

Philemon 1 (New International Version, ©2011)

¹ Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,

To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker—² also to Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier—and to the church that meets in your home:

³ Grace and peace to you^[a] from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴ I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers,⁵ because I hear about your love for all his holy people and your faith in the Lord Jesus.⁶ I pray that your partnership with us in the faith may be effective in deepening your understanding of every good thing we share for the sake of Christ.⁷ Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the Lord's people.

⁸ Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do,⁹ yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love. It is as none other than Paul—an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—¹⁰ that I appeal to you for my son Onesimus,^[b] who became my son while I was in chains.¹¹ Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.

¹² I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you.¹³ I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel.¹⁴ But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do would not seem forced but would be voluntary.¹⁵ Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever—¹⁶ no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord.

¹⁷ So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me.¹⁸ If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me.¹⁹ I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self.²⁰ I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ.²¹ Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask.

²² And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers.

²³ Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings.²⁴ And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers.

²⁵ The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Footnotes:

- a. [Philemon 1:3](#) The Greek is plural; also in verses 22 and 25; elsewhere in this letter “you” is singular.
- b. [Philemon 1:10](#) *Onesimus* means *useful*.

OASIS: LivingClose: Philemon, Paul and Onesimus

Preface: Welcome to our 2nd Bible study in our six sermon LivingClose series, as we explore biblical relationships that are spiritually influential and inspiring. The sermons are complemented by three LIFE Community studies, which use the same biblical text and allow your LC to continue the conversation and go deeper in personal application. Go for it!

Possible starter question: Think of a friend—someone you care about—who needs to grow or change in a particular way. How would you talk to the friend? What would be important to communicate?

Transitional comment: Today we are going to dive into one of the littlest books in the Bible--Philemon. It is a highly personal, gentle and potent letter from a friend who is encouraging big-time change in the life of a friend, all because of the gospel. You might want to “put on the hat” of either Paul, who writes the letter; or Philemon, who receives the letter. Sometimes we need to change and sometimes we need a good friend to help us change!

Let’s listen as Philemon is read aloud. (Someone, who enjoys reading aloud, want to read this for us?)

(Pray for the Holy Spirit to lead your study, if you haven’t already prayed.)

Read and Overview: Now take several minutes by yourself to study this passage. Look for repeated words and ideas. Note some of the key contrasts. What kinds of change are involved?

O What repeated words and ideas did you see? What contrasts did you notice? (3-5 min.)

First Section (vs. 1-7):

O Even in this very personal letter, Paul follows the familiar patterns of 1st century correspondence, identifying the author and then the recipients, followed by a good wish. As you look at vs. 1-3, what words and ideas do you suspect reflect a distinctive Christian flavor?

(n.b. several historical notes: a. the letter was written probably in 61 or 62AD; Paul probably wrote from Rome; b. his friend Tychicus delivers this letter, along with Colossians and a third, unknown letter to the Laodicean referred to in Col. 4; c. Philemon may have been converted in Ephesus, Acts 19)

O (vs. 4-7) In what ways does Paul pray for Philemon?

O (vs. 4-7) For what reasons does Paul so highly regard Philemon?

I In v. 6, when Paul mentions “every good thing we share for the sake of Christ,” what kind of things might he have in mind?

I What might it mean to “refresh (ed) the hearts of the Lord’s people”?

A Think of someone you know who does that? In what ways do they do it? What is one way you’d like to do that, even in your LIFE Community?

Second Section (vs. 8-16):

O Look at vs. 8-10, where Paul unpacks several different kinds of influence he could use in trying to appeal to or influence Philemon. What are some of the kinds he mentions?

I Why do you think he chooses the tact he takes with Philemon?

O In 10-11, what do you learn about Onesimus? What changes has Onesimus undergone?

- O In vs. 12-14, what do you learn about Paul's heart for people and ministry?
- O In vs. 15-16, what are some of the inferences and implications of God's providence and activity?

Third Section (vs. 17-25):

- O In vs. 17-21 Paul gets very practical and provides Philemon with some straight-forward mentoring. What does he want Philemon to do? What changes in outlook (mind) and in behavior?
- O In what ways does Paul demonstrate his sensitivity and commitment? In what ways is Paul invested?
- O V. 22 is more than a postscript. How does this verse reflect about Paul's hopes?

Summary:

- I What would you say are the great hopes that motivate Paul to write to Philemon?
 - A Which one(s) do you need to take to heart and put into motion?
 - Is there a friend you need to challenge wisely and gently?
 - Is there a change you need to ask God to work in your life?
 - Is there a relationship that you need to mend or restore?
 - Is there a way you should refresh someone or some group?

Prayer together: Pray...

- ❖ that God would use you in one another's lives, to refresh, to buildup, to challenge.
- ❖ that God might work in your LC to forge a community and partnership that is deeply refreshing.

Text notes (you can access biblical texts via www.Biblegateway.com)

- a. BIG idea: Spiritual friends help us see ourselves and others as God sees us all. And as a result, God brings unlikely people together.
- b. Philem. 11: *Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.*
- c. KEY: O = Observation; I = Interpretation; A = Application (or C = Challenge)

Advice to study leaders:

- d. Complement your OIA questions with "process questions" (what else? What more? What do others of you see/think?).
- e. Determine the core questions you'll ask (know which ones to skip if pressed for time).
- f. Always reword questions in words that are comfortable for you (and, if the question doesn't make sense to you, then discard it.) You want to "own" each question.
- g. When you ask questions, give people ample time to think and respond. How long do you wait? Take your time; don't rush people but encourage their participation. And avoid answering your own questions!
- h. Timing/pacing: allocate your time and move forward gently, with a steady pace.
- i. Application: Pace the study to conclude with "difference making" application.
- j. Secondary texts—use other texts very sparingly, even if they are relevant. Otherwise, other texts will push you more into the "teacher role," rather than that of facilitator. It also can cause some people to feel distracted or de-powered.
- k. If you are utilizing this "on-line" study and not part of the OASIS course, I recommend you get the one volume commentary New Bible Commentary, Revised (21st Century Edition, IVP). Well worth \$35.