POSTCARDS FROM THE EDGE

Philemon  Week 1: Setting the Stage
The Bible is separated into two main sections—the Old Testament and the New Testament. There are several divisions in each, but the Pauline (letters written by Paul) Epistles (with the exception of 1/2 Thessalonians and 1/2 Timothy) and the General Epistles (letters written by others) are in order of descending length.

That’s always seemed like a significantly non-theological reason to me, but that’s the way it is. The little letter that we’re looking at in the second half of this series (Postcards from the Edge) is the last in the list of Paul’s letters (meaning it’s also the shortest)—Philemon.

However, before we get to the epistle of Philemon, let’s take a minute to look at the author.
Colossians is very similar in many respects to Philemon.
We don’t know exactly what Onesimus did to get himself in trouble, but Onesimus got himself in trouble and ran away to Rome—a place so large that he could disappear (there were well over 800,000 people in Rome at this time). Acts 28:30 indicates that during Paul’s confinement at Rome, that Paul was allowed to receive visitors but was not allowed to seek others out himself, so it seems clear that if the two met while Paul was in prison, Onesimus did the seeking. Perhaps Onesimus had heard Philemon his master speak highly of Paul and wanted to meet Paul for himself. We’re not sure, but we do know that Onesimus found Paul, was saved under Paul’s ministry, and Paul is sending him back to be reconciled.

Terry Brown: Philemon is the wisdom literature of the New Testament—it is what the Gospel looks like in a practical setting.
Schedule for this Series

- Week 1: Setting the Stage (vv 1-3)
- Week 2: Framing the Favor (vv 4-7)
- Week 3: Asking for Assistance (vv 8-16)
- Week 4: Optimistic for Obedience (vv 17-22)
- Week 5: Finishing the Farewell (vv 23-25)
"Philemon" means "one who kisses" and "beloved." Philemon’s name is the noun form of the Greek verb, ‘phileo,’ meaning, friend.

If Apphia was Philemon’s wife, it makes sense that she would be addressed here as well, as the custom of the day was for the woman of the house to have authority over the slaves. Certainly, if she were his wife, a returning runaway slave would involve her as well.
Names to Know (2/2)

- Archippus (ar-kip’-us): a leader in the church (possibly Philemon's son); Colossians 4:17

- Jesus: the Way, the Truth, and the Life

- Onesimus: the slave that ran away from Philemon his master and has returned

- Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke: fellow-workers with Paul mentioned at the end

The commentators spend pages and pages debating whether or not Apphia and Archippus were family members of Philemon or not. Either could be correct, neither is critical.
Fast Facts

- This is the most **personal** letter of Paul's in the entire New Testament—we see Paul's heartbeat and the way he treats his friends.

- The entire letter is only 335 words in the original Greek.

- Philemon is mentioned nowhere else in the entire New Testament.
Stand up, say your name, and read the passage.

So, this week, we are just going to look at the first three verses.
"Ancient letters always started with the name of the one writing." John MacArthur

Read Philemon 1:1a

Paul mentions his imprisonment, which is also described in Acts 28:30-31.

Question 1. Answer 1: Paul is describing his voluntary service to Jesus Christ, and he is foreshadowing his pending request to Philemon (since slavery is similar in relationship to being in prison—you are owned by another).

Question 2. Answer 2: Brothers stick close to you in a time of need. Timothy would always be Paul’s ‘son’ in the faith, but he was proving himself to be a true brother by supporting Paul during his imprisonment.
Philemon 1:1-3 (2/3)

Philemon 1:1a-2: To Philemon our beloved friend and fellow laborer, 2 to the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house:

Questions:
1. Is Paul buttering Philemon up or being truthful?
2. Why address it to the church in his home?

Read Philemon 1:1a-2

"Fellow laborer" is a term that Paul generally only uses on pastors (one notable exception being for Aquila and Priscilla in Acts), so his opinion of Philemon is quite high.

"The church in your house." - Let us never look down on small things as God blesses our church with growth. Were it not for small churches that meet in houses, we would not have this epistle. I love the fact that God is blessing our church, but there are other ways of His hand working as well.

"Up to the third century we have no certain evidence of the existence of church buildings for the purposes of worship; all references point to private houses for this. In Rome several of the oldest churches appear to have been built on the sites of houses used for Christian worship." W E Osterly, The Expositor's Greek Testament

Question 1. Answer 1: Yes. Philemon was both a beloved friend and a fellow laborer, so Paul is telling the truth, but Paul is also getting Philemon ready for what Paul is about to ask for from him.

Question 2. Answer 2: Any broken relationship within a local congregation impacts the entire congregation. One of the great sins of the American church is the belief that my personal issues do not impact the local congregation. Relationships are everything and Paul's focus on restoring this relationship should communicate that fact loud and clear. Additionally, a little peer pressure never hurt.
Philemon 1:3: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Questions:
1. Why would Paul use the same greeting in all of his letters?
2. What do you think is going through Philemon’s mind at this point?

Read Philemon 1:3

Verse 3: Paul's traditional greeting: grace (the Greek part) and peace (the Jewish part). "The theological point Paul's greeting makes is that for him the church of God includes every believer, whether Jew or Greek" Intervarsity Press

Question 1: Answer 1: Paul uses a standard greeting because, (1) he believes it, (2) the Holy Spirit wanted it, and (3) to prove his authorship.

Question 2: Answer 2: I think Philemon was probably confused. Why does Onesimus (his runaway slave) have a letter from Paul and why is Onesimus back? What could these two things have in common? Where is this letter going?
Next Week

- **Philemon 1:4-7**: Framing the Favor

- Homework: memorize **Philemon 1:4-7** and be able to say it to your table

- Homework: Read the entire epistle once through from the perspective of every single major character mentioned: Paul, Philemon, Apphia, Archippus, Jesus, and Onesimus
POSTCARDS FROM THE EDGE

Philemon  Week 2: Framing the Favor
The Bible is separated into two main sections—the Old Testament and the New Testament. There are several divisions in each, but the little letter of Philemon is at the end of the Pauline letters, which means it’s the shortest canonical book that Paul wrote. Paul wrote Philemon while Paul was under house arrest in Rome, so keep that in mind as we go through.
We don’t know exactly what Onesimus did to get himself in trouble, but Onesimus got himself in trouble and ran away to Rome—a place so large that he could disappear (there were well over 800,000 people in Rome at this time). Perhaps Onesimus had heard Philemon his master speak highly of Paul and wanted to meet Paul for himself. We’re not sure, but we do know that Onesimus found Paul, was saved under Paul’s ministry, and Paul is sending him back to be reconciled.
Last week we set the stage for the series and this week we will look at how Paul begins framing his favor that he’s going to ask of Philemon.
"Philemon" means "one who kisses" and "beloved." Philemon’s name is the noun form of the Greek verb, ‘phileo,’ generally translated as ‘love’ or ‘friend.’
Stand up, say your name, the translation that you’re reading from, and read the entire letter.

Question: Do you get the idea that Paul is walking lightly here? Why do you think he is? Answer: He is friends with both sides.

So, this week, we are going to look verses 4-7.
Philemon 1:4: I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers,

Questions:
1. Why would Paul constantly be praying for someone as loving as Philemon?

2. Paul thanks God for Philemon. Why is it important that we become people of gratitude?

Read Philemon 1:4

Question 1. Answer 1: Because no matter how ‘good’ we think we are, we are still all moping around in the dark without God’s help. None of us can do anything good on our own. If Philemon is being prayed for by Paul, this is a good indication that none of us can pull off forgiveness by ourselves. It is OK to ask for help from other believers in the area of forgiveness.

Question 2. Answer 2: As soon as we think that we are doing anything on our own, we are headed down a long, dark road. To quote Trinity from The Matrix, “Because you have been down there Neo, you know that road, you know exactly where it ends. And I know that’s not where you want to be.”
Philemon 1:5: hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints,

Questions:
1. Knowing Paul’s penchant for wordplay, what Greek word do you think he uses for ‘love’?

2. Do you have a hard time loving ‘all’ the saints?

Read Philemon 1:5

We don’t know this for sure, but wouldn’t it have been neat if Paul heard about Philemon’s love and faith through Onesimus?

Question 1. Answer 1: Agape. You thought it was phileo, didn’t you? Philemon had a history of agape love and Paul was reminding him of that history.

Many times in my own life, the most effective way to get me to do something is to remind me of the fact that I’ve done it before for someone else. None of us wants to be inconsistent, but being reminded of our past good works helps us to make good decisions for God going forward.

Commentary Critical: The theological order is first faith then love, the fruit of faith. But he purposely puts Philemon’s love in the first place, as it is to an act of love that he is exhorting him.

John Calvin: This praise, which he bestows on Philemon, includes briefly the whole perfection of a Christian man. It consists of two parts, faith in Christ, and love towards our neighbors.

Question 2. Answer 2: I do. It’s just a fact that we are better friends with some believers than others, but this verse talks about love for all the saints. Love is a choice. Philemon had a history of making that choice. What a great testimony!

Matthew Henry: We must love, as God does, all the saints. Ouch
Philemon 1:6: that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.

Questions:
1. Does anyone’s translation have a different word than, ‘sharing’?

2. Take a minute or two to reflect silently on how energetic your koinonia is.

Read Philemon 1:6

Question 1. Answer 1: Sharing, generosity, fellowship, communion, partnership, communication, and participation are some words used in that verse. The Greek word is koinonia. Another word that could be used here is, ‘intimacy.’ Sharing, generosity, fellowship, communion, partnership, communication, and participation with someone else related to our faith is an intimate act.

The Greek word for, ‘effective’ is energete. We get our English word, ‘energy’ from it. It means to be powerful, energetic, and effective. When I turn on the light switch, I expect the lights to come on because there is energy waiting to make it work. When we share our faith, we should expect the spiritual lights to come on because there is energy waiting to make it work.

Brian Smith: Paul is calling Philemon to the reality that faith must affect how we live.

This is a clear indication that Philemon has room to grow. Paul is pruning Philemon in order to grow him, shape him, and help him produce.

The Greek word for, ‘acknowledgement’ is epignosis. It means the specific knowledge related to something. Our faith is energetic when we know that the good in us is only from Jesus Christ—it’s not good on our own.

Also, please note that Philemon doesn’t appear to be the pastor of this church, but he is sharing his faith. Ed Stetzer said one time (to pastors): If your people bring their unsaved friends to you, they’re confused about whose job it is to spread the gospel.

Philemon 1:7: For we have great joy and consolation in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed by you, brother.

Questions:
1. Have you ever been cold and hungry and then had someone suddenly refresh you?

2. Who have you known that could consistently be described as refreshing the hearts of the saints?

Read Philemon 1:7

I love that Paul ends this verse with, ‘brother.’ Every word is dripping with love and he squeezes more of them in at every opportunity. Matt Ayers: He addressed Philemon in many ways as an equal with the same expectation for his work as he had for his own.

Ray Pritchard: This little letter is a masterpiece of persuasion. If you want to know how to write a letter to someone you need to convince, study the way Paul approached Philemon.

Paul is in prison and he tells Philemon of his joy (a heart that impacts your face) and consolation that Philemon has brought Paul and Timothy. How encouraging would that be to Philemon? Wow. Another thing to be on the lookout for is the fact that Philemon encouraged Paul and now Paul is about to encourage Philemon.

Literally, the analogy Paul uses is one of the bowels being at rest after being disturbed.

Question 1. Answer 1: Tell that story at your table now. Jim: tell the story of the snowstorm on January 29 and coming home to a warm house with hot soup.

Question 2. Answer 2: Karrie Harness, Keith Chrisman

Has Paul mentioned Onesimus’ name yet? Nope. Philemon still doesn’t know what Paul is really getting to. Those same questions from last week must still be swirling around in his head—how did Onesimus get this letter from Paul? What is Onesimus doing back here?

Another thing to take note of is the lack of imperatives. I usually make a really big deal about imperatives when we study the Bible because I want you to know exactly when we are being commanded to do something. Have you heard me mention imperatives yet? Nope. Stay on the lookout for them, though.
Next week, Paul is going to finally get around to asking Philemon for something. And it’s a big request.

- **Philemon 1:8-16**: Asking for Assistance

- Homework: memorize **Philemon 1:8-16** and be able to say it to your table

- Homework: Look up the meaning of Onesimus’ name and read **Philemon** twice, looking for ways in which Paul uses the meaning of Onesimus’ name
POSTCARDS FROM THE EDGE

Philemon  Week 3: Asking for Assistance
Paul wrote **Philemon** while Paul was under house arrest in Rome, so keep that in mind as we go through.

We don’t know exactly what Onesimus did to get himself in trouble, but Onesimus got himself in trouble and ran away to Rome and we do know that Onesimus found Paul, was saved under Paul’s ministry, and Paul is sending him back to be reconciled.
During the last two weeks, we have studied the way that Paul set the stage and framed the favor, and today, we finally get the meat of the story and see what Paul is asking for.
"Philemon" means "one who kisses" and "beloved." Philemon’s name is the noun form of the Greek verb, ‘phileo,’ generally translated as ‘love’ or ‘friend.’
Stand up, say your name, the translation that you’re reading from, and read the entire letter.

So, this week, we are going to look verses 8-16.
Philemon 1:8-9: Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting, yet for love’s sake I rather appeal to you—being such a one as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ—

Questions:
1. Why didn’t Paul just command Philemon?

2. ‘Aged’ or ‘ambassador’?

Read Philemon 1:8-9

David Guzik: Paul wasn’t hesitant to command when the situation demanded it (1 Corinthians 5:4-5), but in wisdom he knew when to use the loving appeal.

Question 1. Answer 1: John Calvin: There is no need of commanding those who willingly obey. Paul demonstrates true meekness in Philemon 1:8: strength under control. He does not abuse his authority as an apostle, but rather wisely seeks reconciliation through love.

Question 2. Answer 2: Coffman: In Paul’s times, ambassadors were practically all “old men”; therefore the word for “old men” came to mean also “ambassador.” This is very much like the way the Greek word for witness came to mean martyr as so many Christians were put to death because of their faith.

Philemon 1:8-9 are the ‘why’ of forgiveness—because of love.
Philemon 1:10-11: I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains, 11 who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me.

Questions:
1. Why did Paul call Onesimus, ‘my son’?
2. What does Onesimus’ name mean?

Read Philemon 1:10-11

Question 1. Answer 1: This was a common way for Paul to speak about those he had personally led to Christ (he also did it in 1 Corinthians 4:14, 17; Titus 1:4; and Galatians 4:19)—it was also a well-known Jewish phrase: Talmud: If one teaches the son of his neighbor the Law, the Scriptures reckon this the same as if he had begotten him

“In my chains.” Matthew Henry: When God’s servants are bound, yet his word and Spirit are not bound; spiritual children may then be born to them

Question 2. Answer 2: A beautiful play on words by Paul in that Onesimus’ name means, ‘profitable.’ Perhaps Paul is making Philemon think of the meaning of his own name and making him wonder if Philemon is being true to that.
Philemon 1:12-14: I am sending him back. You therefore receive him, that is, my own heart, 13 whom I wished to keep with me, that on your behalf he might minister to me in my chains for the gospel. 14 But without your consent I wanted to do nothing, that your good deed might not be by compulsion, as it were, but voluntary.

Question:
1. Was it safe to send Onesimus back?

Read Philemon 1:12-14

Question 1. Answer 1: Coffman: As a runaway slave in Rome, Onesimus was in constant danger of falling into the hands of the slave-catchers; and it would have been dangerous to have sent him alone; therefore Paul utilized the opportunity for having Onesimus, accompanied by Tychicus [see Colossians 4:7-9] the bearer of Colossians, in the journey back to Colossae.

Matthew Henry: Even good men may sometimes need great earnestness and entreaty to lay their passions, let go their resentments, and forgive those who have injured and offended them.
Philemon 1:15-16: For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose, that you might receive him forever, 16 no longer as 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.

Questions:
1. What Bible stories does v 15 remind you of?
2. Does Paul abolish slavery?

Read Philemon 1:15-16

I love how Paul uses the word, ‘perhaps,’ to indicate that he does not assume that he knows everything about God’s will—a good lesson for us to learn. God is sovereign over the good and over the bad.

David Guzik: Somehow, departed for a while doesn’t sound nearly as bad as escaped slave

Question 1. Answer 1: It makes me think of Genesis 45:5 and the story of Joseph—‘for God sent me before you to preserve life’. Also, the story of the prodigal son and the story of Esther.

Question 2. Answer 2: No. People’s New Testament: The gospel held Christian masters responsible for both the moral and the physical welfare of their servants. This request does not abolish slavery—but it did cut the legs out from underneath it. Paul’s letter weakens the arguments for slavery. It’s good for us to remember that it would only be a matter of time before obedience to this command would eliminate slavery. It is also good to remember that it is not God’s fault that it took man hundreds of years to obey these principles to bring about an end to slavery. Why didn’t Paul command Philemon to set Onesimus free? Coffman: Had any apostle written a commandment for Christian slave owners to free their slaves . . . persecutions, already looming, would have been a thousand times more vindictive and destructive; and slaves by the thousands would have “accepted” Christianity whether converted or not, and a revolution would have been precipitated. We must remember that the amelioration of society through the abolition of slavery was not the goal of the gospel. The amelioration of man to the image of Christ for the glory of God is the goal of the gospel. John Calvin: The faith of the gospel does not overturn civil government, or set aside the power and authority which masters have over slaves. Matthew Henry: The communion of saints does not destroy distinction of property. For more on this topic of slavery in the New Testament times, see John MacArthur’s third sermon on Philemon, found here: http://www.biblebb.com/files/mac/57-1.htm. For a great overview of Roman and Hebrew slavery laws, see the introduction of Philemon commentary of The Expositor’s Greek Testament, written by W E Oesterly.

Brian Smith: We are not allowed to hold pre-Christ sins against a brother.
Next Week

- Philemon 1:17-22: Optimistic for Obedience

- Homework: memorize Philemon 1:17-22 and be able to say it to your table

- Homework: Think about times that someone paid a bill for you and times that you were hopeful that someone accomplished something that you asked him or her to do.

Next week, Paul is going to encourage Philemon some more after asking for his help.
Paul wrote **Philemon** while Paul was under house arrest in Rome, so keep that in mind as we go through.

We don’t know exactly what Onesimus did to get himself in trouble, but Onesimus got himself in trouble and ran away to Rome and we do know that Onesimus found Paul, was saved under Paul’s ministry, and Paul is sending him back to be reconciled.
During the last three weeks, we have studied the way that Paul set the stage, framed the favor, and asked Philemon for help. Today, we look at how Paul follows his formal request.
**Review**

*Names to Know*

- **Paul**: the author, currently in prison in Rome
- **Philemon**: the main recipient of the letter and Onesimus’ wronged owner
- **Jesus**: the Way, the Truth, and the Life
- **Onesimus**: the slave that ran away from Philemon and has returned

"Philemon" means "one who kisses" and "beloved." Philemon’s name is the noun form of the Greek verb, ‘phileo,’ generally translated as ‘love’ or ‘friend.’
Stand up, say your name, the translation that you’re reading from, and read the entire letter.

So, this week, we are going to look verses 17-22, but before we do, let’s make sure we’re all on the same page and let’s look at an Old Testament passage that Paul would have known about.
Paul was asking Philemon to live out Galatians 6:8-10: 8 For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. 9 And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. 10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

I want to throw a wrinkle into this story. Read Deuteronomy 23:15-16: You shall not give back to his master the slave who has escaped from his master to you. He may dwell with you in your midst, in the place which he chooses within one of your gates, where it seems best to him; you shall not oppress him.

Given Paul knew Deuteronomy 23:15-16, do you think Paul forced Onesimus to go back to Philemon? ‘ Forced’ is too strong, but yes, I think Paul sent Onesimus back. They were no longer under the Law at this point, they were under grace. Just because Onesimus became a Christian, doesn’t mean that he was free from his civil relations. Justice required Onesimus to go back. Mercy required Philemon to forgive. But God’s grace made Onesimus a brother.

The overriding thought in this passage for me is that repentance without restitution is incomplete. If there is someone that you need to repent to, and then make restitution to, do so today. Maybe you need to repent to God for your sins and become a believer.
Philemon 1:17-22 (1/5)

Philemon 1:17: If then you count me as a partner, receive him as you would me.

Questions:
1. Who do you count as a partner in your life?
2. We just finished Thanksgiving. Did you put on a ‘happy face’ when receiving anyone?

Read Philemon 1:17

‘Count’ can mean anything from ‘to have’ all the way to ‘to be joined to’ like you are joined to a spouse.

‘Partner’ is from the same root word as the Greek word, koinonia (found in Philemon 1:6, translated a variety of ways that basically indicate an intimate relationship). We are partners together in living out the full gospel (all Christians live out the first part of the gospel—salvation—but not all get to live out the full gospel—a transformed life after conversion). This koinonia required familiarity as Paul couldn’t have written this letter (or been the facilitator for reconciliation) had he not known these men well. It’s good to know those in spiritual authority over you well.

Question 1. Answer 1: My wife Julie, my pastors, my fellow deacons, my Group Leaders, many in this room, etc.

Question 2. Answer 2: Sometimes we behave differently when certain people are in the room, right? Paul is asking Philemon to behave as if Paul himself were in the room.
Philemon 1:18: But if he has wronged you or owes anything, put that on my account.

Questions:
1. Have you ever paid a bill for someone? How does that feel?
2. What is required of us when forgiving?

Read Philemon 1:18

‘If he has’ – Barnes’ Notes: He does not say that he had wronged him, but he makes a supposition that he might have done it.

‘Has wronged’ is in the aorist tense in Greek, meaning it is the meaning irrespective of time (it could easily be translated, “If he has wronged you, is wronging you, or does wrong you in the future”)

‘Put that on my account.’ Many commentators believe this phrase proves that Onesimus stole from Philemon. While that may be true, also leave open the possibility that Paul is referring to additional money that Philemon would have had to have paid to offset the missing helper. If Philemon had gone out and bought another slave, that would have been very expensive (500 days’ labor). ‘Put’ means to charge (this is good debt—debt that you don’t have to pay because Jesus paid it for us)—put is also an imperative. Paul does not promise that Philemon will not hurt Onesimus again, he just promises to pay for it. There is a risk that we will be hurt again if we forgive, but there is a certainty that we will never be whole if we do not forgive.

Martin Luther: Even as Christ did for us with God the Father, thus also does St. Paul for Onesimus with Philemon . . . we are all his Onsesimi, to my thinking. Just as we have all been in debt for things we have bought, we are in debt to God for what He has done through Jesus Christ.

Question 1. Answer 1: City of St. Louis

Question 2. Answer 2: John MacArthur: [1] Reception, open our arms, take the person back personally into love. Second, [2] restoration, take them back into useful service. Third, make sure that they have totally and completely had the debt settled [3 restitution]. If they can pay, and it is just and their desire, receive the payment. If they cannot, offer forgiveness. . . . If you want a simple definition then of forgiveness, think of it as a promise never to take revenge. It is a verbally declared promise.
Read Phil 1:19

‘I will repay’ – Ironic that Paul is talking about paying another's debts *while in prison*. What a mind for the needs and cares of others that Paul displays instead of going on and on about his own needs.

Josh Landers: Paul says he will pay for whatever it will cost Phil... but don’t forget you owe me your life. Checkmate. Paul is reminding Phil that Phil owes more than he can pay too.

Paul could have said what he said to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 4:21: *What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of gentleness?*

Question 1. Answer 1:

Question 2. Answer 2: Pastors, teachers, friends, etc.
Philemon 1:20: Yes, brother, let me have joy from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in the Lord.

Questions:
1. What has been your best monetary investment? Your worst?

2. What can we do to refresh the hearts of our pastors?

David Guzik: Paul’s appeal is powerful because he stands beside a guilty man and says to the owner of the slave, “I know this man is a criminal and deserves punishment. Yet this slave is my friend, so if you punish him punish me also. I stand beside him to take his punishment.” This is what Jesus does for us before our master, God the Father.

‘Let me’ is the Greek verb oninemi (the same root word that Onesimus’ name is based on and it means joy that comes from benefits). We have already discussed what ‘refresh my heart’ means in a prior lesson, but for any that missed it, it means the state at which your bowels are at rest and all is right with the world. David Guzik: Paul uses another play on words and the name Onesimus to communicate a not so subtle request: “Let me have Onesimus back from you in the Lord.”

Matthew Henry: Christians should do the things that may rejoice the hearts of one another.

Matthew Henry: Fruits of faith and obedience in people are the minister’s greatest joy.

Question 1. Answer 1: Best = ???; Worst = Blue Ribbon Foods

Question 2. Answer 2: Pray for them. Tell them we appreciate them. “Do you need anything?”

Remember that your actions can refresh others, so be refreshing!
Philemon 1:21-22: Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say. 22 But, meanwhile, also prepare a guest room for me, for I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you.

Questions:
1. What’s your ‘even more’?

2. Was it right of Paul to check up on Philemon?

Read Philemon 1:21-22

‘Even more’: Paul may be hinting that Philemon should set Onesimus free, but the point we shouldn’t miss is that Paul is asking, not commanding.

‘Through your prayers’: Paul did not ask Philemon to pray for him—Paul assumed Philemon was already praying for him. That’s a friend.

Paul also hints here that he may come and check up on Philemon. Trust, but validate.

Question 1. Answer 1: Paul was confident that Philemon would do ‘even more.’ Is there something that you’ve been asked to do that you really ought to do, ‘even more’ of? We are a stench to others when we fail to forgive (i.e., others can tell that something is wrong), and we certainly do not smell like Jesus Christ.

Question 2. Answer 2: Absolutely. Just because we live in a culture of ‘I am not accountable’ doesn’t mean that we’re not really accountable. We are accountable to our pastors for our obedience to the Scriptures—they have to stand before God one day and give an account of us, so we are accountable to them. This is not popular in our culture or in our church culture, but it’s true.
Next Week

- **Philemon 1:23-25**: Finishing the Farewell

- Homework: memorize **Philemon 1:23-25** and be able to say it to your table

- Homework: Think about the people in your life that are depending on you to be the Christian that God has called you to be.

Next week, Paul is going to wrap up his letter to Philemon by reminding him that there are others that are watching to see what Philemon will do as well.
POSTCARDS FROM THE EDGE

Philemon  Week 5: Finishing the Farewell
Paul wrote Philemon while Paul was under house arrest in Rome, so keep that in mind as we go through.

We don’t know exactly what Onesimus did to get himself in trouble, but Onesimus got himself in trouble and ran away to Rome and we do know that Onesimus found Paul, was saved under Paul’s ministry, and Paul is sending him back to be reconciled.
During the last four weeks, we have studied the way that Paul set the stage, framed the favor, asked Philemon for help, and was optimistic toward Philemon’s obedience. Today, we finish the series and see how Paul reminds Philemon that there are others watching.

Review
Schedule for this Series

- Week 1: Setting the Stage (vv 1-3)
- Week 2: Framing the Favor (vv 4-7)
- Week 3: Asking for Assistance (vv 8-16)
- Week 4: Optimistic for Obedience (vv 17-22)
- Week 5: Finishing the Farewell (vv 23-25)
"Philemon" means "one who kisses" and "beloved." Philemon's name is the noun form of the Greek verb, ‘phileo,’ generally translated as ‘love’ or ‘friend.’
Philemon

- Let’s read the entire letter

- Pronunciation helps
  - Philemon (phil-e’-man)
  - Apphia (aff-ee’-uh)
  - Archippus (ar-kip’-us)
  - Epaphras (ee-paf’-ras)
  - Aristarchus (airy-stark’-us)
  - Demas (dee’-muss)

Read Philemon.

Today, we finish the series by looking at verses 23-25.

Questions:
1. How do the names in this list compare to Colossians 4:7-16?
2. Who helps keep you accountable?

Question 1. Answer 1: They are the same except for Justus Jesus shows up in the Colossians 4:7-16 list. This section is why we think Philemon lived in Colossae—because the same traveling companions were with Paul at the time of both writings.

John MacArthur: "Five men, five men precious to Paul, five men precious to Philemon, five men Philemon knows, five men who know Philemon. What's he saying? He's saying you can't act independently of the fellowship. You don't act alone. If you don't forgive, you will fracture the love bond that exists between these men and you. You will violate their expectations of you. You will set a bad example for them. You can't do just what you want to do as if you existed alone. You not only have a level of accountability to one who is your spiritual leader, but you have a level of responsibility to set the standard for those who are your spiritual friends. Five men, they send their greetings, Philemon. They have high expectations of you.

John MacArthur: Faith and love have a ripple effect on everything around them.

Brian Smith: We were never called to do it on our own. . . . We were never designed to do it on our own.

Question 2. Answer 2: My wife, you all, sometimes even my kids!
Epaphras (lovely)
Shows up in Colossians 1:7; 4:12; Philemon 1:23; Under arrest with Paul at the time Philemon was written; Probably the founder of the Colossian church (from Colossians 1:7)

John Mark (a defense; ‘John’ is a Jewish name, ‘Mark’ is a Roman name)
Shows up in Acts 12:12, 35; 13:5, 13; 15:37, 39; Colossians 4:10; 2 Thessalonians 3:17; 2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 1:24; 1 Peter 5:13; Cousin or nephew of Barnabas (from Colossians 4:10); Converted by Peter (1 Peter 5:13); Author of the second gospel; Worked with Paul at Rome (Colossians 4:10; 2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 1:24); Argued over by Paul and Barnabas (from Acts 15:36-39); Waffled early (Acts 13:5) and finished strong (2 Timothy 4:11)

Aristarchus (the best ruler)
Shows up in Acts 19:29; 20:4; 27:2; Colossians 4:10; Philemon 1:24; Native of Thessalonica (Acts 20:4; 27:2); Traveled with Paul extensively; Aristarchus and Epaphras traded titles from Colossians to Philemon

Demas (governor of the people)
Shows up in Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:10; Philemon 1:24; Started strong (Colossians 4:14; Philemon 1:24) and finished weak (2 Timothy 4:10)

Luke (light-giving)
Shows up in Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 1:24; A gentile physician who wrote the third gospel and the Acts of the Apostles (28% of the New Testament—compared to Paul, who wrote 24% of the New Testament); Travelled extensively with Paul and stayed with Paul to the end (2 Timothy 4:11)
Philemon 1:25: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

Questions:
1. “Your” is plural. What does that indicate about ‘their’ spirit?
2. What does ‘amen’ mean?

Read Philemon 1:25

Question 1. Answer 1: Paul wanted it to be unified.

Question 2. Answer 2: “So be it,” or “I agree.” It was a custom, which passed over from the synagogues to the Christian churches, that when someone read or spoke, after they had prayed, that those listening would respond by saying, ‘Amen’ (making what was said their own).
Terry Brown spoke several times during the last few weeks on Philemon and was very helpful to me.

Application

- Don’t always use your authority.
- Terry Brown: The issue of what happened is not the issue; reconciliation is the issue.
- Terry Brown: As long as people work together, there will be a need for reconciliation.
- Terry Brown: Forgiveness identifies us with Jesus.
- Without reconciliation, there can be no unity.
1. Patience: Paul is asking Philemon to bring Christian principles into the evil system of slavery. Without attempting to overturn the whole system, he injects Christian grace where previously human selfishness and greed had reigned. (flavor injector) Galatians 6:9

2. Tact: Paul could have commanded Philemon to obey, but he didn’t. . . . Some one has said that tact is like a girdle. It helps us organize the awkward truth more attractively. Proverbs 25:15; Ephesians 4:15

3. Personal Appeal: We have so many excuses for non-involvement:
* We say, “I don’t want to get involved.” That’s why things get worse and not better.
* We say, “Things will never change.” Maybe not, but they sure won’t change as long as you sit on your Blessed Assurance and make excuses.
* We say, “The world is going to the devil.” No, it’s already gone to the devil a long time ago, but Jesus defeated the devil when he rose from the dead.
* We say, “I don’t have time to get involved. I’m too busy already.” If you’re too busy to lend a helping hand to hurting people, then something is badly wrong with your priorities.
* We say, “What if I get involved and fail anyway?” That might happen. Just be faithful and leave the results up to God.
4. Individual Example
*He led Onesimus to Christ—You can do that
*He risked a friendship to help a new believer—You can do that.
*He applied the gospel to a personal need—You can do that.
*He saw God’s hand at work and gave God all the credit—You can do that.
*He offered to pay the debt Onesimus owed—You can do that.
*He didn’t complain about an unjust system and about how he unfairly imprisoned and he didn’t focus on anything but the problem at hand—you can do that.

Paul didn’t do anything unusual, strange or extraordinary. He simply did what any Christian should do—and could do.

5. Initiative: You have start somewhere. In the introduction to Jimmy Carter’s book, *Sources of Strength*, President Carter tells the following story: After a personal witnessing experience with Eloy Cruz, an admirable Cuban pastor who had surprising rapport with very poor immigrants from Puerto Rico, I asked him for the secret of his success. He was modest and embarrassed, but he finally said, “Senor Jimmy, we only need to have two loves in our lives: for God, and for the person who happens to be in front of us at any time.”
The most famous quote from all of the commentaries is the one by Martin Luther: for we are all His Onesimi.

However, when I started this series, I sent out an email asking for input from our class related to what they had seen the second time through the letter to Philemon that they didn’t see the first time through. I got a tremendous amount of input, but the best summary (in my opinion) of all of the input, commentaries, dictionaries, encyclopedias, and research that I did came from one of our class members—Alissa Calhoun:

Onesimus means “useful” which was what Paul was wanting Philemon to do . . . to use Onesimus although Onesimus had not been useful to Philemon when he was with him before. It shows that the Lord can change anyone willing to give Him their heart and control of their life and make them useful for Christ.

What is your story of forgiveness?