together, serving together, discovering our spiritual gifts, our passions, how our personality plays into, finding out how we can better serve one another, love one another, bear with one another, care for one another. This is the place where we ask that you not only be served, but that you serve. That you're not only loved, but that you also love others.

We're grateful for Church at Home and we want you to know you are very much a part of this teamwork message today because many of you are unable to be here because of underlying health condition, and some of you are staying away because of family members with underlying healthy conditions. Again, from the very beginning and until today, we honor that. At the same time, we are challenging the person who says, "Why can't I just stay home? I don't have any issues. I know there are places to spread out and be safe on campus. Why can't I just stay home." That's because we don't believe, in the long term, that you can do ministry alone at home by yourself.

We believe you need to be a part of the family of God. We believe digital ministry is important. You think *I just sit at home and I'll watch your message and then I'm going to watch this other preacher's message and then I'm going to go over here and get worship from this church...* You can go and get fed and be served and cared for from a lot of different places, but church is far more than that. It's far more than just having your needs met. Being on a team is not just about you. It's about everybody else on the team. And we deploy others. We ask other people to serve in areas where we are unable to accomplish it.

2. Teamwork requires that we take the hit for one another. With this one, we move onto the next person on the list, Onesimus. I love this name, I love this person, I love this character in this text and in the Book of Philemon. When you're a part of a team, it's one of the best things about being on the team. You know your teammates have your back. They are going to stick up for you. When someone is going to start mouthing off maybe about this church around the community and you hear that, you take the hit for your church. You're like *Well, no, I don't like to take the hit.* People often don't like to take the hit because they don't want whatever wrath that's coming out in that conversation to fall on them.

But a teammate says, “You know what? If you're going against one of my teammates, you're going against me.”

Now watch where this goes with Onesimus. **9 He is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother...** Onesimus is a runaway slave who finds the Lord. He becomes a believer. The Apostle Paul is going to send him back to his owner, Philemon. What's neat about the book of the Bible, Colossians, is that this letter would have been traveling back to the Colossians alongside another letter, which is the New Testament book of the Bible, Philemon. These two would have been traveling back together, and the one carrying the letter is the one who is going to deliver it to Philemon. ...**who is one of you.** So, he is a Colossian as well.

They will tell you everything that is happening here. The Book of Philemon is a one-chapter book. It's a letter to Philemon where Paul takes the hit. Can you imagine? You're a runaway slave and in that day, the penalty for being a runaway slave... We don't know if he stole anything or what exactly happened. The penalty is death. And you become a follower of Jesus and the one who leads you to the Lord says, “Hey, you need to go back and make things right with Philemon.” Can you imagine? “You want me to do this by myself? You want me to go talk to him by myself?” “No, I'm sending a letter along with you.”

Let's read the letter that would have been traveling alongside the letter to the Colossians. This is Paul saying to Philemon, the owner of Onesimus. Philemon – **12 I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you.** I am sending him who is my very heart back to you.” Do you want to know what persuasive speech looks like? Have you ever had a teacher that wants you to write a persuasive speech or teaches you how to be persuasive in your writing? This is it. It's probably one of the most beautiful examples we have in scripture of persuasive writing.

13 I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. Again, he's on the team now. He's part of the team. **14 But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do would not seem forced but would be voluntary.** Do you see what he's saying to Philemon? He's saying, “I know you're going to make the right decision; I'm just moving you in that direction.: Doesn't that sound like what we do with our kids all the time? We're trying to be persuasive; we're not always successful, but this is. **15 Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever...** Why? Because he's now a believer in Christ Jesus. **16 ...no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord.**

17 So if you consider me a partner... Here's the persuasion. ...**welcome him as you would welcome me.** Taking the hit. **18 If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me.** And I love this, it's my favorite verse in the whole Book of Philemon. **19 I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back...** If he has taken anything from you or if he owes you anything, I'll pay it back. —**not to mention that you owe me your very self.** That's the Bible, y'all. That is beautifully put.

This is one of the best examples we have of taking the hit. If you are part of the team at Woodland Hills Family Church, now, more than ever in this very challenging season, I'm going to challenge you with it in

just a few moments as close out. We need you take the hit with us. We need you to take the hit. We need you to walk alongside us. We know there are frustrations in this season. We know there are difficult times, but we're asked to take the hit. The word picture I would use is the football center – another illustration from sports – snapping the ball to the quarterback and stepping out of the way, allowing the quarter back to be taken out. We say no, the job of that line is to take the hit. And when you are one a team, you take the hit.

The only thing worse than the accusations of your enemies is the silence of your friends. Sometimes we stay silent when things are being said or things are being done because we don't want any of that wrath coming on us. I want to encourage you to find ways this week, as part of this team, to take the hit. If you hear gossip in the church, guess what your role is. Take the hit. Obviously don't join in. Some people are like, "When I hear gossip, I just like to stay silent." That doesn't help. Shut it down. You're like, "My fear is if I get involved, then they will start gossiping about me." That's why people remain silent. But you're going to discover that you don't have all that many friends when you follow this. You're going to find it takes a lot, but we need to be teammates in it, a team together.

3. Teamwork means that we comfort and encourage one another. This is encouraging one another and comforting one another. I want to make sure you hear that. It's not that we don't cheer each other on; we do cheer each other on. It's not that we don't encourage one another as we're running in this race, but we do; we're constantly encouraging one another, but that's not all we do. It's easy to tell someone, "Don't ever give up!" What takes more work is actually picking someone up and letting them borrow your strength. That takes more.

In Colossians 4, we're going to read this list now that goes on. You're going to get a lot of the laborers, the co-workers with Paul. ***10 My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.)*** I love this about Mark because if you read in Acts 15, you know that Paul and Barnabas had a disagreement over this gentlemen because he abandoned them on their missionary journey. Then when they got ready for the next missionary journey, Paul said, "I don't want to take him. You can keep him." And Barnabas said, "No, we're taking him."

I had to write a paper on this once. Who was right? Paul or Barnabas. Paul said, "It's about the mission and we can't take anybody that might affect the mission." Barnabas comes in and says, "People are the mission." He was the encourager, and they had a disagreement so sharp the scripture tells us that Paul and Barnabas parted ways. But I love when you read this in the letter to the Colossians. What are we reading now? We are reading that there must have been a reconciliation.

11 Jesus (not our Lord and Savior – another man), ***who is called Justus, also sends greetings. These are the only Jews among my co-workers for the kingdom of God, and they have proved a comfort to me.*** God is going to send people into your life, and he sends people into my life that are just a comfort. Many of you sent cards and letters from Pastor Appreciation Month and I want to say thank you. It's November 1 now and Pastor Appreciation Month is over. You still can use it this week if you want to go another week.

But I loved reading the letters from people who weren't just fans, but people who are in the trenches, running the race with us. They're alongside of us, providing comfort as we do this ministry.

12 Epaphras, who is one of you... So, he is a Colossian. ...and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you...

If I can encourage our Church at Home family. You can't do much physically with folks right now. Now more than ever... Yesterday I felt this burden in a big way for our prayer warriors. We have got to call on those of you who pray, and you have time to pray and you're taking lots of time praying. Names are coming to my mind right now of those who I know are constantly wrestling in prayer for this church family and for our community. Yesterday, it seemed like every couple of hours, I got a new set of names of couples or of families in our church who have COVID. We have some that are in hospitals. We have some watching right now who have lost a family member and we're with the Ramsey family, the Goldberg family as you mourn during this difficult season. We're praying for your mom, Ramsey family. I just think of all the people right now who need prayer. This is a great way for you to be on the team. We need you praying.

He is always wrestling in prayer for you that you may stand firm in all the will of God... This is the whole part of Colossians that we said it's about remaining steadfast. It's why we're doing this series for four weeks in November called *The Great Race*. It's because we feel going into 2020... And who knows what's going to happen when we wake up Wednesday morning? But we're entering into a time where Christians need to be reminded of something called endurance and perseverance. The finish line for us is not an election cycle. The finish line for us is not based on a calendar. The finish line for us is not based on any season or stage of life. The finish line for us is when the Lord calls us home or he returns for us, period. That's the finish line. And we are all running in this race until we get to that finish line. We're all helping each other cross the finish line. And we're praying for one another. But ***...mature and fully assured.*** That's what we're praying for. We're praying for your endurance and perseverance during this season. We're praying for all of the saints, all of those who call Jesus Lord.

13 I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis. 14 Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings. 15 Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.

16 After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea.

17 Tell Archippus: "See to it that you complete the ministry you have received in the Lord." When is the ministry that we have received in the Lord complete? When either the Lord returns or calls us home. Now the rolls we play, the positions that we might have, the ministry that we might serve in, that will change, but we're talking about steadfastness until the end, running this race.

18 I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

It's easy to be on a team when you're winning. I love being on a winning team. What's the team right now in the NFL that hasn't won a game yet? The Jets. Are you a Jets fan? Okay, good. Everybody loves the winning moment. Everybody loves when it's the winning moment and the kicker has scored the winning field goal. We're all with number 3 then.

But last Sunday, I turned on the game. I love watching football games in the last two minutes. I highly recommend this. If you don't have time to watch football, scan... If you see it's like 12 to 48, I pass that game. I like 27-24. I like those games with two minutes left. I turned on the Steelers/Titans game. We love these moments as a team, but what about the moment that you kick it, as I saw it... This was live last week. He kicks it and then his body is leaning in the way the ball is going, away from the right upright. And look at this. Right after he kicks it, there ain't nobody patting him on the helmet. I felt sorry for the guy. I wanted to get in there and give him a hug and say, "It's okay, buddy. You got this next time." You know there was some foul language going on. And that's why I'm so glad they have the coach in a mask. His eyes are like *I hate you and I'm trading you*. I don't even know if number 3 is a good kicker, but I saw him walk off the field so discouraged.

In many ways... I'm just going to be honest with you. It's where a lot of those who have been serving faithfully in this church since March are at. Don't take anything about what I'm about to say to be about me. This isn't about me or where I'm at. I think I'm pretty leveled off emotionally right now, but every now and then, I have my moments.

At staff meeting this week, I felt it from a lot of our leaders, a lot of our directors. The fatigue that is setting in. And I'm here to tell you I think the fatigue is going to carry into 2021 no matter who is elected on Tuesday. I believe if ever the church of Jesus Christ needs to be taught and reminded and encouraged with endurance, perseverance, and steadfastness, it is right now.

People ask, "Aren't worried about what might happen to our country?" The gates of hell won't come against the church, so whatever happens... I don't want that happening to our country. I don't want to lose religious liberties, but if we do, guess what? It's not going to affect my faith. I'm still going to follow Christ. I'm still going to meet. You're like, "What happens if they start shutting down the church?" That's what I'm saying. We better save our strength because we may have some big decisions to make next year come January 21. I don't know. This is getting way more political than I have in my notes.

Let me just encourage you. Somebody left last week – I heard it was multiple people – frustrated. I have to say it at 10:00 more than any other service that packs out. Everything got filled up and some people showed up and were told the Castle was full and they were told that was full and there was nothing left. People said to some of our folks, "I can't stand the way this church is run." I'm like, to be honest with you, during this season, neither can I. Do you think I'm jumping up and down about all the nonsense we're going through right now? I'm not thrilled about it. So, I'll just say this as we close. If you're tired of masks, social distancing, limited seating, needing to register your children each Sunday or watching from home, you're in good company. I'm tired of all of it too. I've ordered the book, *Church During a COVID Pandemic*, but it hasn't been published yet, people. Alright? So, lighten up. We don't need more critics. We need more runners.

We don't need more people saying, "That's my seat." People ask me all the time if they can use my seat in this service. I don't have a seat! I want to encourage you, follower of Jesus, if you are on this team, you don't have a seat either. We have lost people dying and going to hell who show up here every single Sunday; give them you seat! Run with us, not fighting against it! Right? We're all fatigued by this. You're like, "Are we going to meet if they say we have to go back to 10 people?" Okay, this is going out on livestream. I was going to save this for 11:30. I told somebody this week. If they limit us to 10 but hundreds can go to Home Depot, we'll be open. I'm not saying that as a threat. I'm not saying that to say, "I'm going to fight the city and I'm going to fight Biden and I'm going fight..." I'm not saying all of that. What I'm saying is we better save some strength. We better stay in the race. We better stay committed as followers of Christ. Some of you are wasting energy on a lot of nonsense. As we've grown tired of the pandemic, let us not grow tired of one another. So, the next time you're watching, the next time you go over and they say, "Sorry, we're full," instead of complaining, say, "Thank you for serving."

I know it's not easy telling people that there's no room left. I'm sorry there is limited seating. We would not do every other row if we didn't have to, if we weren't in a pandemic. No one is thrilled about it, but we're doing it. The question as we close out is: Will we remain faithful to the mission, sticking up for one another, comforting one another and encouraging one another, or will we complain, gripe, seek our own way, and keep our seats? It's a question I'd love for each member of this church to answer. I just want to encourage Church at Home. If you're staying home for underlying health conditions, we honor that. We actually encourage that. I actually told dear friends this week who are dealing with another ailment, I said, "I want to encourage you to stay home for a couple of weeks. Let your immune system fight this other thing you've got going on. You don't need to risk even more getting this with your age and what you have going on. So, my encouragement to you is stay home until it's safe. I get that."

But if you're doing everything else in town, we're just going to say it again. There are plenty of places on this campus where you can be safe, and not just safe for you, but where you can be safe and be a part of this team and running the ball down the field and being a runner, not just a fan. We want to encourage all of us to be co-workers and co-labors in the cause of Christ.

Father, we love you and we're grateful for how you continue to work in this church. I pray that many today will move from the seats, will move from where the fans are to the playing field and they will choose to serve. I know we're all tired, we're all fatigued, and we're going to spend the next couple of weeks looking at what it means to be refreshed and replenished and restored in you, and how to serve one another as we carry out the mission of the gospel of Jesus Christ here at this church.

For the one who has never placed faith in Jesus that today would be the day they join the family, they join the team and they confess with their mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in their heart that he has been raised from the dead that they will be saved.

We pray all of this in the name of Jesus, and everyone agreed and said... Amen