



PHILEMON

A LETTER BORN IN CONFLICT

36 DAILY READINGS



PHILEMON

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Introduction

In the spring of 2017 the Holy Spirit led me to begin a lengthy study in the book of Philemon. Up until that point, I can only remember hearing one sermon ever preached from this short little 25 verse letter written by Paul. It was taught by Frank Damazio at City Bible Church in Portland, OR on a Saturday at the conclusion of Generation Unleashed, a youth conference. As I began to read, my study led me into great amazement as I began to experience Jesus in a very personal way within Philemon.

While reading through this book several times, I knew that I wanted to write a devotional that would help people go word by word and verse by verse through the entirety of it. Among some of the truths that I discovered within this book were answers to culturally hot topics, an ability to see individuals no longer as useless, but useful, and leadership principles that will help us serve people in the same way that Jesus leads us.

It's my prayer that as you read you this devotional God will show Himself to you afresh. One Pastor of Jennifer and mine often says, "It takes God to love God." So as you read, make sure to ask the Holy Spirit for help to see what you can't see on your own. God has hidden many things for you in plain sight and there up for grabs. Go get em.

Patrick Walton
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"The letter to Philemon may be the most explicit demonstration of how, more than anyone else, Paul created the Western individual human being, unconditionally precious to God and therefore entitled to the consideration of other human beings"

-Sarah Ruden, *Paul Among The People*

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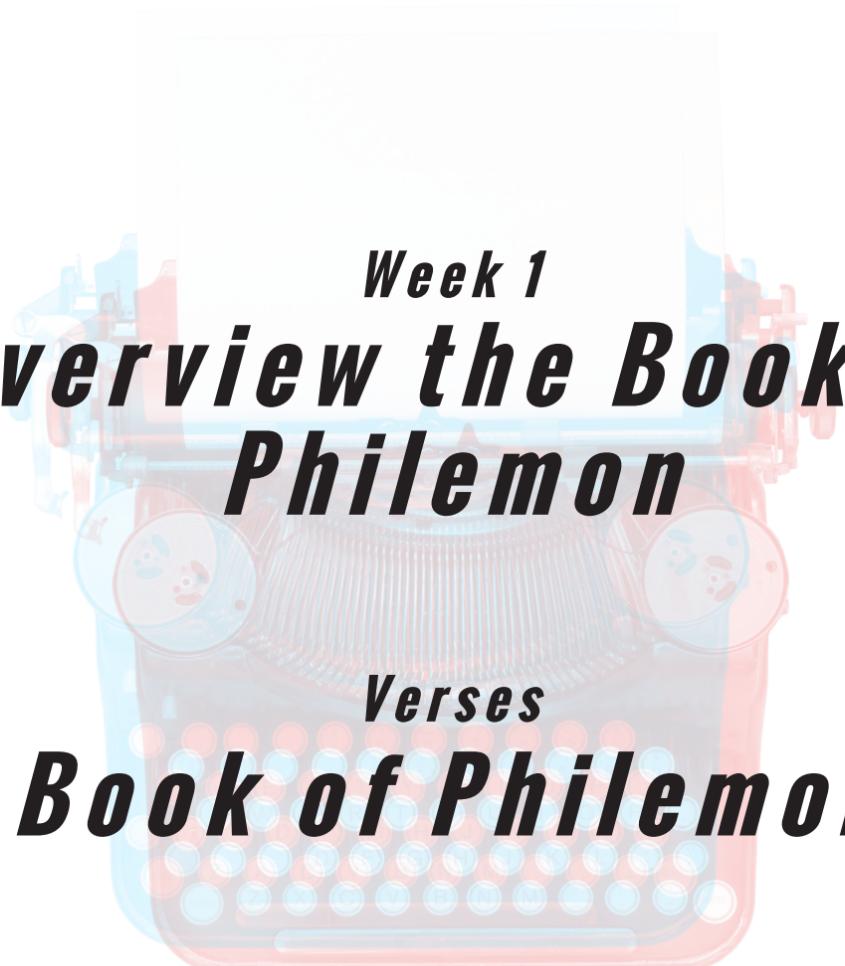
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Week 1
***Overview the Book of
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Book of Philemon

The Book of Philemon

Day 1 / Book of Philemon

Week 1

The book of Philemon is the shortest Pauline letter that we have in the New Testament. Paul's letters aren't organized in the New Testament chronologically. The first letters are letters written to Churches, organized from longest to shortest. After the letters to Churches, we then have Paul's personal correspondence to various people of which is the book of Philemon. Philemon is referred to as a prison epistle (letter) which was most likely written from Rome. Paul's other prison epistles include Ephesus, Philippians and Colossians.

It's interesting when considering that Paul had a mind like a racehorse, a heart the size of Texas, and a relational network that would rival Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg that we don't have more personal letters that were preserved from Paul. I believe that it tells us how much God wanted to make sure we had this little letter and that we don't neglect it.

It would be easy to pass over this short 25 verse letter, tucked away towards the back end of the New Testament. However, I have found personally that these out-of-the-way books of the Bible that you don't hear about too often actually have an equal amount of gold that God would have us to gather through reading and becoming acquainted with it. This letter doesn't speak of local Church structure as several of Paul's other letters do. It doesn't refute Gnosticism which was rampant in Paul's day. It doesn't establish foundational doctrines, and it really doesn't travel much beyond the household whom Paul has written to.

But what we do see within this letter is deep humility through the life of Paul, God's concern for healthy relationships within His family and how the body of Christ is called to do life together as we take the Gospel of the Kingdom into the world in which we live. Have you ever considered how a short note, a little letter, a text message or an email could have lasting impact on those that receive it? I don't know if Paul knew the eternal impact that this letter would have upon the readers both in his day and for the past 2,000 years of Church history. The faithful act of writing this letter, and living the way that Paul lived has doubtless changed the course of many. Don't neglect the simple things that God has asked you to do.

No Longer Can We Separate Thinking And Living

Day 2 / Book of Philemon

Week 1

As I watch my kids grow, I get a sneak peek into my own life. It's easy to get frustrated at a variety of things that they do, until I suddenly see the same things happening in my own life in a different, and often larger, scale. One of those things is my struggle to join together what I think about and how I live. James, Jesus' half-brother said it this way, "be a doer of the word and not a hearer only" (James 1:22). James was driving home something that is common to all of us, and something that the Holy Spirit is able to help us do, which is to join together what we are thinking and learning with how we actually live day-to-day.

The letter of Philemon is the culmination of how Paul's theology (thoughts about God) lead to Paul's life of action. Another way to say it is that Paul's adoration of Jesus lead to Paul's adherence to Jesus. One of the powerful points Paul makes through the entirety of this letter is that it's no good if we reach a mental assent in Jesus without changing the way that we live. Now, in order to walk something out, we have to first know about it. However, our knowledge should produce a life of action.

The life of Paul through this letter shouldn't be seen as an illustration, but a life compelling implementation and action. As we will see through this study, Paul is going to place himself in the middle of two people, taking his theology out the secret place of private devotion to Jesus and into the streets of practical expression to walk out what he is thinking about as he works to mediate a conflict between two people that Jesus cares deeply about.

In what ways have you separated what you have learned from the way that you have lived? And in what ways can you work to close the gap between knowledge and action? Is there one thing that you can do today, or this week that would activate your beliefs? Maybe with a neighbor, a co-worker, a family member, or a financial matter?

Who Is Philemon?

Day 3 / Book of Philemon

Week 1

Philemon, a Roman citizen, was a wealthy land owner from the Phrygian city of Colossae. At the time of Paul's letter to Philemon, Colossae was a city located in Asia Minor, which is now known as Turkey. Colossae was about 10 miles southeast from Laodicea and about 13 miles from Hierapolis. It seems that Paul and Philemon originally met in Ephesus while Philemon was there selling some smooth black wool that was produced from his land. This wool sold for top dollar in Ephesus. Little is known about Philemon prior to his salvation experience through Paul's ministry in Ephesus. We can assume that while in Ephesus, he was not just selling things, but also paying homage to pagan gods, of which there were plenty in the great city of Ephesus.

The reason we know that Philemon was a wealthy landowner is because of two primary things. Firstly, he was a slave owner. Owning slaves in Paul's day was reserved for those that had more than an average income. We know that he had one slave for sure, but most likely several more beyond that. And secondly, Philemon had a Church that met in his house. The only way that house churches worked is that there was enough room to accommodate all the people that were attending. From these two things, it's easy to deduce that Philemon's income was above average.

However, the reason why we have this letter is because one of Philemon's slaves, Onesimus, had apparently run off, leaving behind some type of accrued loss as a result of his actions. In his attempt to hide away, Onesimus ended up in Rome, a large metropolitan city, hoping to start a new life no longer as a slave. But while in Rome, Onesimus ended up in the same prison as Paul, Philemon's spiritual father, and was born again through Paul. The plot thickens. After building a relationship with Onesimus in this Roman prison, Paul realized that Onesimus must return back to Colossae and attempt to reconcile the fractured relationship between him and his owner, Philemon. Paul, as a great spiritual father is more concerned with the health of God's family than his own personal needs that Onesimus is caring for.

You might be reading this book, and finding yourself in the position of Philemon, someone who has been wronged by someone else and struggling to forgive. Or you might find yourself in the position of Onesimus, someone who has wronged someone else and is in need of repentance. Throughout our lives we find ourselves in both places, people needing to forgive and people needing to be forgiven. Where are you at today in the relationships around you? Is there someone that you need to ask forgiveness from, or is there someone you need to talk to and let them know that what they did hurt you? Move in the direction of health, in your own life, and in the life of God's family today.

The Structure Of Philemon

Day 4 / Book of Philemon

Week 1

More than one time I have re-read portions of the Bible that I had become familiar with only to see several new things that I had never seen before, including how specific books were laid out. When it comes to the chapters and verses in the Bible, it's important to note that these were added much later, around 1240 A.D. giving us a total of 1,189 chapters and 31,173 verses. I'm mentioning these chapters simply to state that many times chapters and verses end and start in the middle of a statement or a sentence. This is problematic at times because it tends to break up the thought of the author or the specifics of what was being said.

The book of Philemon, like most books of the Bible has a pretty clear structure in how Paul laid it out. It might seem a little haphazard at first glance, but after a few passes the structure begins to emerge and it becomes clear, like the rest of his letters, how intentional Paul is in writing this letter. Because it's only a one-chapter book with just 25 verses, it doesn't have any subsequent chapters. In Philemon 1-3 Paul opens the letter by greeting Philemon and what we believe to be his household. The people that he mentions in those 3 verses include a total of five people. Paul, Timothy, and Philemon we know, but the other two we aren't as clear about, but commentators believe them to be Philemon's wife, Apphia, and son, Archippus.

From the greeting, Paul then includes a prayer for Philemon and their house church that goes for about 4 verses from Philemon 4-7. This prayer is beautiful, speaking of many wonderful things Philemon and the Church in his house were faithfully walking out in their devotion to Jesus and others. But the lion's share of the letter is given to Paul's reason for writing the letter in the first place and that's to make a request of Philemon. Paul's request of Philemon goes for 15 verses from Philemon 8-22. I'm so excited to open up this request in the coming days with you, as we witness a powerful player in God's kingdom (Paul) lay down his authority and influence, and simply appeal to Philemon for the sake of love.

And finally, the book closes with Paul's closing remarks in Philemon 23-25. This book is unlike any other books that Paul writes either to Churches or individuals. Speaking personally, while reading Philemon, my ideas about Paul shifted from viewing him as a floating, always on top, halo-status, powerful signs-and-wonders preacher, to a devoted man who loved God and God's people with the entirety of his life. Paul's heart for God's people, which is greatly on display through this letter, is stunning, and gives us something to aim for in our own lives by God's grace.

What does the structure of your life look like? Is there a clear rhythm to how you live? Is there consistency and thoughtfulness in the way you plan your days, weeks, months and years? If there isn't, let this be the day where you start talking to God about how you could consistently move forward with Him. How you might move from chaotic to Spirit led and structured by God's grace.

The Occasion For The Letter

Day 5 / Book of Philemon

Week 1

I'm sure that you have stepped into a conversation among other people midway only to realize that what you're hearing doesn't make sense. It's hard to put together what's being said because you're missing some context, other parts of the story, and information that would help tie everything together. The letter to Philemon at first glance might not seem that wild until we slow down a little bit and start to hear what's actually being said. Then we see that there are significant challenges, and potentially devastating implications for the people involved if God's Spirit is not at work among the situation and relationships.

Through the book of Philemon and a little bit from Colossians, which is a sister book to Philemon, we are able to put the pieces of the story together and work to grasp the enormity of what's transpired: Onesimus' sin, his salvation through Christ by the way of Paul, Paul's desire for reconciliation, and assumptions about how Philemon might have felt receiving this information. From Philemon 16 it's clear that Onesimus was a slave who was owned or cared for by Philemon. And in Philemon 18 we see that when Onesimus ran away, he accrued some type of debt that was left for Philemon. We don't know what type of debt that was, but it's either lost work because of his absence, or the theft of money he took for his journey.

We also see from Philemon 10, that Onesimus found his way to Rome, most likely looking for a large urban city to hide out in and start a new life where Paul was in prison. While in Rome, he ended up for reasons we don't know, in a prison cell with Paul. It was here in this prison cell that Onesimus was born again through Paul. After discipling Onesimus for some time, Paul knew that this fractured relationship between Onesimus and Philemon had to be restored. To make things more challenging, according to Philemon 19, Paul also led Philemon to the Lord. So now Paul is at the root of both Philemon's and Onesimus's salvation in Christ, making Paul both of their spiritual fathers.

According to Colossians 4:7-8, Paul sent both the letters of Colossians and Philemon to Philemon and his house Church in Colossae by the hands of Tychicus, and you guessed it, Philemon's once runaway slave, now born-again brother in Christ Onesimus. We will look at it further in the days to come, but Onesimus' crime in their culture was punishable by death, so you can only imagine how afraid he must have been to return back to Philemon's house not knowing what might happen to him. But what a predicament this placed Philemon in. Anger, confusion, joy, frustration, betrayal among many other emotions we might assume are all happening within him.

It's here, that Philemon receives this personal correspondence, hand-written from his spiritual father Paul, from the hands of Onesimus, appealing that Philemon receive Onesimus back, no longer as just a slave, but a beloved brother in Christ. Yes, you can cut the tension with a knife. What a story and what an experience for all parties involved. I believe that this letter accomplished the purpose that Paul intended: a reconciled relationship between Philemon and Onesimus. And the reason I think that is the simple fact that this letter was preserved.

Take time today to think about any hard conversations you might need to have with people in your life. Who do you need to receive back into your life? Or who do you need to ask to be received back into their life? God's grace is able to help you in your weakness, or in your inability to do what's needed; He can help you. Talk to Him about it today and move forward with courage.

Slavery and God's Kingdom

Day 6 / Book of Philemon

Week 1

It's important that we take a short look at the issue of slavery and God's kingdom that's contained within this letter. And as we go through each of the verses in Philemon, we will deal with this topic in further detail. In a day where racial tension is at a fever pitch, and rightly so in many regards, it's still important that we don't take our cues from politics, sinful culture, or simply just our experience. However, we must look at the Bible, which contains God's word to mankind.

Growing up as a white man, I admittedly have been unaware, ignorant, and silent regarding the struggling plight of minorities specifically here in America. Being a part of the majority culture has left me with some blind spots that, by God's grace, the Holy Spirit in 2016/2017 has been faithful to bring to my attention. This has happened mainly as I have developed some friendships with minority pastors in my city who have graciously, without accusation or anger, helped me to see what I simply couldn't see on my own.

When reading Philemon, the subject of slavery surfaces quickly as we get to know the main characters of the story. Philemon, a follower of Jesus and the pastor of a house church that's in Colossae is also a slave owner, and Onesimus is his runaway slave who has developed a friendship with Paul. Paul, the author of Philemon, takes an approach to dealing with the issue of slavery that has excited some and bothered others. The excitement for some is that Paul approaches slaves and slave owners from the position of, "If we can get people IN CHRIST we can change the culture of slavery from the inside out, the heart, not the outside in." But others are frustrated at Paul because he doesn't seem to condemn slavery in a vocal way. Paul's slower, non-protesting, non-confrontational way of dealing with slavery has frustrated many.

It's been noted by some that in Paul's day, in Delos, located in Greece, not far from both Ephesus and Corinth there were as many as 10,000 slaves a day placed on the trading block. Though the numbers are hard to get completely accurate, it's also been said that within the Roman Empire's heyday, as many as 1/3 of the population were slaves, calculating to upwards of 400,000 slaves in total. All this to say, slavery was a cultural norm in Paul's day, something to be expected.

In the midst of some people's frustration at Paul's approach to slavery, I actually think the way he went about addressing it was brilliant. It seems to be that Paul was wise enough to know that if you went up against a system that had completely normalized slavery it could end up unprofitable for Gospel expansion. So instead of hitting it head on by protesting and raising his voice in public, he went after the heart of both slave owners and slaves, working to move them into a relationship with Christ. This made clear that Paul's concern for slavery wasn't primarily about brotherly love, and equality, though those are good things, but about people being IN CHRIST.

If people were in Christ, it would move them from being identified as a Jew or Greek, free or slave, owner or apostle, and into being a son of God and fellow family members of those within God's household. This placed every disciple of Christ on the same playing field, removing the wall of cultural separation and placing everyone IN CHRIST and among each other. Paul's belief, as we will see, is that this method of dealing with slavery, though slow, would be far more effective because it's touching something beyond care and concern for his fellow man; it's touching Christ and His eternal purpose and power to transform society through a new humanity.

We will look further at several other passages outside the book of Philemon as we go verse by verse through Philemon to see what else Paul had to say about slavery, but here are some other verses that

you can go look up that Paul and other New Testament authors wrote about concerning the subject of slavery, slave owners and slaves (**Col. 3:18-4:1; Eph. 6:5-9; 1st Cor. 7:21-23; 1st Tim. 6:1,2; Titus 2:9, 10; 1st Pet. 2:18-21**).



Week 2

Paul's Greeting

Verses

Philemon 1-3

You Can't Make This Stuff Up

Day 1 / Philemon 1a

Week 2

Have you ever been out with a newly engaged couple or friends that recently started dating? As you sit and listen to their story of how they got together, it sounds like a match made in heaven. You think to yourself, "These two were made for each other." And as these lovebirds tell their story, you continue to say, often out loud if you're like me, "You can't make this stuff up." And truly you can't. People meeting in a restaurant that's named the same as the girl's last name, parking on a street that's the date of their birthday, or finding out this loved one is actually from the same state, city, and neighborhood, but they just didn't know each other.

In many ways, Paul's life is much like this. Here is a guy who has put people in prison prior to his relationship in Christ. He was powerful and educated, commanded people to go where he said, and even oversaw the death of God's beloved servants. But now, in his latter years of ministry, after encountering the risen Christ on the road to Damascus in **Acts 9**, the tables have turned; he's writing to a fellow brother, Philemon, greeting him from his prison cell. The one who threw people in prison, and was above the law of the land, is now in prison, living under the law of the land. You can't make this stuff up.

Paul opens the letter of Philemon saying in **Philemon 1.a**, "Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus..." Oh how the tables have turned for Paul. Eugene Peterson's Bible translation, the Message Remix says it this way, "I Paul, a prisoner for the sake of Christ Jesus." This is important to note because in some of Paul's letters he refers to himself as a bond slave of Jesus or like here, as a prisoner of Christ. But it's my belief Paul isn't speaking about His relationship with Jesus here, as much as the fact that he's actually in a literal prison, in Rome. The word he uses here for prisoner, is the word fether, or bond. He's literally a prisoner in a prison cell.

The humility that God worked in the life of Paul is stunning. God has a way of bringing about humility in our lives, but I also think that, as Paul grew in the knowledge of God, he desired God to work this in his life, though it came about most often in painful ways. Again, you can't make this stuff up. Paul's one of the most powerful religious leaders in his day, now serving the same God he was persecuting, from a prison cell. I can only imagine the ridicule that Paul endured from his peers, from the soldiers and religious leaders that he once ran with, a man once so powerful, now in prison, serving "this Jesus."

Are there parts of your life that seem to be a dichotomy to others? Parts of your life that seem to be ironic or like a story that you simply couldn't make up? You can take hope today that in midst of your dichotomy, in the midst of your irony and the story that can't be made up because it's so real, that it's God you answer to, not the curious questions from your fellow countrymen. Rest, be at peace and filled with hope that though your story might bring accusation and suspicion from others, if God's the Author, then that's all that matters.

Living Under The Lordship Of Christ

Day 2 / Philemon 1a

Week 2

Inside God's family, we often use a language that is mostly derived from the Bible and usually makes sense to those inside. But to those outside of the Church or just coming into the body of Christ, it might sound a little strange to hear some of the Christian vernacular. See I did it right there. If you're a part of God's family, the idea of being in the body of Christ most likely makes sense. But if following Jesus is new to you, or you aren't a follower of Jesus, then that might sound like a strange thing to be "a part of the body of Christ." In any case, that was a great explanation to my point. All of us use words that we really don't know the meaning of. We may use the word in the right context, but when asked by a little kid for an explanation of the word, we are dumbfounded, stutter, and simply move along to the next subject because we may realize we don't know actually know the meaning.

The word that I want to zero in on is "Lord." In **Philemon 1a**. Paul says, "Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus..." Now Paul doesn't expressly use the word Lord here as you can see. But what Paul is getting at carries the same idea as the word Lord. As we now know, Paul is a prisoner in a literal prison cell. And here in this painful and humiliating place, Paul is not speaking as a victim, he's not accusing anyone, or saying that he's being treated unfairly. The reason I believe we don't see this type of speech coming from his mouth is because Paul is living in light of the Lordship of Christ Jesus. It's not just the Lordship of Christ over "all things" but over his life specifically. The actual reading of this in the original text says, "Paul, a prisoner for Christ's sake." This would mean that the Owner of the prisoner is Christ and the reason for the imprisonment is Christ. This is Lordship language.

Paul is making clear that Christ Jesus, the Lord of all things, the Lord above every other Lord, is leading his life perfectly. It's not the devil who's imprisoned Paul. It's not the Roman Empire. And it's not the law, but Christ who's imprisoned Paul. Paul's not offended at the Christ for the direction He's taking his life. Paul is a bond slave, a servant, one subservient to the One who is over the affairs of his life. As with most things, writing/talking about it is much easier than living it out. It's not that we should celebrate Paul as if Paul is making this statement on his own. Nobody under these of circumstances on their own can make these kinds of claims. Only a person who is yielding to the work of the Holy Spirit in their life can agree with God's leadership when it includes such things as Paul's experiencing.

Enough about Paul's life; what about yours? Where are you at today? And what type of God do you see over your life? Do you see a sovereign Lord, who's wild, but good leading your life? And is that sovereign Lord leading your life perfectly? Today, take time to evaluate your emotions and find out how you really feel concerning where your life is. Are you mad? Are you happy? Do you wish you were somewhere else, doing something else, and with different people? If so, why? Has God placed you where you are? Has He given you the job you have? And has He placed you among the people you're with? If so, then ask yourself, am I okay with this?

Success and influence have an interesting way of impacting people. It seems to me that what's on the inside of a person prior to becoming "important" makes a massive difference in how they handle the success that comes their way. If a person is naturally prone to liking the spotlight and attention, influence only brings that closer to the surface. We all know that person. But if success comes to the type of person who naturally deflects attention, and shies away from being the center of a crowded space or among their peers, then influence doesn't seem to change them as much. We might say, "They handled that promotion well." It's clear that when responsibility comes, when your life is celebrated by others in a significant way, it does affect you.

Paul is one of those people who receive significant attention in the New Testament for his life. Paul's writings, like the Book of Romans for example, are historically esteemed alongside Aristotle, Plato, and Socrates. Much of what Paul wrote, even with the help of the Holy Spirit, is deep, complicated, and hard to make sense of. Paul said of himself about his upbringing, prior to his conversion in Christ, in **Philippians 3:4-6**, "For we are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit and have no confidence in the flesh, though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the Church; concerning righteousness which is in the law, blameless." Okay, that's a mouthful. Summed up, Paul is telling us that he's really smart, really dedicated, and in a class of his own.

But after Paul's conversion, by the help of the Holy Spirit, and I'm sure this was painful for him, he tells a much different story about himself. He says in **1st Corinthians 15:9**, "For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church." This is a testimony, not so much to Paul, but to the work of the Spirit in his life and what can happen in our lives if we will allow the Spirit to do what He does best: transform the human heart.

When Paul wrote his letters he always opened them with a greeting and every time, except for the book of Philemon, Paul mentions that he's received an apostolic ministry from Jesus. It's only here in the letter to Philemon that Paul doesn't mention anything regarding his apostleship. He simply opens this letter by saying in **Philemon 1a**, "Paul, prisoner of Christ Jesus..." As we will see in the days to come, this isn't haphazard or accidental, but intentional. Paul is going to make an appeal to Philemon to do something that's going to be really hard for him in the natural, but Paul is wanting to make sure that Philemon's response to the request is voluntary, and not out of obligation because he's an apostle.

Though Paul has a significant title that carries lots of authority, he intentionally leaves it off for the sake of serving his brother. Paul could have solved the problem by stating his authority and title, and simply told Philemon what to do. But instead, he appeals to him, title free, as a brother a fellow worker with him in Christ. This is a commendable action on Paul's part and has massive implications for us.

What does authority look like in your life? What do you do with the influence that God has given to you? Do you use it to hurt and harm others, or to help them? Do you let people know who you are, what you know, and how important you are? If so, what if there's a better way to live? A way that serves others, that loves others, and goes in the way of Jesus and not the flesh. If you don't know how you come across to those in your life, you could always ask them and see. I'm sure, if you're ready and able to hear it, or at least willing to try, there's some people who wouldn't mind sharing with you.

When it comes to the Bible, deep, close, and lasting friendships are nothing new. These are called BFF'S or best friends forever. It's clear that David and Jonathan were BFF'S. Jesus also, though He had an inner circle of 12 disciples, also had an even closer group that you might consider His BBF'S, and that was Peter, James and John. And after the Church is started and underway, we see that Paul also had a BFF, Timothy. Here in **Philemon 1a.**, Paul opens up this letter saying, "Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus and Timothy our brother..." Now Timothy, who has two books in the New Testament that bear his name, both written by Paul, is a person who surfaces several times throughout Paul's letters.

According to **Acts 16** Paul comes into Derbe and Lystra and meets Timothy who is already a follower of Jesus. Timothy's parents have an interesting heritage as his mother is Jewish but his father was Greek. Paul here simply stumbles into a relationship that's been created in heaven, meaning, as Paul is serving Jesus faithfully, the Holy Spirit connects these two and what God does with and through them is explosive. When writing to the Philippians Paul has this to say of Timothy in **Philippians 2:19-22**, "But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state. For I have no one likeminded, who will sincerely care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus. But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the Gospel." Pretty remarkable words for a young man who served with Paul throughout his ministry.

Now when it comes to the reason Paul included Timothy's name in this letter to Philemon there are a few different suggestions, but I'm not going to bore you with those. I'm going to cut to the chase and tell you why I think Paul did it. This letter to Philemon, as we will see in the next chapter, is written to a house Church that was led by Philemon and his family. And because Timothy's ministry alongside Paul had a notable impact in Ephesus (**Acts 19:22; 2nd Corinthians 1:1**), it's most likely that Timothy was there with Paul when he led Philemon to the Lord in Ephesus. Paul is simply mentioning someone with him whom Philemon knew for the purpose of keeping this letter familial. We aren't to assume that Timothy wrote this letter as some say, because Paul himself says in this letter that it's his own hand writing it (**Philemon 19**), but that he gets a customary mention because of the relationship that he also had with Philemon. But it is noteworthy to mention that it's pretty remarkable that Paul doesn't mind including others in his writings. He's a true father, including sons into the glory of the work that God's called him into. It takes a humble and confident person to share the spoils with others.

Now when it comes to your life, who's your Timothy? Who's the person that your mentoring and raising up to go further than you ever could? And who's the Paul in your life that's mentoring you? Sadly, I have met many people over the past 18 years that are on their own, doing life disconnected from people they are mentoring and others who are mentoring them. It's never too late to find people that you can come alongside and who can come alongside you. These are people you can help accomplish God's purposes for their lives and others who can help you accomplish the purposes that God's called you into. Start a dialog with the Holy Spirit asking Him to point out someone you can help and someone who can help you. Don't do life on your own.

It's A Family Thing

Day 5 / Philemon 1c - 2

Week 2

Because God is a Father, His desire is to have a family, made up of sons and daughters that, in theory or according to the Bible, truly love God and each other. I throw the theory portion in there because we all know that's much easier said than done. Only the combination of God's Spirit and willing people can make rebellious, self-centered, multicultural, diverse people one family, under one Father, with one common faith. It's hard for us to find one common food among a diverse family, let alone all the other things that God desires. The depressing part is when we look within ourselves to try and make this happen. It can't. It's only by God's grace that a loving, selfless, devoted-to-Christ family will emerge out of every tongue, tribe, nation, and people. God will do this, but it's going to continue to be painful and glorious process along the way.

Paul continues his opening remarks to Philemon in **Philemon 1.b-2** saying, "...To Philemon our beloved brother and fellow laborer. To the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house." These are the three people that Paul intentionally greets in the opening of this letter. Because this is a house Church, as Paul says, "and to the church in your house," it's important to greet the entire household of Philemon. This is why I believe that Apphia is Philemon's wife and Archippus is Philemon's son. Remember, God is a Father and His desire is that He would have a family made up of sons and daughters that truly love God and each other.

Here in this household, within this family, there's been a significant fracture into the culture of their home. This slave, owned by Philemon, Onesimus, who use to be a part of the family, has suddenly up and left, running away, leaving some type of debt and an empty hole of uncompleted work. If Philemon is anything like myself, the broken relationship took a toll on him and his attitude around the house. Not only Philemon was affected, but probably the entire household and the Church that met within it. Philemon's name means "affectionate" and it's derived from the word "kiss." Based on his name it's hard to picture Philemon, from the things that Paul is going to say about him in this letter, being a wicked master who was mistreating Onesimus. Slavery in Paul's day was entirely dependent upon the master and how he treated the slaves that worked for them. It wasn't uncommon that when slaves were finally free and could leave, that they would come back and pledge to work for the master the rest of their lives because of the quality of treatment they received. We don't know if this is the case, but it seems Onesimus had a good quality of life based on what's said about Philemon's character.

Paul refers to Philemon and Apphia as beloved friends and fellow laborers with him in the Gospel. They aren't co-laboring with Paul like his pets that accomplish his bidding, but people who are commissioned by God Himself, and are doing ministry in their own right apart from Paul. Paul isn't challenged or threatened by others who are advancing in God's call for their lives. He's a true father, celebrating and championing the influence that God has given to them and that's why he doesn't mind calling them fellow laborers. Paul is Philemon's spiritual father who lead him into faith. He could have called Philemon his son, like he calls Onesimus in the letter, but instead, he places himself on the same level as Philemon, as a fellow laborer.

And Paul calls this son, Archippus, "our fellow soldier." The reason this is important is because Paul only uses this title "soldier" of himself, Epaphroditus (**Philippians 2:5**) and here, of Archippus. This young man also appears in Philemon's companion letter, Colossians in **Colossians 4:17** where Paul says, "And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord that you may fulfill it." Paul is using military language here to speak of what Archippus has received from the Lord and how he is to complete that mission. Paul never left the heavy lifting to others while he himself rested, but always

rolled up his sleeves leading the way by example. He shared in the work of the ministry and honored others that did the same.

Now, why is all this household, mother, father, son, and so on important to know? It's important because if Onesimus, Philemon's runaway slave is to return back to the household, which is what Paul is going to ask of Philemon, then the entire family and Church that's currently meeting in Philemon's house has to do this together. Remember, God is a Father and desires a family of sons and daughters that truly love Him and each other. Paul is following a heavenly pattern here. He's not stuffing old things under the rug, glossing over hurts and wrongs or simply moving on and acting like it nothing ever happened. Paul is setting the stage for an invitation that Philemon would receive Onesimus back into his very household because he's not just a slave; he's been born again, making him a brother in the faith. He's risking much and attempting something that could turn out terribly. Or it could restore something that's broken.

What's your relationship with God's family like? Do you attend a local body regularly? Are you committed to getting to know others and allowing others to know you? If not, why? What have you done with the hurts and pain you've suffered within God's family, by your spiritual brothers and sisters, mothers, and fathers? The reason I ask is because just like our natural families, God's family has issues to. The issues aren't the issue, it's how we handle the issues that make it good or bad. Don't run past, present or future pain. Commit to being a person, who by God's grace will work through whatever comes your way.

God, The Intentional Author

Day 6 / Philemon 3

Week 2

I remember reading the Bible for the first time as a new Christ follower back in 2000 and being shocked that these stories I had heard so much about in my childhood got such little airtime in the Bible. When it came to Noah's Ark, the Red Sea parting, Jericho's walls falling, and Jonah in the belly of a giant fish, they were just a couple chapters a piece in the Bible. I felt a little ripped off. Because they are such paramount stories in both biblical and cultural history, I'd thought that they would have massive books written about them. But no, short stories, quick points, and then on to the next person. Over the years I haven't felt so ripped off as the young immature Patrick did. I'm now dignified, collected, and much more pious. Psych! The reason I don't feel this way anymore is because I have changed my perception about brevity in the stories that God has authored.

God's not haphazard or short sighted when He inspired these authors to write the things that they did. And some people have taken unfair potshots at folks like Paul and other Biblical authors for the things that they said. Translations throughout history, and ancient manuscripts tell us that the words from then to now haven't really changed. What we have today, is as close as you can get to what they had back then when it was originally written. That's documented and fact. And actually, we tend to trust more in Shakespeare's writings which we have so little of in comparison to the Bible, which we have so many copies preserved.

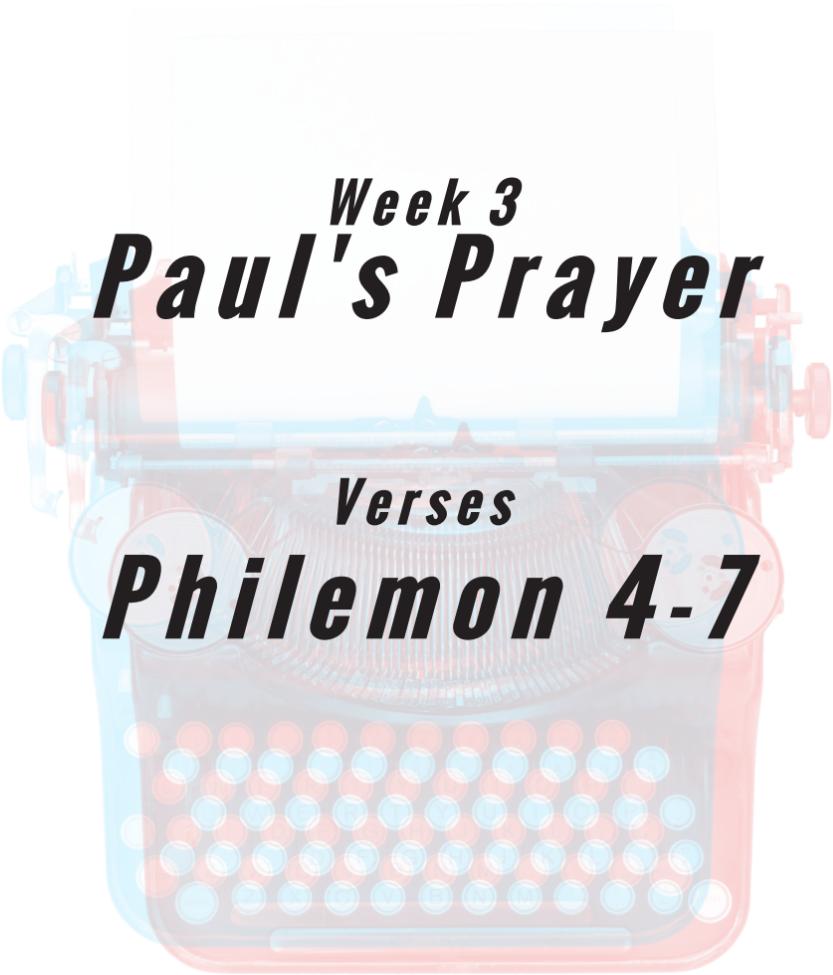
Some commentator's critique Paul here in **Philemon 3** as he says, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Their criticism is that Paul could have left these words out. They say, "it's just a customary greeting from their day that's filling in words to increase the size of the letter. He should've done without them." My feelings are quite different. Because God's not haphazard, and He doesn't use filler words because He has nothing else to say, I believe that this is very specific and intentional and that's why the words were recorded. Firstly, grace speaks of God's unmerited favor and power. In the times of our life when we need God's grace and God's power, He makes it available to us. If there was ever a time when Philemon and his house Church needed God's power and favor, it was now.

And secondly, God's peace, or His shalom, is needed if God is going to continue to be glorified in and through this house Church and the individuals involved. God's shalom amounts to more than a signal of two fingers in the air from a person wearing a tie-dyed shirt. It speaks of restoration, life going back to how it was in Eden, in the beginning before the fall when all things were working as there supposed to. Remember, Philemon is reading these words, written to him by Paul, with Onesimus standing in front of him having just handed him the letters. Awkward right? To say the least.

Paul is saying, "Philemon, you're going to need God's power (grace) and His restorative peace in order to do what God's asking you to do." And once again, Paul isn't accidental in his wording here as reminds Philemon where it's going to come from. Paul says, "...God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." It's God and God alone that our power and peace come from. Remember, this is a house church, being led by a family, and this is why Paul calls God "our Father." Many Christians can end up knowing Christ, but in times like these where there's serious challenges, they don't look to God, they don't see Jesus as the Lord who's ruling over all things and the only One who can give power and peace. Paul hasn't even made his request yet. He's just setting the stage, moving their hearts into a place of remembering Who is overseeing their lives and Who is going to help them navigate the decisions to come in the future. It's beautiful and intentional what Paul is doing.

When it comes to your life, do you see God and God alone as the One who gives peace, who gives

power to overcome tough situations and difficult places? If not, what would it look like for you to lift up your eyes towards the heavens and confess out loud, “God, I need Your help. I can’t do this on my own. I need Your power, and Your peace in order to overcome what’s in front of me.” It’s my belief that if you will be faithful to do that, to ask for help that God will graciously and generously give it to you. He’s not a miser.



Week 3
Paul's Prayer

Verses
Philemon 4-7

On The Hunt For the Perfect Word

Day 1 / Philemon 4

Week 3

Sometimes within God's family, it seems that people make big deal about specific words and their meaning. And in all honesty, sometimes it's just downright annoying and frustrating when people do this. For instance, one might say, "I'm going to Church tomorrow morning," to which someone might reply, "Well, you do know that we are the church." Or one says, "I love worshipping God on Sunday mornings" and someone says back, "You know, worship is a way of life, not songs and singing." Now listen to me, these are well meaning people, but they have in the past driven me mad, until recent.

During my time in Kansas City working at the International House of Prayer, I had the privilege of working with Rob Parker who is the director of Partnership Development. Rob is a self-proclaimed wordsmith. My opinion is that you will never meet another Rob Parker. His gift and knack to find the perfect word that will rightly explain and give proper context to what's being said is unlike anything I've ever seen. Over time, Rob helped me to see, through patience and kindness, that words and meanings are significant and important. Here in Philemon 4, Paul is making a shift in his letter from greeting to his prayer for Philemon and his family. He says, "I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers..."

In Paul's day, a plethora of gods were being worshiped, and when you prayed, you had to make sure and give all of them an honorable mention lest they become angry and punish you. But here, Paul does the complete opposite. He opens up his prayer by speaking to just one God, and calls that God, "My God." This is a wordsmith moment from Paul. He's saying, "I'm not just a believer, but a follower of God. And it's not many gods, or several gods that I'm following, but One, the true and living God." He's in relationship with the God of the Bible, the God of human history. And something else that Paul does here is give thanks as he does in most all of his prayers. Now remember, he's about 1,700 miles away from Colossae in a Roman prison, writing a letter to help facilitate reconciliation between Philemon and Onesimus; and his opening words are words of thanksgiving. What?

It's common for us to give thanks for the gifts that God's given to us, the blessings, and the opportunities, but that's not what Paul is doing here. Paul's actually giving thanks for the gifts that God has given to someone else, Philemon. Alongside his thanksgiving for Philemon is a continued commitment to pray for him, or "making mention of him always," when he's praying for him. This is important because God's work in us never ends. There is always something else that we need. We don't ever get to a place where we don't need prayer and this is what Paul is letting us know. Philemon is doing great things, and we will see that as we continue in this study. But more than great things, he's still in need of more that God would give to him.

Listen, when it's all said and done in this age, nobody will say they prayed too much, read their bible too much, or fellowshiped with the people of God too much. Paul was avid in his prayer life, his commitment to the scriptures, reaching those that were far from Christ, and giving thanks for those that he was laboring with and among. This is an example to us of what our life should look like.

What does your life of thanksgiving look like? Do you spend most of your time frustrated at what should be happening, or rejoicing at what is happening? Sure the devil has the ability to disrupt our lives, but greater than the devil is God who's overseeing all things, including hardships, pain, and difficulty. Take a second, third, or fourth look at your life, those that God's has placed around you, and the many things He's giving to you, and around you. My belief is that thanksgiving can burst forth, even if you're in a hard place.

God's Divine Order

Day 2 / Philemon 5

Week 3

My wife Jennifer and I can go around and around talking about a variety of things and the “right” way to do them. Of course, the “right” way is the way that I do it, and any other way is the “wrong” way. Well as you can imagine, this philosophy has not won friends and influenced others. The truth is, my way is most of the time, simply that: my way. There are lots of ways to do things, and sometimes there is a right way, but most of the time it’s just “a” way, and even an efficient way.

But when it comes to God, He has established a divine order, or a “right” way, for some things to operate in. I’m not talking about how you can apply something, because application can widely vary. Here in **Philemon 5**, Paul is giving us God’s divine or right order. Through Paul, the Holy Spirit says, “...hearing of your love and faith which you have towards the Lord Jesus and towards all the saints...” Did you catch it? Did you see the order in which Paul mentions the Lord Jesus and then the saints? Paul rightly presents that Philemon’s love is first towards the Lord Jesus and then towards the saints. This is God’s divine, or right, order.

In **Matthew 22:37-39** Jesus says, “...you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all our soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: you shall love your neighbor as yourself.” It’s here, from Jesus Himself, Who is simply quoting **Deuteronomy 6** that we see the order that God set in motion in the Old Testament carries it’s way into the New Testament. The truth is, without God’s love prioritized in first place, we simply can’t walk out the second commandment, which is God’s call to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. The second commandment is something that takes God’s power and grace for us to be able to walk it out. This might be the reason why we don’t love others very well, because we aren’t loving ourselves in the grace of God.

This is the basis of Paul’s thanksgiving from the previous verse. He’s celebrating that Philemon’s love for God is evident and it’s being expressed in an active way through loving the saints. Others are testifying of Philemon’s love and their Church in Colossae. This was also true of the Thessalonica believers as Paul says in **1st Thessalonians 1:8-9**, “For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything.” This had to be of great encouragement to Paul, having abored and taught these very things, now to see his disciples walking in them.

The last thing that Paul makes note of here is that Philemon’s faith is something active and happening in the present, not in the past. This is why Paul says, “...which you have...” Having a faith that’s alive today, not just yesterday, takes diligence, faithfulness, and persistence. It’s common for us to live on yesterday’s experience, but that doesn’t get us through the things that we face today. Yesterday’s faith takes us through yesterday, and today’s faith takes us through today. According to God, if our love for Him and others isn’t growing and active, then it’s fading. Love doesn’t know a static place. It’s either moving forward or going backwards.

In light of Paul’s words and thanksgiving, when you look at your life, do you see these same qualities alive in your heart like they were in Philemon’s? Is your love first being directed towards God or others? I have mixed those up before and it ended in great hardship, pain, and distance from God. I thought I was just too busy with ministry, but the truth was, I miss prioritized God’s commandments putting the second one in first place and the first one in second place. It’s easy to do, especially if you have a heart for people. I challenge you to see where your priorities lay? Are they directed towards God first and foremost? If not, what things needed to be moved into second place so that the first things can be first?

Sharing Is Caring... In Theory

Day 3 / Philemon 6a

Week 3

Growing up, it was drilled into me that I had to share. I had to share with my dad, with my mom, with my sister, and with every friend that came to my house. As a kid, sharing worked out really well when we were visiting other people's houses because they would have to share with me. But the toughest part was when people came to our house and I had to share with them. It was always a mystery to me why MY toys somehow became someone else's toys when they came to our house. Something that I hadn't played with for years suddenly became the object of my desire when someone else was playing with it. Funny how that works. Well, unfortunately, for me, as an adult, not much has changed. Recently our family was at this restaurant in Kansas City, MO known for its fried chicken. They serve homestyle, which means they bring one bowl of mashed potatoes, biscuits, beans and so on, and you just dish it out to each other. It's a place created for sharing. YAY, my favorite.

Well here's the problem with our evening at dinner. I ordered a chicken-fried chicken. When my food came, everyone at the table somehow thought this "Homestyle" dinner setting continued onto my plate. Silly people. That was for ME, not them. Well, as you can assume, this night didn't end well and is still a sore spot for my generous wife. She has this sharing thing down much better than me.

You as well as I might be thinking "What does fried Chicken, sharing and **Philemon verse 6a** have anything to do with each other?" Well, more than you'd think. It's here that Paul says, "...that the sharing of your faith may become effective..." This word sharing that Paul uses is the Greek word Koinonia and it means "sharing, mutual partners, partnership, and participation." The idea is like sharing a kitchen with another person, or sharing a house, a living space, or somewhere that you wouldn't be allowed to remain independent, but would have to become dependent upon others in the same area. Paul is being very intentional in the words he's using and how he's saying it. Paul is getting at true Kingdom culture, and he's not ashamed of leading to that end.

You are now aware of the drama. This letter to Philemon is being hand delivered to him by Philemon's runaway and guilty slave Onesimus. Philemon was won to the Lord by Paul and so was Onesimus. Through these opening verses, Paul has been setting the stage for a massive opportunity of reconciliation between two brothers in Christ. If this goes off successfully, which I believe it did, it will set a significant foundation for how God's family was to resolve conflict moving forward. This is why Paul chooses this specific word, "Koinonia." Paul is praying that the faith Philemon is walking in is a faith that will allow for Paul to speak into his life asking him to do something that's hard in the flesh, but easy in the spirit: forgive, receive, and reconcile the fractured relationship between him and Onesimus.

Paul is talking about a faith that's not living on its own, but being shared between the family of God, a faith that allows others who are of the household of faith to speak into it. This is what Paul means by sharing, the Koinonia of Philemon's faith. Paul is going to ask Philemon to do something that's hard. And Philemon has legal right to punish Onesimus, but Paul is going to ask him not to. And not just not punish, but to receive him into his life, his family, and into his house Church; he's a brother now.

The question for you that this brings up, is who is able to speak into your life in various areas, both small and great? Who points out things? Who challenges you? And these people are present in your life, are you offended when they do or do you listen, and consider what they say? Is there someone who could appeal to you not to punish someone, simply because they appealed in love for you to stop and reconsider? From the scriptures, we see that this is what God has called us into. A life of partnership, shared faith, and mutual journeys.

Both/And, Not Either/Or

Day 4 / Philemon 6b

Week 3

Within God's family, there is a tension at times between experience and education. There are some groups of Christians that see education as the enemy of experience and vice versa. I have personally been around both groups and at times I also have even been in one or the other. The first part of my life in Christ, I was predominantly among a group that valued experience over education. Then that flipped as I got turned on to really educated Bible teachers from a circle that values education over experience. Now when I say education, I'm not just talking about a degree. I'm talking about the pursuit of the knowledge of God through commentaries, grounded Bible teachers, and stout theological conversation that's rooted in orthodoxy.

But through this process of maturity in Christ, I have come to realize that it's both experience in Christ and education that brings forth maturity in the life of a believer. Jesus is at work in both the head and the heart every Jesus follower. We want to build Churches, ministries, and people that are redefining theological education through worship and intercession. This means we take what we are learning through great Bible teachers into the place of prayer, that that our information becomes experiential knowledge of the risen and living Christ.

This combination of both experience and education through Jesus is what Paul is challenging Philemon's life and ministry with. Paul says in **Philemon 6b**, "...by the acknowledgement of every good thing which is in you, in Christ Jesus." The word that's used for acknowledgment is the Greek word EPIGNOSIS and it speaks of both experiential and intellectual knowledge. Paul's challenge to Philemon is that he would take this experiential knowledge and walk it out in this challenging situation with his runaway slave, who is now his brother in Christ. What Paul is talking to Philemon about is what God would also talk to us about. Jesus wants us to take what we are learning into the place of prayer and bible study so that we experience Him, not just learn about Him. Then as we experience Him, that we would then walk it out in our everyday life.

Philemon knows God; he's experienced His goodness in his own life through salvation, and now Paul is making intercession for him and asking that he would walk out what he has learned and experienced in Christ. The rubber must meet the road, so-to-speak. This might sound hard, or difficult, and in some degree, it is. And this is why Paul says, "...of every good thing which is in you, in Christ Jesus." Paul is reminding Philemon that he can't do this on his own, but Christ lives in him and that's all he needs. Philemon doesn't need a fire tunnel or altar call in order to walk this out. He simply needs to look inward to the Holy Spirit who resides in him and has given him everything that's needed to walk out God's call and invitation of reconciliation that's coming through Paul.

When it comes to your life have you found yourself in one camp or the other, valuing one and despising the other? It's easy to do, as I have been there myself. But what I know for sure is that God is working in your life to awaken you, not to one side or the other, but to both. You can have your cake and eat it too. My encouragement to you is to take steps today to take what you have learned cognitively and convey it to your heart so that it's not only head knowledge, but also heart knowledge. This can be done by simply taking what you have learned into prayer, conversation with the Godhead. Make a commitment to grow into a mature person, becoming all that God destined you to be.

As parents of two children and one on the way, Jennifer and I have both moments of sheer frustration, anger, and disappointment as well as joy, pride, and deep appreciation. Sometimes these emotions happen within the span of about 5 minutes--all of them. But among these emotions, there isn't much greater joy that comes than when we overhear them talking to dolls, toy soldiers, or their friends, sharing words and information that Jennifer and I have spoken to them. Now, in the moment that we have spoken the things they're now repeating, they are often distracted, fidgeting, and giving off body language that says they aren't listening, even though they are.

Recently, our daughter (4) was playing with her dolls and Jennifer and I overheard her say, "now look at me in the eyes, I'm trying to tell you something and you need to listen to me." We nearly fell over laughing at how cute this was, but we were also deeply touched that things we have said to her are coming out of her own mouth. This is the joy of discipleship. As you share the life of Christ, and principles of life with others, they take them into their own lives and begin walking out the wisdom you have shared with them.

Here in **Philemon 7a** Paul is doing just that. He's celebrating the way that Philemon has lived his life and worked into his heart the Holy Spirit's discipleship and Paul's teaching. Paul says here, "For we have great joy and consolation in your love..." Paul starts out by saying, "For." This is the reason for Paul's joy. Paul has joy and thanksgiving in Philemon, for this reason--he's acted on love. Paul makes the point here as well to say, "we," meaning it's not an "I" or a "you," but a "we". Remember, Paul's in a Roman prison, writing this letter, and he will eventually die there as well. And in the midst of his suffering and difficulty, he's still able to celebrate the lives of others and speak in inclusive, not exclusive, terms.

We've all been around those people who in their difficulty can't see anybody else in the room except themselves. Not Paul. Paul is outward thinking because this is what true apostolic leadership looks like. Think of it in terms of parenting. Our kids don't know the ins and outs of life in a parent's world, and this is how it's supposed to be. One of the primary things that Paul celebrates here, as well as many of his other epistles, is love. Paul's continual prayer for the Churches he's serving is that they would grow in love, experience God's love, that they would love one another, and that their love would go beyond the gathering and the family to those who are outside God's family.

The love inside of Philemon and that's at work within the house of Church he's leading is an indicator that they have taken their spiritual father's words to heart and are walking in them. They are being formed into the image of Christ, becoming mature disciples. Paul as a father is filled with joy that his children are taking his words to heart and putting them into their lives.

Are you able to see beyond yourself and your personal challenges to those that God has set you among? In your conversation with others, do you listen or mainly talk about yourself? God's design for you is that you would become an outward focused person. I like to say that leaders are self-aware, but not self-absorbed. I challenge you to be mindful of how much you talk about yourself, and that you would ask the Holy Spirit for help to listen to others, and celebrate them, far more than you celebrate yourself. Move from an "I" thought process to a "we", or "them" thought process.

What's Love Got To Do With It

Day 6 / Philemon 7b

Week 3

Love in our culture is a funny, often overplayed word. We love our iPhone's, our cars, our houses, and even our hamburgers. Now, words sometimes are simply that--words. But in some cases, words are important, and have specific meanings. Today, living in the Seattle-metro there are many people who talk about love and care about this word. And though I have deep appreciation for their passion to love others and bring equality, this cultural definition of love is often at odds with Jesus' definition of love. The type of love that Jesus introduces speaks of obedience, action, wholeheartedness, and steadfast devotion to Him even when it includes unpopular truths and principles. Our culture on the other hand often sees love as tolerance, open-mindedness, and acceptance of every religious thought and ideology. It's like a cloud, something that changes from day to day, as opposed to something grounded, concrete, and solid.

But in order for us to get to the root of love's definition we have to look to the Creator and what He intended it to mean. Here in **Philemon 7b** it would be easy to miss what Paul is getting at. He continues his thought from our previous writing by saying, "...because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you brother." Remember, Paul has opened this letter by giving an introduction, thanking God, and now praying for Philemon and his house Church. And what Paul zeroes in on here through this verse is the fact that they have put Christ's love to work in the lives of those they are leading and winning to Christ. In the previous part of this verse, Paul is saying, "Guys, we have so much consolation and joy in the love of Christ in you, because you have done something with it. You have actually put it to work and allowed it to impact the lives of others. Well done." Now of course that's Patrick 3:16 right there, but that seems to be what he is saying.

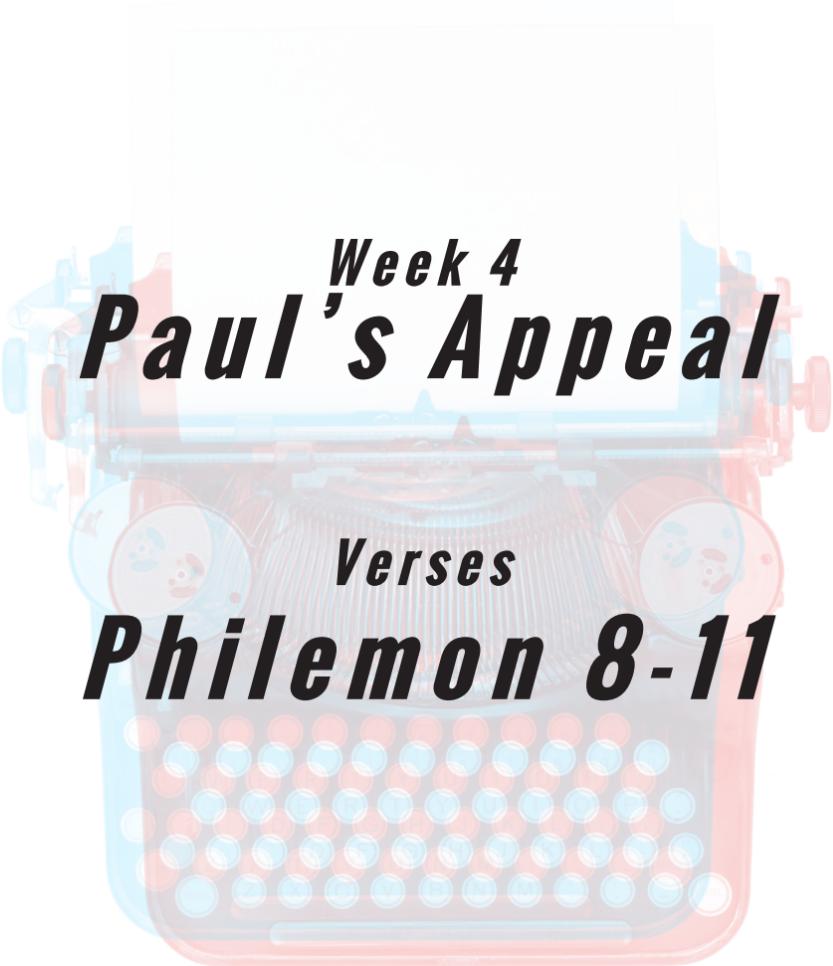
This love that Paul is celebrating in the life of Philemon isn't an abstract love, it's not vanishing and changing with culture, and life in this age. No, quite opposite. It's a love that's been demonstrated, and walked out among the people that they are leading. They have done what Christ commanded them to do: love others in the way that Christ has loved you. A love without consolation, without action, without steadfastness towards God and others is something different then what Jesus demonstrated and talked out. The greatest sign of Jesus' love is the fact that He gave up His life on behalf of others. This was love. It was love that drove Him to Calvary. It was love that caused Him to take on flesh, live life like us, and die in our place. Love was bleeding, broken, rejected, and crucified.

Paul makes sure to tell Philemon that their consolation in his love is because they have refreshed others. This idea of refreshing others is all about putting people at rest. It speaks of a soldier in battle, bullets flying; however because they've been trained for this, they are at rest. It also speaks of compensation, giving pleasure to others, and making people comfortable. And although these things have an earthly connection to them, I think what Paul is getting at is the same rest that Jesus gives to those who are weary of life in this age.

This is the very reason why Paul knew he could send Onesimus back to Philemon--because Philemon has demonstrated Christ's love in the past. This love was something shown to Christ and others and it gave Paul confidence that he would refresh the heart of Onesimus like he has done already for others.

When it comes to Christ's love, do you see yourself in agreement with Jesus or with culture? Are there areas in your life where you think you love others more than Jesus does? This is common today in our culture of tolerance. The danger is that we can end up on the other side of God's love. Jesus is patient, but never tolerant. He will never be approving of sin. He will never wink at it and dismiss it. He commands that men repent of their sins and obey Him if they want to be a Christ follower. Are there areas in our life

where Christ's love hasn't taken on action towards Him and others? If so, what are they? Mention them to Him in repentance and ask for His forgiveness. He's kind, benevolent and more willing to forgive than we are to repent. And lastly, ask Him for help to demonstrate His love to those that He's set you among. The Holy Spirit can help us in our weakness.



Week 4
Paul's Appeal

Verses
Philemon 8-11

Servant Leadership Is Where It's At

Day 1 / Philemon 8a

Week 4

My former Pastor would often say to our congregation, “When you see a (therefore) in the Bible, you have to ask what is therefore, there for?” It seems like a silly question to ask and a little redundant. But over time it has made a lot more sense to me. I think the primary reason we have to ask why it's there is because it's a transitory word. That word is leading us away from one thing and directing us into another thing. It's often letting us know that what was said prior to it, is going to shed more light on what comes after it. And this is the case here in **Philemon 8a**.

Paul begins verse 8a by saying, “Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ...” Thus far, Paul has greeted Philemon, his family, and the house church. He then went into thanksgiving for them and said a prayer. And now he's moving away from those three things and moving into the appeal which makes up the largest portion of this letter. This appeal is about 15 verses of 25 in total, again making it the largest portion of Paul's letter to Philemon. What Paul has said in the previous 7 verses was setting the stage for what he's about to say. He's changing the letter from generalities to specifics as he's going to request that Philemon do something on his behalf.

Paul has an apostolic authority that God has given him over many churches and people, including both Philemon and the Church that he's leading. Paul is the covering, the person in authority who is giving direct oversight to the ministry that's happening in Colossae. And there's a constant theme in how Paul wields authority in his life. It's something called “servant leadership.” As I mentioned in the opening verses of this book, this letter to Philemon is the only letter written by Paul that he doesn't assert this apostolic authority. His strong commitment to servant leadership is the reason why he doesn't present himself as, “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.” He simply presents himself to Philemon and his house Church as, “Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus.”

The reason that he's doing this is because he doesn't want this appeal to Philemon to come across as someone trying to force him into doing something that God's not asking him to do. In so many words, Paul is saying, *“Philemon, listen, I have authority that's been given to me by God, but I don't want to use it in this situation. I don't want to abuse this authority, and I don't want you to receive Onesimus simply because I asked you to. I want you to receive him back because it's the right thing to do. If you haven't truly forgiven him from the depth of your heart, then what does it matter if he comes back. He has to be received by you and the church in your house.”*

Paul makes it clear to that he could be not just bold, but very bold. And Paul's boldness isn't even within himself, it's through Christ. He could just cut to the chase and tell Philemon what he ought to do, but that's not what Paul wants to do. Paul is working through this situation and conflict in such a way that it honors the position that God has placed Philemon in. The Greek idea happening around this situation is that of a husband and wife. God has placed Philemon as the head of the home and Church, and even if Paul is the one who lead Philemon to the Lord, Paul still respect's the position that Philemon is in.

When it comes to your life how do you handle the authority that God has given to you? Do you recognize it? Maybe it's over office employees, students, other employees, your own children, or a staff of people. Whatever it is, we all have a matrix of authority that God has given us. How we use it really matters to Jesus. It's essential that we develop a servant's heart regarding the authority that's been entrusted to us. Take time to think about the way you speak to others. Do you help them, or hurt them? Do you instruct them, or do you listen? Do you lead with your interests only, or do you consider others in your decisions? Ask the Holy Spirit what he thinks about your leadership style with others.

Family, Fights, and Forgiveness

Day 2 / Philemon 8b

Week 4

Growing up in Eugene, OR, I had some really good friends down the street that were brothers. Todd was younger than Andy, but both of them were pretty strong. Todd was a wrestler and their dad was a brick mason. He was a very talented craftsman and unusually strong dad. But it wasn't uncommon to come over to their house and find Todd and Andy in an all-out fight in the living room. When I say all out fight, I mean like MMA meets WWF happening right in front of you. Bare knuckle fists, broken tables, black eyes, and occasionally, blood. It was so intense. Growing up with a sister, we had our moments, but never a physical altercation. Not so with these guys. It was all out war.

But in the midst of this chaos, they still had a deep sense of family and connectedness towards one another. I remember one day when this backyard (living room) cage fight was happening that the doorbell rang. Andy and Todd stopped fighting long enough to open the door only find another neighbor kid who was pretty upset at Andy. As soon as he laid into Andy, here comes Todd nearly over the top of Andy ready to fight and defend his brother. It was the weirdest and most beautiful thing, weird because it seemed like 7 seconds prior they were arch enemies ready to pulverize each other's heads, but beautiful because of the family bond that held them together even in the midst of what seemed like utter hatred.

This is how God has wired us! We are created to love one another, even though we have strong feelings, frustration, and even anger at times towards our brothers and sisters. He most certainly doesn't want us to fight, but I hope you get the point. The conflict and feelings we have usually aren't negative, it's how we handle those feelings that make it positive or negative. Here in **Philemon 8b** Paul continues his thoughts by saying, "...to command you what is fitting." The point that I'm linking together is the fact that Paul is writing this letter from a Roman prison. In this prison cell Paul has no authority over what happens there. But regarding Philemon and this house Church, he has all of Heaven's authority to command, exhort, lead, and challenge the people so that they might do the will of God.

Even in Paul's place of trial and lack of authority, he still has authority in this Church to help solve a dispute between two brothers whose salvations Paul was at the center of. I mean really, take a minute to think about Paul's humility. Canonized eternally into the word God is a letter from the great New Testament missionary/apostle writing from a prison cell. There is such weakness in his life, but it's in this place of weakness that God's power was actually upon Paul. This is why you and I should be very careful when we make assumptions about people's lives. We think we might be able to make an accurate assessment, but that's the problem: we assume. When was the last time that you thought a prisoner would turn the world upside-down and be counted among authors of the best-selling book of all time in world history?

Many religions and ideologies have forceful beliefs, and controlling practices, but not so with Christianity. Sure, God has commands and things that He asks us to follow, and some things are harder than others to hear, but He doesn't force us to do it. And when we look at Paul's life it would be easy to celebrate him, but in reality, it's God's work of grace through Paul's life that excites our hearts. Paul doesn't want a medal, or to be set on a pedestal, he is simply doing for others what God has done for him. And this is where we also want to be. Paul is saying, "I could command you what is fitting, but that's not what I'm going to do. Though I don't have authority over my life in prison, I have authority in your life, but I'm not going to use it."

How do you handle conflict within the family of God? Are you able to put aside your differences to bring resolution and see restoration? Do you walk away from relationships without them being mended? I

understand that there's pain and real terrible feelings, but God's Spirit is able to help us walk through whatever might come up. Instead of demanding people to reconcile, or trying to command people to do this or that, try laying aside your rights and authority, and simply talking to them as a beloved brother or sister in Christ. Don't push them away, pull them close and see what God does.

Love - Not Safe, But Good

Day 3 / Philemon 9a

Week 4

If you've ever read the book or seen the Chronicles of Narnia movie, "The Lion Witch and the Wardrobe" you know about this memorable moment with Lucy and Mr. Beaver. They're seeing a different side to Aslan the Lion, and they're a little freaked out. Lucy says to Mr. Beaver, "Is he safe?" Mr. Beaver replies to Lucy and says, "Safe? Course he's not safe, but he's good. He's the King I tell you." Such an excellent quote. When it comes to love, this is the perfect example of its wild nature.

I don't think that most people spend time thinking about love and the heat of its flame. Love is a wildfire that has the potential to totally consume those that possess it. And much like Mr. Beaver said, love isn't safe; It's a wild ride into the great unknown. When you depart on love's train, there is no telling where it will end up. Every ride on the train of love is different, and the heights and depths of its travel are varied for every passenger. The scenic views of open fields and tall mountains are always mixed with high, narrow bridges and dark ominous tunnels. It's a trip totally worth taking, but don't be mistaken or surprised, it's an adventure for every passenger.

Paul is in the midst of this wild ride of love himself as he's gracefully navigating this difficult relationship between Philemon and Onesimus. Paul says here in **Philemon 9a**, "...yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you..." This isn't the first time in Philemon that Paul has spoken of love. In fact, he's mentioned it twice back in Philemon verse 5 and 7. The point of Paul mentioning Philemon's love is to remind him that the love he has been driven by in the past is the same love that he will need in the future. God's love isn't for yesterday, it's for today. A love that only works yesterday is a love that won't help us today. We need it now, for today. My former pastor once said that, "Love knows no static place. It's either increasing or decreasing, but there's not static spot in love."

This word "appeal" also appears twice in this letter. It's going to surface again in just a couple verses as Paul makes clear his request of Philemon. It's the same word that Paul uses in the letter to the Romans, in **Romans 12:1** when he says, "I beseech you, by the mercies of God..." It's not quite "ugly crying" but it's close. It means "To beg, to earnestly ask, or to clearly and intently make your request known." It's important to read those emotions into Paul's request here. He's not just casually asking something, he's straight up appealing to Philemon. And his appeal isn't based in his apostolic authority, or his position among the Churches, or even in Philemon's life, but simply out of love, for love's sake.

If you remember Paul's famous love chapter from **1st Corinthians 13** he has much to say about the nature of love. He says in **1st Corinthian's 13:4-8**, "Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does parade itself, is not puffed up, does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hope's all things, endures all things. Love never fails..." Whoa! That's a mouthful to say, in the least. This letter to the Corinthians was written prior to this letter to Philemon, which means this is Paul's M.O. Paul has lived this way, and he's here celebrating it in the life of Philemon, but more importantly, he's calling Philemon today, not yesterday, to act upon this kind of love that, "...does not seek its own..."

I like to say here that Paul is putting his theology into practice, which is actually what all of us are called to do. Paul is standing in the gap for another man in the same way that Christ stood in the gap for him. Paul has experienced God's love for him when he was far off, when he was a runaway, when he was separated from Christ because of his actions and now he's serving Onesimus in the same way that Christ has served him.

For the sake of love, what needs to change in your life so that you, like Paul risk things for others? When was the last time that you begged on someone else's behalf to seek reconciliation and restoration? Love should cause us to raise our voices for others, and work to stand in between fractured things praying, pleading, and believing they will be put back together. Is there a broken relationship around you that needs to be mended? Can you help facilitate that? Or is there something in your life that's happened where you need to let forgiveness towards others flow? Talk to the Holy Spirit, and whatever tells you to do, do it! But don't just ask Him once, aks Him till he answers.

Grey Hair, But Not Outta The Game

Day 4 / Philemon 9b

Week 4

Aging is quite the process. And even though I'm not officially qualified to speak much about it, I do have some experience on the subject because after all, I am 37. Also, I've had grey hair for a while now and that virtually makes me a sage--since the age of about 20. I used to say I don't mind having grey hair because at least I haven't lost my hair. But I can't say that anymore because there are a few spots where it's disappearing. But here's where I've experienced myself aging; even if it seems small, it's still happening: concerts, and large stadium sporting events. Man alive, they are way too loud. I literally think to myself, "How can I get out of here?" I know, I'm going to end up being that person who's got cotton stuffed into my ears looking all soured out!

Another area I see aging apparent is in helping people move. This one's the biggest mystery to me personally. Here's what happens. I spend a morning helping a friend take several trips with the moving truck, which means we pack it up from the old place and pack it into the new place. Though I'm tired, and eat some pizza (official sponsor of moving day), I don't feel totally wiped out, and shot. But the following morning I wake up and it takes me about 4 hours to realize that I'm sore from helping someone move. For the first 3.5 hours, in my mind I figured I slept funny, or I need a new bed. Then I'm like, "OH WOW! I'm sore from helping Mike move." That just doesn't seem possible to me. But I guess I'm not 20 anymore.

Well it seems that Paul knows a little something about aging as well. Here in **Philemon 9b** he continues his appeal by saying, "...being such a one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ..." Because I have read a few commentaries on Philemon prior to creating this work, it's clear that many people assume that Paul was speaking metaphorically here about being a slave of Christ. But I don't think this is the case by any means. When you look at the whole of this letter, as well as Colossians which is a companion book to Philemon, we get a clear picture that he was in a literal prison. Now, I fully understand how they came to this conclusion because there are times when Paul speaks of himself as a prisoner of Christ in the sense of being owned by Christ, but this isn't one of them.

Between the two letters this is what Paul has to say about being in a physical, literal prison, "Paul a prisoner of Christ Jesus...also a prisoner of Christ Jesus...whom I have begotten while in my chains...he might minister to me in my chains...Epaphras, my fellow prisoner...remember my chains..." (**Philemon 1,9,10,13,23; Colossians 4:18**). The word for prison that Paul uses is the word "fetter," and it speaks of literally being bound, not just bound to Christ, which he was, but literally bound in prison. Paul is in a difficult place. Now, he was given a measure of freedom while in this Roman prison, but it wasn't freedom to do what he wanted to do, and go where he wanted to go.

But his idea of being aged isn't quite what we might think. Paul's age at the time of this letter is suspected to be early 50's. So it's not like he's ancient or an antique yet. So what is he saying? He's actually appealing to his wisdom, statesmanship, and the fact that he's an ambassador. He's telling Philemon, "Would you please listen to me, I'm an elder statesman for God's family, I'm a commissioned representative of Jesus by God's will. I'm not dropping my title on you, and not trying to convince you, but I am letting you know, I have a heart for Jesus and His family, and God Himself has placed me here." Paul is using such tender words, without violating his commitment to not push or persuade Philemon to do anything he doesn't want to do, or doesn't see fit to do.

And lastly, it seems with the use of the word, "now" Paul is letting Philemon know that he's just recently been placed in prison. As a Roman citizen, it was Paul's goal and heart's desire for many years to make it back to Rome with the Gospel message to testify to the powers that be that there was a new King. Upon

his arrival he was imprisoned and this is where he would spend his final years before offering up his head to King Jesus.

Based on Paul's love for Jesus and God's people, what does your own heart look like? How do you use the influence that God's given to you? Do you push others, try to convince others, or do you listen, wait patiently, and lead them down a path that honors their freewill? This is the will of God in my opinion, helping to lead people down a path of honor and dignity, while still using our influence that Jesus has given to us. Take time and talk to the Holy Spirit about how you can serve others that your reasonable for. He has much to say, if you will simply ask Him about it.

Slaves Becoming Sons

Day 5 / Philemon 10

Week 4

Let's take a moment and place ourselves in Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus's shoes. In case you forgot, Paul has lead Philemon into faith in Christ. Onesimus is Philemon's former slave who has runaway from Colosse and somehow met Paul in a Roman prison. While there in the prison, Onesimus is born again and becomes a dear friend and helper to Paul. But over time, Paul realizes that he needs to send Onesimus back to Philemon with hopes of seeing their relationship restored, because Onesimus is now a Christ follower, just like Paul and Philemon, making him their family member.

This is what you call a complex, and potentially volatile situation. There is lots of room for this whole thing to go really well, or to totally blow up and backfire. If there's one thing I know, it's that people under stress and in pain do strange things even when you know them, and think they won't. But it wouldn't be fair not to mention the fact that people sometimes don't act in the way you expect, and follow God, and work through the pressure in an honorable way. This is why it's volatile, because you just don't know.

It's here in the storyline of this letter that it takes a pretty dramatic shift. It's important to remember Philemon, according to Colossians 4:7-9, is receiving the letter written to him by Paul, from the hands of Onesimus. Maybe Onesimus is standing in front of Philemon, having just showed up back on his property, with two letters from Philemon's spiritual father. You can cut the tension with a knife!

Paul says in Philemon 10, "I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains..." Oh snap, Paul done did it! Yep, Paul just dropped the bombshell on Philemon and in all reality, the single purpose for this entire 25 verse letter. Paul is inserting a person who we can only assume has caused considerable pain for Philemon and his entire household, maybe the whole congregation that's being led out of his house as well. And now, he's standing in front of him, having returned as the born-again son of his spiritual father, and a member of God's family. Onesimus left a runaway slave, but now has returned as a son of God.

Onesimus was a Phrygian slave. Varro, a Roman author from around the 1st century classified slaves as implements, wagons, dumb oxen that were good for labor only. It wasn't uncommon for a Roman slave to have their tongue cut out. Even though there were laws against killing plough oxen, often there were no consequences for killing a slave. These Phrygian slaves were considered to be all brawn and no brains. But Paul's presentation of Onesimus is very different than how culture had classified him. Paul knows that this is going to hard on Philemon's flesh, and that's why he leads with the fact that he's now Paul's son, whom he has begotten in the faith.

But what Paul did shouldn't be considered heroic or noble. In God's kingdom it's simply the right thing to do. This is what true fathers do--they put themselves out on the line for the sake of those they're leading. And that's it. This is what Christ has done for us, and if we want true theology, then it has to inform our practice just like it did Paul's. You can't read about Paul's life and walk away with the thought that he was all head and no heart. Paul took what he experienced in Christ and walked it out through the way that he lived, and this is our pattern moving forward.

What would you do if you were in Paul's shoes? Would you keep Onesimus or send him back so that the relationship gets reconciled? Or would you keep him with you and allow him to continue serving you? Do you think that reconciliation in God's family is important enough to step out in faith and help make it happen? In what ways can you personally contribute to having health in the body of Christ?

When it came to naming our kids ,Jennifer and I were pretty perplexed. For the 9 months that Jennifer was pregnant with Phinneas, we had no name, and really no clue what his name would be. We had a few back-ups because we were feeling that God might not speak to us about him. So, we had a few in our back pocket that we liked, but didn't feel "inspired" by the Holy Spirit about. About 2 days before Jen went into labor, we were sitting around in the living room and she was, for like the 10 millionth time, reading through those dreaded name books. I was reading the paper when she said, "What do you think of Phinehas?" I didn't look up or anything. I just replied, "What does it mean, and where's it derived from?" She said, "From Exodus, and it means mouth of brass." Now I perked up.

The reason why is nearly one year ago in May 2010 I was sitting in my office reading through Exodus and I had a powerful moment with God. His presence filled my office and I started crying nearly uncontrollably. The Lord spoke to me out of nowhere and said, "I'm going to give you a son, and you're going to hand him the priesthood (ministry)." Now this leveled me cause Jennifer and I at this time hadn't talked about kids. So now, just two days before he would be born she comes across this name. I ask her, "Where at in Exodus?" She said, "Exodus 6," and I said, "Jen, that's the very passage that God spoke to me out of." Well, nonetheless we changed the spelling from Phinehas to Phinneas and the rest is history. Though we were a little worried about what God was saying over our son, God Himself wasn't worried and knew that He had the perfect name to describe the destiny of this young man.

Names are important. Names in the Bible and even today, are so significant. And though you wouldn't think about Paul using humor in his writings, he actually uses some pretty amazing comedic tactics in mentioning Philemon's runaway slave. Here in Philemon 11 Paul says, "...Onesimus...who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me." Onesimus's name actually means useless. As a Phrygian slave, they had a reputation as being unreliable and unfaithful. But Paul is sending back a completely different person to Philemon. That's why Paul says, "... who was ONCE unprofitable to you, but NOW is profitable to you and to me." The work of salvation in the life of Onesimus is seen in the ONCE (past) and the NOW (present). Just as Paul tells us in 2nd Corinthians 5:17, "... If anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation, old things have passed away and behold, all things have become new." He was once someone negative but is now someone positive. He's changed.

Because of the translation of our modern Bibles we miss out on the emphasis in language that Paul is using. He's not saying that's he's just useful, but that he's very useful. Paul is saying, "Philemon, believe you me, this man that came to me is a totally new man that I'm sending back to you. I know that at one time he wasn't very useful, but take my word for him, he's amazing. He's been so useful to me and I trust that he will be the same for you, maybe even more than for me."

Martin Luther rightly said that we are all Onesimus. Outside of Christ we too were runaway slaves, created to serve God, but steeped in sin and running as far away from Him as we could get. But God in His mercy took people who were once useless to Him and made us useful in His kingdom. This is about God and His glory, not ours. This is about God's mercy, God's kindness, and God's forgiveness. God is the hero of this story and every other story.

Do you know what your name means? Have you ever looked it up? Is there a verse that goes along with your name? Not all names have a corresponding verse, but many do. Have you ever asked Jesus about your name? Have you ever taken time to ask Jesus how He feels about you and what He thinks about when He looks at you? I encourage you to do just that: wait on Him, talk to Him, and ask how He feels

when He looks at you. In the same way that God changed Saul's name to Paul, and Onesimus from useless to useful, God wants to do the same thing through you. Your named has been changed so that you can help others receive God's identity for their lives.



Week 5

The Appeal Continued

Verses

Philemon 12 - 16

There's Gold In Them Hills

Day 1 / Philemon 12a

Week 5

Have you ever been in the middle of something when you got the feeling what you were working on was way bigger than you could have imagined at the beginning? It's like you knew the idea was grand, you just didn't know how grand. The thing I've learned about God is that He's got ideas, and ways of making what you created travel to places you could never get on your own. It's not uncommon to come across people who have read something I wrote, heard a teaching I taught, or were impacted and changed by a service they were in. When you obey God you simply have no idea where He's going to take you, and where you will end up.

Harvard educated and accomplished author Sarah Ruden rightly said regarding Paul and Philemon, "The letter to Philemon may be the most explicit demonstration of how, more than anyone else, Paul created the Western individual human being, unconditionally precious to God and therefore entitled to the consideration of other human beings." The reason I recite this quote again is to say, I don't know if this was entirely in Paul's mind when he was writing to Philemon. It's clear from other books and verses that Paul knew he was writing scripture, but to what extent that scripture would be carried throughout the whole of the world, it seems hard to believe he would've conceived that.

Paul, here in verse 12a says to Philemon, "I am sending him back..." What Paul was doing in sending Onesimus back to Philemon and Colossae was bigger than himself. It was bigger than Philemon, Onesimus, their house Church or even their region. These words would be canonized eternally, printed, put into Bibles and eventually made digital, giving the nearly 62.9% of the world who has a phone, these very words in their hands. I mean talk about doing the right thing and God making sure it was remembered forever-- literally, for ever.

We, just like Paul, are called to be obedient in our relationship with Christ as we simply have no clue what God will choose to do with us or what we create in His name. Paul was locked up in prison, serving Jesus, but being faithful to write down the things that God had given him, and today those words, combined with the Holy Spirit, have changed countless other lives.

Paul also knows the power of working through conflict and making sure that resolution takes place, and this is the impetus for him to send Onesimus back. I don't think that Paul's thinking, "Man, if I land this restoration well, and these guys have resolution for their fractured relationship maybe my story, and the part I played will be a memorial for me forever." I think that Paul's saying, "Man, Onesimus, you have been such a blessing to me here in this prison. And what encouragement you've given me. You are much like Philemon and this has greatly helped me. But I can't keep you here, knowing that you haven't worked through your separation with Philemon. I know it's going to be hard to return, and you're having second thoughts about it, but listen, it's the right thing to do. You have to go back. As much as I'd like to keep you, you have to go. This will honor Jesus and His assembly in Colosse."

When it comes to your life, what do your relationships look like? Have all things been settled? Are the things that you can resolve, resolved? Are there things that need to be restored? There are times when it's not possible to restore things because one of the parties is unwilling, and in that case, you have to leave it with God and trust His timing. But make sure that you have done what you can to bring about reconciliation. One person rightly said that, "unforgiveness is like drinking poison, and hoping the other person dies." You have to let it go, and let God enter into the relationship and have His way!

Are You Kidding Me?

Day 2 / Philemon 12b

Week 5

We've all been there. Short notice, massive event or project, and the entire thing gets thrown into your lap. It seems impossible, and totally unrealistic, but something goes off inside us, and we get this surge of energy and think to ourselves, "This very well may be possible." Now I would say that most of the time whatever it is that we've been given gets done, but there are surely times when we just aren't able to complete it. It's remarkable what we as humans are capable of doing under pressure and short timeframes. As a master procrastinator this often comes in handy, but it's a double-edged sword because though it gets done, making it all happen the night before, or the morning of, is no fun, especially when you watch everyone else around you, and they're completed far before the deadline.

When it comes to the reconciliation of Onesimus and Philemon, this is basically what happens. Imagine with me: one day Philemon's out working on the farm, enjoying a cup of coffee with a congregation member when off in the distance he sees a familiar face walking towards him. As he sets his coffee cup down and looks closer he notices it's Onesimus, once his slave and now a runaway fugitive. Like most of us would be, Philemon's trying to make sense of the moment, but struggling. As Onesimus gets closer, he extends a pleasant greeting with his smile, but quickly puts two letters in Philemon's hand. As Philemon looks at the letters, he sees that one is for the Church in Colossae and one for him personally. But the curious thing is that both letters bear the name of his spiritual father, Paul.

As he works through the personal letter written to him, he comes to this part here in Philemon 12b and reads, "...You therefore receive him, that is, my own heart..." To make matters worse, it's not like Philemon is experiencing this letter, in theory, in private. He's got Onesimus standing right in front of him. "Receive him back? As your own heart? Are you kidding me? Do you know what he did to me. Do you know how he left me high and dry? Obviously, you don't, because if you did you wouldn't send him back to me asking me to receive him like everything's all hunky dory." Now, that's not in the Bible. That's just my commentary on what might've been going on in Philemon's heart or mind. It might not have been so, but something like that, in that moment, seems realistic to me.

What Paul is asking Philemon to do is a tall order. I mean not with the help of the Holy Spirit and the power of God, but at first blush, yea, this is tough. Timeframe? Right now! Philemon is confronted in person by someone who has wronged him, and both of their spiritual father's, Paul, is asking them to resolve their differences, to forgive, and to be reconciled to each other in Christ. Paul uses the word, "...my own heart..." That word heart is the word bowels. It speaks of the core within a person, not that hidden six pack core, but the seat of their life--the mind, will and emotions.

The aged apostle is letting Philemon know that Onesimus has become dear to him, and that Philemon should receive him back as if he were Paul himself. What a task, what a project, and such high stakes. If Philemon let him off the hook and forgave him, it would send shockwaves to fellow masters and slaves. But if Philemon punished him, which was totally permissible within the law, he would injure Paul's heart, and quench the work of God inside His assembly as God is building a family of all people. This was serious.

I have been learning that when I'm faced with these moments, I need to take a deep breath, pray silently, and ask the Holy Spirit for help. It's easy to get in the flesh, in a hurry! But taking time to invite God into the situation has helped me to make sure that I respond in a Christ-like way. I want to encourage you, next time you're faced with a situation that could cause you to get frustrated that you take time to pray and invite the Holy Spirit to empower you to respond in a way that would honor God.

Trusting God In The Fog

Day 3 / Philemon 13

Week 5

As a shepherd of God's people, I'm challenged sometimes to care deeply about others, yet watch them make poor choices that not only impact them, but others around them, including their own families. Often people are open and will listen, and in other cases people, like myself at times, are bent on making choices that will bring about negative results in their lives. The hope is always that people will listen to the Godly counsel around them, hear the voice of the Holy Spirit, and respond to God. But this doesn't always happen.

It's easy when you're in the middle of life to forget the larger story that's taking place, a story that God Himself is writing. It's not a quick, 2-chapter book, but a novel, a story filled with too many chapters to count, one of those books that are intimidating because they don't have pictures and they look like a dictionary. These are the types of stories that God writes. In fact, he started writing one some six to ten thousand years ago and it's still being told today. But when pressured, in the midst of darkness it's easy to lose sight of what God is doing. One moment it's bright and sunny, everything seems clear, and all of the sudden, in the very next moment, the fog settles in and you can't see anything. These are the moments when you need people around you that will help you remember what God has said. They will help you remember where God told you to go and what God told you to do!

And it's just like God to put one of the most unlikely people into the life of Paul for this very purpose. In Paul's letter to Philemon, in Philemon 13 he says this, "...Onesimus...whom I wished to keep with me, that on your (Philemon) behalf he might minister to me in my chains for the gospel." Philemon's once runaway slave is now the person who's encouraging and giving strength to Paul in this Roman prison. So much so that Paul says he's ministering to him on Philemon's behalf. Onesimus has become somewhat of a stand in for Philemon. Once useless, but now useful Onesimus. Who'd uh thunk it!

Recently while preaching through a series titled "The Gospel: God's Story, our Message," I had great moments of personal clarity. So much of what I've been taught over the years about the "Gospel" was about ministering to others, feeding the poor, and seeing people saved. These are certainly fruits of the Gospel message, but at the core, they aren't the Gospel. The Gospel is a story, mainly--God's story. It's about God's work in redemptive history and His future plans to fully establish His kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. When we only hear bits and pieces of the this story, we can lose sight of the larger thing that God is doing. And what if Paul was saying to Onesimus, "Speak to me the Gospel story. Tell me that it's not about my suffering, it's not about my imprisonment, it's not about my frailty, but about God's glory and the good of others. Tell me again that it's about Jesus' beauty and His majesty, and that His plan will work perfectly." I think this is what it means as Christians to speak the Gospel into the lives of God's people. It's to move people beyond themselves and put them into God's story, not their own.

When you think about your struggles, family upbringing, employment, transportation, and the place where you live, are you filled with anger about what isn't, or peace that God's using your life and your things for His glory and the good of others? Can you see all things working together for His glory and your good? Maybe you're in a place right now where the fog has settled into your life and it's hard to make sense of what's happening. Be of good courage, though it's foggy to you, it's not foggy to God. His light is far brighter than a fog light; He can see through it perfectly. I encourage you to trust Him, talk to close, trusted friends and have them remind you that you're in God's story, and your life and your things are for His glory and the good of others.

Open Hearts and Open Hands

Day 4 / Philemon 14

Week 5

Years ago, I heard a Pastor of mine whom I greatly respect talk about voluntary love. His comments largely shaped my beliefs regarding how Jesus receives love and what He is and isn't willing to do. What I mean by this is that Jesus won't violate our freewill to force us to love Him. This would be involuntary love. Love that is forced and isn't genuine, isn't voluntary; it's involuntary. And because God so loves the dignity of the human heart choosing whom it will love, He refuses to violate it. Listen, if God is the Creator of all things, including humans, currently 1/8th of His creation has chosen something other than Him. This is painful to God, but He has empowered people to point their love in any direction that they want, whether it's Him or something else.

From my reading of the scriptures and my personal experience, it seems that God reveals Himself to His creation in hopes that our hearts are awakened, and we will put our trust in Him. He doesn't force us to choose Him. He simply gives us the opportunity and it's up to us, empowered or led by His Spirit to say yes or no to Him. And when it comes to leadership within the Church, nothing is different. Leadership and authority within God's family is to look, or mirror how God leads us, which means it's got to be voluntary. Paul understands this and actually models this through his relationship between Philemon and Onesimus.

Here in Philemon 14, Paul says, "But without your consent I wanted to do nothing, that your good deed might not be by compulsion, as it were, but voluntary." There's a lot here, so let's take it part by part and unpack it. According to Roman law, Paul could be punished for keeping Onesimus with him because he was a fugitive. Under Roman law fugitives were only safe or allowed to be harbored until their situation was resolved, either by returning and working off what was owed, or paying the full price of their exit to the owner. And it may be that it was Onesimus's desire to return after he was born again because of the Spirit's conviction about his fractured relationship.

But Paul is clear, Onesimus has become a great comrade and friend in his prison cell. And Paul doesn't want to let him go, but also realizes that it's the right thing to do. Some have assumed that this word consent can also be translated as opinion. This would mean that Paul wants to hear from Philemon, but is still willing to do what he wants to do, and that's the opposite of what's happening. Paul is saying, "Listen, I wanted to keep this guy with me, but that's not right for me to do. Legally he belongs to you and I want to obey the law. And beyond that, he's now a brother in Christ and the two of you have ought, and it's got to get worked out. So, instead of keeping him with me, I'm sending him back to you and if you want to send him back to me to be with me, then do it of your own decision, not because I pressed you into a corner. I want your decision to be made voluntarily."

Even if Paul were to give Philemon the option to keep Onesimus with him in prison, Philemon might have said yes, but only out of respect for Paul, and not because he really wanted to. He might have felt pressured to adhere to Paul's request while still harboring hurt, pain, and offense and this would be the opposite of what Paul wanted to do. This way of leading was simply something that Paul saw in the life of Christ, and was working to emulate through his own leadership. Paul was living a Christ-like life. Paul is demonstrating right theology here: thoughts about God that lead to action or demonstration.

When it comes to leading people in your own life do you do it open handedly? Do you allow people to follow God, listen to God, and do what God has called them to do? Even when we do this, there can still be pain in our lives, but this is simply seeing people that we care for deeply move away from us. I have watched both our natural and spiritual parents shed tears over Jennifer and I as we walked out to follow

God where He was calling us, but they still blessed us in our journey. They didn't try and keep us or contrive a story so that we would stay. With tears in their eyes, they blessed us and allowed us to follow God. My challenge to you is that you also lead open handedly with those people that God has placed in your life. The Holy Spirit can help you.

Over the years I have had the privilege of building meaningful relationships with dear brothers and sisters from varying denominations that aren't like me. This has been one of the best gifts that God has given to me over the past decade. Through these relationships, I have been turned onto Bible teachers, authors, and pastors that I would've never known if it weren't for them. And if I were to be vulnerable, I draw more from non-charismatics in the area of theology and doctrine than I do from charismatics. I have a passion to see all these denominations, non-denominational ministries, and Jesus movements come together and share with one another in a way that I think Jesus wants us to. But unity in God's family is another subject for another time.

Through these non-charismatic friendships, I have learned about the peace many of these brothers and sisters have in life. It's not that I don't have peace, but in the midst of a people who love hearing God's voice, sometimes we lose sight of sound judgment. My Pastor often says, "Don't be so open minded that your brains fall out." His point is that, alongside following God's voice, also use your mind, and the sound judgment that God has given to you. But one thing in particular that is challenging in charismatic communities is how people drop the "God said" card when they want a specific outcome they see can only happen by saying that. God does speak, and I'd assume that many times it was the Lord, but there have surely been times that God wasn't speaking, but they used it for their benefit. This approach to God's voice has been destructive in the lives of many. It's an abuse of this glorious phrase.

We have to be mindful when we are dropping information like this regarding our lives and the lives of others. It's one thing to ask questions about what you think God might be speaking to you, but it's another thing to simply step out and recklessly say it when you don't really know. Paul's leadership over the lives of Philemon and Onesimus demonstrates this perfectly. Paul says to Philemon in Philemon 15, "For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever..." This is what I like to call the "divine perhaps of God." Paul is in a position of authority in both of these relationships as the spiritual father. He has the authority of heaven on his life as an apostle by the will of God. His ministry is attested to with powerful signs and wonders, but here, he goes in a totally different direction.

Instead of dropping the "God said card" he simply says, "Perhaps." What a lesson to be learned for all of us. Paul, in a great feat of leadership and wisdom from heaven, doesn't press the issue, doesn't try and tell Philemon why Onesimus left, or try and use spiritual language. He simply says, "Perhaps." This takes the pressure off the conversation and presents another option that Philemon might not have considered. Paul is basically saying, "Philemon, I know it's hard to hear right now. And I know that it doesn't make sense, and that there's real pain in your life. But have you thought about the fact that maybe God was in the midst of all of this? And though he left for a little while, it might, perhaps have been for the bigger purpose of receiving him back, not for a little while, but forever."

I would assume that Paul knew what was happening. I don't think Paul was wondering why Onesimus left. I think that Paul is clear that Onesimus left, for the purpose of being born again, so that he would return back to Philemon forever. But instead of ramrodding that information to Philemon, Paul simply says, "Perhaps." Regarding this verse, one theologian rightly said, "Let us not assume that we have the key of the cabinet where God keeps His hidden purposes. Divine providence is mysterious and varied, and thus we should keep our assumptions and opinions to the divine perhaps of God." That's a mic drop quote. As in, drop that mic and walk away!

How do you share with others what you think God might be speaking to you? Do you use God's voice

in manipulative ways, or in ways that build up God's family, and strengthen His children? I like to call it investigative prophecy. What I mean by this is, if you think God might be speaking to you, try it out by asking questions. If you get a scripture for a person, or a picture, just ask them in a conversational way. You could say something like, "Hey, I was thinking about you yesterday and I heard this Psalm and I was wondering if it means anything to you." Downplay the moment, and make it normal. That way if you haven't heard God it's not a big "miss." I personally do this all the time when I'm praying for people. If I feel something, or see a picture, or get a word, I just ask that person if this means anything to them. God speaks, we need His voice, and He wants to use you to do it. But just make sure it honors both Him and others.

From Slaves to Sons

Day 6 / Philemon 16

Week 5

Slavery in the ancient world was a massive market that many took advantage of. It was said that in Attica alone, located in Greece, there were around 400,000 slaves and just 31,000 free persons. Slavery was common practice, and for those of affluence it wasn't just normative; it was actually expected. This is how many managed property, took care of livestock, and oversaw their possessions. For a Caucasian man living among the majority culture, this seems so ancient and archaic. But I only have to look back 163 years to when slavery in the United States of America was abolished. And then only 63 years to when segregation ended. Considering the fact that our nation is only about 241 years old, this is a massive stain in our history that I personally don't think has been fully rectified, resolved, and restored. There are many hurting Americans today that still suffer with the terrible pain of injustice that they personally have experienced along with their families.

Speaking of Onesimus, Paul says to Philemon in Philemon 15-16, "...that you might receive him (Onesimus) forever, no longer a slave, but more than a slave—a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord." What Paul is talking about here is something that he has talked about in many gentile majority cities. In his letter to the Galatians and Ephesians he has similar things to say about the dignity of people, especially those who are in Christ, and how they should be treated. The ending of slavery, especially cruel slavery, was something that Paul was thoroughly committed to. Also in his letter to the Colossians, a companion letter, Paul makes clear that in Christ there is neither Jew, nor Greek, slave nor free, and even male nor female.

Paul's not saying that we lose our nationality or our gender, but he is saying that in Christ the playing field is leveled. No longer are we identified by where we are from, or what we look like, but now, Christ is our qualification. And with Onesimus, Paul is making clear to Philemon that he's no longer only a slave, but a beloved brother, a laborer in Christ. Paul is very wise not to tell Philemon what to do, but simply appeals to him about a better way of living. He's basically saying, "Philemon, I'm not going to tell you what to do, or how you should do it, but in everything that's happening you must acknowledge this: Onesimus is a Christian. Which means however you receive him back, if you put him back into his position, he can't only be a slave to you, he's now a brother in Christ, a fellow laborer. He's now a part of your family, not just for food and labor, but for love."

This was no longer a judgment that Philemon was able to make about Onesimus. It no longer matter how Philemon saw him, because heaven's words over Onesimus weren't slave, but son. It's quite interesting that both Philemon and Onesimus in this letter are referred to as brothers. Once separated by economic, educational, and racial inequality, suddenly, in a stunning turnaround, they are both on the same playing field--brothers in Christ. Once a slave, and now a son, a fellow worker. And if there is anyone who is qualified to make an assessment about the genuineness of another person's salvation, it was Paul. Paul has a lot at stake relationally between himself and Philemon, and you better believe that He thought long and hard about Onesimus' sincerity before he sent him back. But this would've also been a massive statement about the genuineness of what's happen in Onesimus's life.

Are there things that you can personally do to help change the culture of our nation, and bring awareness to the injustice around you? How can you use your influence, and the means that God has given to you to serve others? If you don't know what the answer might be, I encourage you to take time and ask the Holy Spirit if there is something you can do. Remember, He knows everything, and is more than willing to speak. He's more willing to speak than we are to ask, which is why He often breaks into our silence with direction, advice, and wisdom. He can't help Himself.



Week 6

***Applied Atonement and
Closing Remarks***

Verses

Philemon 17 - 25

Back in the day, like way back in the day, well not that far back, but a little ways back, I had a job at a golf course. Like most of my jobs prior to becoming a Christian, I ended up getting fired. Now the reason I got fired was pretty legitimate. A few things happened. First, I was stealing beer from the kitchen cooler. This was especially bad because I was about 17, which meant I shouldn't be drinking but I also didn't pay for them, and they considered that stealing. I know, pretty harsh, but it's real. I guess you have to pay for things. And secondly, I was golfing regularly at times when we weren't allowed to golf. This wasn't just a public course either, it was one of those collared shirt, 2 year waiting list, private country club places.

And when that fateful day came, where I was called into the office and fired, I was pretty crushed. I mean I totally understood, but still, it's never enjoyable hearing the words, "You're fired." Even though I was totally in the wrong, my parent's pastor Dave Galenter showed up to the golf course and tried to help me get my job back. He was willing to pay for the rounds of golf that I had stolen along with the beers I nabbed. He was willing to put it on his account, even though it was my wrong. Today Pastor Dave is a dear friend, and we've had many of laughs about my antics over the years.

What happened with me and Pastor Dave happened with Paul and Philemon. I mean, not the golf course and beers, but the fact that Paul was willing to assume the debt of Onesimus to see his relationship restored with Philemon, and for Philemon to welcome Onesimus into the family of God. Paul says in Philemon 17, "If then you count me as a partner, receive him (Onesimus) as you would me." It's here for the second time in this short letter that Paul drops the word KOINONIA. As mentioned previously this word means "Partnership, shared life, and common interests." As Stuart Greaves would say, "This is a gangster move."

Paul is again appealing to Philemon and their shared work in the Gospel. Paul isn't wanting to simply bully him into receiving Onesimus, or even to use the authority that God has given him, but through relationship, he's trying to make an appeal. And wow, what a commendation for Onesimus by way of Paul. Paul says to Philemon, "...receive him as you would me..." This is a heavy hitting spiritual father placing his stamp of approval on what was once a runaway slave, now turned son of Christ and "bonified" member of God's family. Having the approval of those that have influence means the world to me, and it must have been a massive shot of confidence into the life of Onesimus. I mean, knowing that this giant in God's family, though a man, but still a significant man, says, "...receive him back as you would me..." Talk about breaking off the shame of his past, the stereotype of his culture being from Phrygia, and defined as a wheelbarrow, or useless. God was using Paul to restore this young man and his God-given identity.

In so many words, Paul is saying, "Philemon, if you love the Christ in me, then can't you also love the Christ in Onesimus?" This is what John the beloved writes in 1st John 3:14, "We know that we have passed from death, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death." This word "receive" that Paul uses speaks of receiving someone into your home, your inner-circle, and your very family. Paul is asking Philemon to take this guilty, once runaway slave, now follower of Jesus, back into his very family.

Sometimes it's easy for us to forgive certain people while also keeping them at arm's length. And there are times when this is important so that we don't continue subjecting ourselves to pain, suffering, and abuse. But other times we need to forgive and open up our hearts again, and allow trust to be rebuilt. Paul wasn't going to allow Philemon to simply forgive him and leave him out to pasture. Paul was calling Philemon to open up not only his house, but his heart.

Are there people in your world that you need to allow back into your space, and open up your heart again to trust, love, and even serve? If so, don't delay; call today! Let them know what happened was hard, but you want to try again. You want to leave open the friendship, even if there are new boundaries in the beginning. Jesus Himself tells us to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. Talk to the Holy Spirit, He will help you, as He cares about restoration and health in God's family like nobody else!

Paul continues his conversation from the previous verses here in Philemon 18-19 by saying, “But if he has wronged you, or owes anything, put that on my account. I, Paul, am writing with my own hand. I will repay—not to mention that you owe me your own self besides.” And to these two verses, N.T. Wright, a modern-day theologian rightly states, “Paul is putting into practice the doctrine of justification in the everyday application of life. Onesimus, whom God has saved, is now inside the family of God, and nobody has the right to refuse fellowship or entrance from a brother or sister.”

Some years prior to Paul writing this book, Paul penned the powerful words of 2nd Corinthians 5:18-19 when he said, “Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is that God was in Christ reconciling us the world to Himself, not imputing the trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.” What we see here through his relationship with Onesimus is what I call “applied atonement.” Through Paul’s salvation experienced, he encountered a God who assumed his debts and took what was due Paul on Himself for the sake of Paul going free. And now Paul has the opportunity to do the same for another wayward son of God, Onesimus.

Paul is clear when he says, “...if he has wronged you, or owes anything, put that on my account,” that Onesimus will be held responsible for his actions; He’s just not making him personally pay for it--Paul is. This is Paul taking the doctrine of atonement and putting it to work in a practical way to help others go free and be reconciled within God’s family. There are times when people need to personally pay for what they have done, and they need to own up to the wrongs they have caused. But clearly, Paul, who cares so much about repentance and having a contrite heart can see a genuine work of the Spirit in Onesimus’s life, and that’s enough for him to put himself in the line of fire so to speak.

If you think of it in terms of the cross, Paul is in the middle, stretching out his left arm to Onesimus and his right arm to Philemon and pulling them close in himself so as to take the debt on personally. It’s not that Paul can forgive sins and actually make atonement for others; that’s been done through Christ and Christ alone. But he can, just like us, stand in between others and work to absolve their debts through his influence, his pocket book, and his words. And what a joy that we get to use what God has given to us for the sake of God’s glory and the good of others.

We don’t know what happened when Onesimus left Philemon’s place. It was about a 1,000+ mile journey to get to Rome from Colossae and he might have simply taken enough money for the journey. But the debt that was incurred also might have been from work that never got done because of his absence. We just don’t know. But whatever it was, it was significant enough that Paul felt he needed to step out and make the wrong right. Which also means that Onesimus wasn’t hiding his sin but had confessed the wrong to Paul.

Paul then closes out verse 19 by making sure Philemon knows that he is writing this letter. Paul wasn’t relegating this letter to a scribe, but was taking personal responsibility to make sure this personal communication remained personal. But Paul also drops a heavy on Philemon as he reminds him that he owes his own salvation to the Paul and his ministry. It’s not that Paul saved Philemon, because that’s something that only Jesus can do. But his salvation came by the way of Paul. And this seems to be Paul’s somewhat non-appeal, but straightforward way of asking Philemon to do him a solid, based on what Paul has done for him.

It's my belief that God wants to take your experiences in Him and work them into the way you live your life. It's good to experience God, but that experience actually happens so that you would live in light of it, and that you would do for others what Christ, or your experience in Christ, has done for you. How can you work to apply what the Holy Spirit is doing in and with you, to the way you walk, talk, and interact with those around you? Can you, like Paul, apply the doctrine of justification into your own and the lives of others? This is what James is saying when he tells us that we are to be doers of the word, not just hearers only.

Worn Out, But Not Wounded

Day 3 / Philemon 20 - 21

Week 6

When it comes to the two personality styles of introverts and extraverts, there are two primary things that separate them. Extraverts get recharged by being around people, and introverts get recharged by being alone. As an extravert, I totally get this. Crowds energize me; being in places where I can meet new people, connect with older friends, and be in the middle of a buzz is life giving. I know that some of you just threw up a little in your mouth. I totally get it. It's probably because you're an introvert. Personality styles aren't about right or wrong, just simply what is. And truth be told, both styles have things they have to learn. Introverts have to learn to be around people and not withdraw all the time. Extraverts need to learn how to be alone and withdraw from people sometimes.

I personally think that Paul was an extrovert. He might not have been a full-blown extrovert, but he most definitely loved being around people and didn't mind the crowds (unless they were trying to kill him. I'm sure he would have avoided those crowds if he could have). But it's pretty clear that he had the gift of encouragement. As a visionary leader, Paul most likely wouldn't have written all the letters that he did had he not got locked up in prison. I think he would have just kept running, traveling, building, pouring into others, and championing Jesus' church to fill the earth with God's glory.

But in even in the life of a people driven extrovert like Paul, he still got tired. And here in Philemon 20-21 I think Paul's heart-felt emotional appeal has run its course. It's not that he's mad or getting short with Philemon, he's just tired of walking down this long road of appeal. You can hear the words of a tired shepherd in his voice as he says, "Yes, brother, let me have joy from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in the Lord. Having confidence in your obedience I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say."

It's almost like Paul is saying, "Hey man, come on, seriously. The more I have loved these disciples the worse I've been treated. I can't find my winter coat and it's freezing here. Demas has forgotten me and Alexander the coppersmith whom I loved has done me much harm. The Thessalonians whom I cared for like my own children think I'm a charlatan. The Corinthians are enamored with these charismatic super apostles whose poop doesn't stink. I was left, beaten for dead, lowered through a roof in another city because they didn't like what I had to say. I've spent a few days in the deep. But you, Philemon, please, just give me some joy. Refresh my heart man. I'm wore out brah."

Paul has encouraged Philemon earlier in the letter about the way that he has refreshed the hearts of the brethren, and now Paul is asking Philemon to refresh him. Paul isn't looking for a better life, or more comfort, but that Philemon would receive Onesimus back into his care, not only as a slave but as a brother in Christ. It's not going to be easy in the natural for Philemon to this, but with God's grace, He can do it. And even though this situation is tense because Onesimus isn't as certain about what Philemon will do upon his return, Paul is confident. Paul wouldn't have sent Onesimus back if he thought there was the potential for death or further destruction through the system of slavery. Paul is clear that he has confidence in Philemon to do the right thing, the Christ thing.

What does your personality look like? Can you celebrate who God's made you to be, or do you find yourself wanting to be someone else? I would assume that you know what your strengths are, but are you aware of your weaknesses? Your strengths are just that--strengths. They usually don't need that much help or work, but when it comes to your weaknesses, these are areas that we should give some time and attention to. Not all of our time, but some of it. Don't just lean on your strengths and run with them, give some attention to your weaknesses as well.

Friendships are a beautiful thing. At times they are challenging, involve pain, and they don't always make sense, but life without friends isn't much of a life. The Proverb is right when it says that, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend..." I mean who intentionally sets out to build friendship with these three words involved: friends, wounds, and faithful? When we are building friendships, these aren't usually things that are in the front of our mind. But in reality, at least in my personal experience, I have had all those things and more in my dearest friendships. Deep pain, hurt, betrayal, while at the same time stunning levels of joy, connectedness, being understood, and celebration for who I am in Christ.

There are so many ups and downs in the cycle of friendships, but it's worth venturing into the unknown for the sake of love and having comrades that you can conquer the world with. From Paul's letter, it's clear that they have shared this deep friendship between each other. Here in Philemon 22 Paul says, "But, meanwhile, also prepare a guest room for me, for I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you." Paul is around 1,300 miles away from Colossae in Rome and here writing about his hopes to come and be together with Philemon.

Being in prison would be challenging for anyone, but especially for a guy like Paul. At the tail end of 2nd Corinthians, Paul goes into a lengthy commentary about his sufferings and trials. But he says something most telling in 2nd Corinthians 11:28 when he says alongside all his sufferings, "...besides (besides all these physical trials) these other things which come upon me daily: my great concern for the Churches." This is a clear display of Paul's heart, not just for the works that God empowered him to start, but the very people inside the ministries. Paul was not just talking about assemblies, but individual's that he has co-labored, shed tears, and been through the ringer with.

According to Paul's words, he's clear that it's actually Philemon's prayers for Paul that's going to get him out of prison. Paul doesn't know God's will this time when it comes to his prison sentence, because he's not getting out. This is where he will die. But he's so confident in his friend's prayers that he actually says, "Hey, bro, prepare me a guest room in your house, because I'm certain that through your prayers for me God is going to let me out so that I can come and be with you and strengthen the work that God Himself has begun. I miss you, friend. But even in this prison cell, even in my separation from you, I'm confident that you are praying for me. I feel it, and it means the world to me and I can't wait to see you." This is what a comrade will do for you. Partnership in friendship looks like this. At the start of the letter Paul is clear that he's praying for Philemon and his assembly, and at the end of the letter Paul is confident that Philemon and the ministry there are praying for him.

If your life has looked anything like mine, you've had your ups and downs when it comes to friendships. But my question for you is are you still reaching for close relationships, people whom you can share your life with? I understand that you've most likely been hurt, and have had great disappointment when it comes to friendships, but even in all of that, are you still reaching to develop the type of comrades needed to go through life with? I would encourage you to talk to the Holy Spirit about the various things you have experienced in friendships, and if there's healing that needs to take place let it happen. Open up those places and allow Him to come in and touch them. And then ask the Holy Spirit where to start so that you can make the friendships needed to go out and change the world.

God's Story, Your Message

Day 5 / Philemon 23 -24

Week 6

God's not a miser. He doesn't share His glory with anyone, but He most certainly shares honor within His creation. Glory and honor are different, and it's important that we make the distinction. Glory and worship belong solely and only to God. But honor is something that can be given both to God and to God's creation. We should give honor to those that God has set among us, though we would never worship them because that belongs only for the Lord.

Here at the close of Philemon, Paul mentions a host of names that he's presently doing ministry with. He mentions them here in Philemon 23-24 saying, "Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, as do Mark, Arstarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow laborers." There are several things I find fascinating about these verses. Firstly, it shows us that Paul wasn't a lone ranger. Paul was a man who was committed to doing life with a company of people. He wasn't out there on his own doing things without the company of friends who were committed to the mission alongside him. My dad would often say to me that if you ended up with 5 really close friends at the end of life, you would be successful, or winning. We aren't called to do this on our own. We need each other.

Secondly, it shocks me in many ways that God would eternally canonize human names into the scriptures. Maybe that makes sense to you, but for me I think, what humility, what condescension, that the High and Lofty God would include humans into His story. Eternally, these men and women who are mentioned not just here, but throughout the whole of the Bible will be remembered. The life they lived, the sacrifices they made, and the encouragement they gave to others will be rewarded by God, both through the scriptures and in person when their bodies are resurrected and they stand before Jesus. Jesus isn't ashamed to call us family, to call us His brothers and sisters.

And lastly, it's not that this story is about us, or about people or the names of others. The only important, and worthy name is His, but God does allow us into His story. Some falsely say that the Bible is about us, or that it's a love letter written to us from God. I love the heart behind this thinking, but it's not accurate. By principle, the Bible is for us, but not about us. It's about God. It's a book telling who God is, how God acts, and how we are to respond to Him and join in with His mission. When the credits of our life play before God, we won't be the leading role in history (HIS-STORY). Like an extra in a movie, we will have a cameo in God's story, but our picture won't be on the front of the DVD, or the blockbuster trailer God is writing, producing, and starring in.

In what ways can you make sure that your life is lived for God's glory, while at the same time understanding that God doesn't mind giving you honor, and showing love and appreciation for the life of faith you're living? Do you sometimes get confused about who is the star of this story? Do you see yourself or God as the lead actor? It takes the work of the Holy Spirit to be able to see God as the star, while at the same time seeing yourself as having dignity and honor for who you are and what you are doing. Take time to talk to the Holy Spirit asking Him how you do this, how you make Him number one, without making yourself a worm.

I'm Not, but I Know I AM

Day 6 / Philemon 25

Years ago, Louie Giglio was one of the keynote speakers at a conference in Atlanta, GA called Thrive, led by Andy Stanley. Prior to Louie's sermon, as he was talking about the preparation process, he told a story about how Holy Spirit began to speak to him a simple phrase that would end up shaping his ministry. As he was praying and getting ready to teach, he said out loud, "I'm not, but I know I AM." This phrase resounded in his heart. And his sermon that night, largely without notes, came flooding from his heart as he shared what God was doing in him. This truth, said in a thousand different ways needs to be worked into the life of every Christ follower.

I have found it more common than I would like to admit within God's family that there is often language that sounds "Christian" but is really rooted in humanism. I think this language is a mixture of Biblical truths and earthly wisdom/Western bravado, but that mixture needs to be removed. It comes across as self-help life coaching that's devoid of Christ's power and Christ's work. It sounds something like, "Hey, you got take care of you. You have to protect yourself. You can figure this out. You have to pull yourself up, dust yourself off, and go make it happen. You got what it takes." I'm making a point, so hang with me. I have said these things as well, and I do get the idea they are trying to present. But when it comes to living this life in and with Christ, it's not about what we can do, or what we have to offer. It's about God's ability to empower us, strengthen us, and lead us into the fullness of His kingdom.

Here as Paul is closing out this letter with the final verse he says in Philemon 25, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen." Now that the context of this letter is in view, this verse should make a lot of sense to us. Paul opens this letter by praying and asking for God's grace to be upon Philemon, probably for the sake of simply reading the letter. But now at the close of this letter Paul's prayer again is that God's grace would be upon Philemon, not to simply hear the information, but to actually do it--to reconcile, to see restoration, and to inject health into God's family by mending the broken things. This word used for grace there is the Greek word "Charis". It speaks of God's power, and His ability to accomplish what He said He would do.

In order for Philemon to walk out Paul's request, he's going to need God's divine empowerment. Philemon would only be able to give lip service on his own. But over time, if forgiveness wasn't real inside his heart and life, the fractured relationship that didn't get healed would surface again, and it could be really ugly. Followers of Jesus aren't dependent upon their power to accomplish the Christian life. We must have the work, power, and person of the Holy Spirit operating from within if we are going to be able to obey Jesus and do what's He's called us into. Self-help, self-motivation, and earthly phrases that we use to motivate people will never give what's need internally to be a successful follower of Jesus Christ. This only comes through the Person of the Holy Spirit.

In Colossians 2:23, "These things (earthly wisdom) indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh." Paul is combating humanism that's crept into the life of this body. That's why he says at the start of Colossians 2, that in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Then he opens up Colossians 3 by calling the Christ followers in Colossae to lift up their eyes, to seek those things which are above, and to not pattern their lives in the way of earthly wisdom. Here's the point I'm making, our life in Christ, is about Christ's life in us. This is our life. It's not about humanistic rhetoric, western philosophy, but Christ, and Him crucified.

Just like Philemon, if you and I are going to walk this life following Christ, we must have the grace of His

Spirit at work within us; otherwise, we can do nothing. Philemon has massive decisions ahead of him, and if he's going to do it God's way, it's not coming from his own strength and wisdom. It's coming from God, and God alone.

Well, here we are at the final day of reflection. We have journeyed all the way through this glorious book, discovering the truths of God's word and now, we need His help to follow Him and walk it out. Take time to talk to the Spirit, asking Him for help. Your confession of weakness and inability to accomplish what God has asked you to do is a sweet-smelling incense to Jesus. There is nothing more exciting to God than one of His children asking Him for help. Don't agree with life in this age, but instead, agree with the age to come, and that slogan is, "I'm not, but I know IAM."



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