

- Welcome back everyone, this morning – we begin a new book of the Bible.
 - I guess you wouldn't call it a book, but rather a letter of the Bible because it's only 1 Chapter long.
 - A one-chapter letter, “a letter called Philemon”.
- Now - as you have heard me say before, the introduction is in many ways – my favorite part of a new book or letter.
 - Primarily because context is the key when studying scripture.
 - Therefore, knowing who the letter was written to and more importantly why the letter was written is extremely important if you want to interpret the book or letter correctly.
 - And by the way – I really can't emphasize this point enough, mainly because of all the *Bible Bingo* that goes around in our society today.
 - Where someone pulls out a verse of scripture and uses it as their “proof text” all for the purposes of proving or disproving a point.
 - The problem is, about 90 plus percent of the time the verse they are using is wrong because they missed the context of the writings.
 - A great example of what I am trying to convey shows up in several verses throughout the Bible and so, I choose a few this morning to prove what I am saying.

[Jeremiah 29:11](#) “For I know the plans that I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.”

- This verse was first on this list because it's so frequently taken out of context.
 - Remember, this verse wasn't written in a context of God speaking directly to *you* (the modern-day reader).
 - It was a promise God gave to His chosen people – the Jews.
 - In Jeremiah, God promises the Hebrews, who are being held captive in Babylon, that He will bring them freedom.
 - The “prosperity” mentioned here is about meeting their practical physical needs.
 - It's not about modern readers magically becoming affluent just because they believe in God.
 - This verse also has a harsh edge when shared out of context – for example
 - For example – When someone has a chronic ailment, and then this verse is prescribed to offer “magical healing.”
 - Problem is, when a misunderstood promise doesn't come to pass, people's faith can be weakened.
 - Next on the list we have:

[Philippians 4:13](#) **“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”**

- This verse shows up frequently in athletic environments, from Steph Curry writing the verse on his shoes, to Tim Tebow referencing the verse on his face stickers
 - The insinuation is that professional athletes will have a competitive edge because they believe in Jesus.
 - However, in context, Paul writes this statement while awaiting trial (and potential execution) for preaching about Jesus’ resurrection.
 - Paul’s encouraging the Philippian church to endure their suffering by remembering that Christ, who overcame death, is the source of their strength.
 - It’s about finding an inner strength when you’re enduring spiritual adversity, not about being magically blessed with an athletic or professional competitive edge.
 - Let’s do one more – and then we will move on

[Matthew 7:1](#) **“Do not judge so that you will not be judged.”**

- Accompanied by the quote “only God can judge me,” people may interpret this verse to mean that nobody has authority to assert that there’s clear right and wrong.
 - However, saying “only God can judge me” doesn’t come from Bible, it comes from a rap song!
 - If this verse meant that humans must stop judging each other, we ought to terminate our justice systems and simply trust God to intervene and punish people who commit crimes.
 - Certainly, our society’s stronger for establishing rules to govern what behavior we’ll tolerate and what must be stopped.
 - One reason many people avoid the church is because they’re bothered by hypocrisy and self-righteousness among believers.
 - To strengthen our witness, we need to root out the “holier-than-thou” attitudes, making it clear that *everyone* is welcome in our churches.
- So, just remember what I’ve said – especially when someone quotes scripture – and tries to use it to back up a theological or doctrinal theory or concept.
 - When someone does this to me – I always say – let’s see if you are correct by “backing up and asking some fundamental questions.
 - “Let’s see if what you are saying still holds true after putting those verses into context!
 - All we must do to put their theory to the test is to ask the fundamental questions:
 - Who wrote the letter?
 - Who was it written to?
 - And why did they write the letter in the first place?

- Or what issue or problem does the letter or book address in that particular verse?
- And if you do that – you will be amazed at the outcome, which, generally speaking, has nothing to do with the individual’s theological theory or concept.
- Moving on, so today we will begin our teaching on the letter of Philemon, and for most people, if you say – I am studying Philemon, they will say, “You are studying what?”
 - And that’s understandable, given the fact as I said earlier, this letter is only 25 verses long.
- Having said that, as you know it’s nothing for us to extract up to 5 teachings out of one Chapter.
 - So, it could last longer than you think – or maybe not.
- So, Philemon? Who in the world is Philemon?
 - Furthermore – who wrote this letter?
 - And why did they write it?
 - These are the questions we should be asking ourselves. So, let's answer them.
- First – we will begin our journey – by answering the question who wrote it?
 - It was Paul.
 - Which by the way just a side-bar, if someone ever asks you who wrote a particular book in the New Testament and you don’t know the answer, you will have a better than 50 percent chance of getting it right if you say – Paul.
 - Kind of like penciling in “C” on standardized testing.
 - And why – Paul wrote 13-14 of the 27 books of the New Testament.
 - Which means Paul by himself, wrote most of the New Testament.
 - With John coming in second with 5 books or letters
- So, Paul wrote Philemon, but who was he writing it to or maybe more importantly – why did he write it?
 - Paul wrote this letter to a man named Philemon – to “pacify” and or promote reconciliation between a slave (his slave, a man named Onesimus) and his master (this man known as Philemon).
 - Philemon was a Christian believed to have come to faith under Paul’s leadership.
 - Possibly while Paul was in Ephesus ministering.
 - So, Philemon was a believer – and he was a wealthy man.
 - A man who lived in Colossae (CO-LEE-SEE) – which of course, made him a Colossian.
 - And as with most wealthy people in those days, Philemon had slaves – or at least he had one slave.
 - And that slave was a man named Onesimus.
- But what in the world does that have to do with Paul? And why would Paul write a letter to this man?

- Well – it turns out, Onesimus wasn't just any slave.
 - He was a runaway slave.
- No one knows why he ran away specifically, but popular beliefs think he ran away, not because he was being treated poorly, but because Philemon gave him great freedom.
 - And I will elaborate on that a little bit later in our teaching.
- So Onesimus ran away from Philemon, but where did he go?
 - To Rome.
 - Why did he go to Rome?
 - Once again, the belief is it would have been easier for him to fade into the crowd – because Rome at that time consisted of some 450K-500K people.
 - Now while he was there, he just so happened to run into Paul.
 - This may seem insignificant to you, but I assure you it's not.
 - It was divine appointment.
 - I mean – think about it, Colossae was 1300 miles away from Rome, and that's as the crow flies.
 - Which would have meant you must catch a boat ride to go straight there
 - And so – that would have been like you walking from Nashville to Hartford Connecticut and arriving in a town of 500K people, when you were from a town of roughly 50K people.
 - Then of course, magically running into Paul – the man who led your master to Christ.
 - Coincidence – I don't think so!
- So, Philemon runs away to Rome – and runs into Paul. And there Paul leads him to the Lord as well, and from there we are told that Onesimus becomes a valuable helper to Paul.
 - And then Paul (at some point) discovers that Onesimus was slave who belongs to Philemon.
 - Even though, Paul desired to keep Onesimus with him, he felt a greater responsibility to return Onesimus to his master.
 - You see, Paul eternally knew – Onesimus needed to make things right with Philemon.
- Paul and Onesimus also knew the dangers a slave faced when returning as a runaway.
 - Since slaves were generally considered property, which meant Paul had somewhat (in a sense) stolen Onesimus.
 - Or at least at a minimum – he harbored Philemon's property.
- So as I said earlier, Paul wrote this 25-verse letter to “pacify” Philemon and to promote reconciliation between a slave and his master.
 - Now, all this all seems simple enough, but one question I have is - How does this

letter get delivered to Philemon?

- It wasn't by the Post Office – or Fedex or UPS.
 - It was hand delivered.
 - Which meant – it probably arrived earlier – than if the Post Office delivered it!
- So, who delivered it?
- Well – it was delivered by a man named Tychicus (Tit-ti kus) – but he wasn't alone – he was accompanied by Onesimus as well.
 - And we will talk more about Tychicus later.
 - And so – with that background behind us, let's dig into Philemon.
 - And here is what Paul wrote and my NASB 95 translation calls this section *Salutation* – (which is nothing more than a greeting!)

**[Philemon 1:1](#) Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,
To Philemon our beloved *brother* and fellow worker,
[Philemon 1:2](#) and to Apphia (Aaa -fee- uh) our sister, and to Archippus (ahh-key-
pus) our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house:
[Philemon 1:3](#) Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus
Christ.**

- So Paul begins his opening salutation in a unique way, where He refers to himself a prisoner.
 - And just and FYI to you, the letter to Philemon is the only letter he wrote – in which he references himself this way.
 - In all his other writings he calls himself - either an apostle or bondservant of Jesus Christ.
 - But never a prisoner!
 - So, wonder what that's all about?
 - Well – if you think about the context of this letter, I believe it is easy to arrive at the answer.
 - Just remember, who it was that Paul was writing to and what he was writing about.
 - He was writing this letter to Philemon on behalf of his run a way slave, Onesimus.
 - So, there is no doubt Paul is trying to make a connection with Philemon.
- Another important item to remember is that Paul is writing this letter from prison.
 - A place where God put him, which gives him a distinct advantage when speaking about a prisoner and or slavery.
 - And by the way, the fact that God places him in prison – that experience is what allows him to relate to both Philemon and Onesimus.

- It reinforces what James tells us in [James 1:1-2](#) when he said the following:
- Listen to what James wrote on the topic of trials and tribulations specifically – what they do for us.

[James 1:1](#) **James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,
To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings.**

[James 1:2](#) **Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials,**

[James 1:3](#) **knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.**

[James 1:4](#) **And let endurance have *its* perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.**

- So, the next time you experience various trials, trouble of any kind, when you are going through something.
 - Never forget – God is doing something in your life.
 - Preparing you – qualifying you is the way I like to put it – so that you can minister to others who have experienced the same type of trial and tribulation.
 - And sure enough, we see that pictured through the life of Paul.
 - The fact that Paul has been a prisoner and considers himself a slave of Jesus Christ has earned him the right and authority to speak on the matter.
 - And for that reason, it would be fitting for him to describe himself this way.
 - Because he himself (no doubt) understands what it means to be a prisoner and or bond servant i.e. a slave.
 - Basically, Paul is not asking Philemon for any type of measure of sacrifice – as one who knows nothing of sacrifice, but rather – he is speaking as a prisoner / a bondsman.
 - Pleading on behalf of another prisoner or bondsman whose story is the focus and burden of this letter.
 - And we will see that to be the case as Paul points to his own bonds, no less than six times in this brief letter.
- Now, by considering Paul’s statement, the looming question for all of us sitting here today should be-
 - Do we see ourselves in this light?
 - Do we see ourselves as prisoners and or bondservants of Jesus Christ.
 - Before we say yes, let us consider what that means, because at its core – it means our life is not our own.
 - It belongs to God!
 - It been purchased with a price!
 - And we no longer own it!
 - And therefore, everything we do (actually - in everything we say and do) should

be done with one thought in mind.

- Is what I am doing pleasing my Master.
- Or maybe even more than that, is what I am doing what my Master wants me to do.
- That's really what's at the core of what it means to be a prisoner or bondservants at heart. Are we pleasing our Master?
 - By the way – I realize this is easier said than done, but it is accomplishable.
- It is accomplishable if we are cognitive and aware of our position before Christ.
- Meaning, it's accomplishable if we have a correct view of ourselves.
 - Which is what?
- Well – let's allow Isaiah to tell us what that view should be.
- Now, before I read this – I want you to think about the experience Isaiah is having here, because – if you realize the situation he finds himself in, that's what will help you come to the realization of how insignificant we really are.
 - More specifically – how insignificant we will be when we stand before the God of creation.
 - Let me read it to you:

Isaiah 6:1 In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple.

Isaiah 6:2 Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.

Isaiah 6:3 And one called out to another and said,

“Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts,
The whole earth is full of His glory.”

Isaiah 6:4 And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke.

Isaiah 6:5 Then I said,

“Woe is me, for I am ruined!
Because I am a man of unclean lips,
And I live among a people of unclean lips;
For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts.”

Isaiah 6:6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs.

Isaiah 6:7 He touched my mouth *with it* and said, “Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven.”

- So, all you must do to see yourself in the correct light is to read Isaiah's encounter with God.
 - We as humans all possess an element of pride in our conscious and or subconscious, and we all tend to see ourselves in the most favorable light possible.

- But when you pause for a moment and think about it – think about what it’s going to be like – on the day you meet the Creator of the universe.
 - When you stand before God.
 - Isaiah’s account of this moment – will give you just a taste of that moment.
- We don’t know exactly what it will be like, but I can assure you – based on all accounts of those who encountered God in the Bible, our encounter – upon our death – is not going to begin with us saying, Hey God – “ole buddy ole pal,”
 - How’s it been?
 - I am so glad to be here.
 - I’ve been waiting a long time to meet you.
- That’s not what it’s going to be like.
- In reality – it will begin with you hitting your knees and falling prostrate on your face.
- An encounter with our Holy and Righteous God will be an encounter of trepidation met with extreme humility and reverence.
 - Which is how we should live each day, and some of us do a better job of this than others.
 - But none of us do it to the degree we should.
- Humility is the key – when trying to please our Master – and as I said, this is tough.
 - Primarily – because our attention is consistently being held captive by the “shiny” things of this world.
- So – how do we accomplish this seemingly insurmountable feat – if we want to stay humble and remain in a consistent place of thankfulness and gratitude?
 - How do we do it? Anyone know?
 - I’ll let Paul give you the answer, and it shows up in [Romans 12:1-3](#) – listen to what he says.

[Romans 12:1](#) Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship.

[Romans 12:2](#) And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

[Romans 12:3](#) For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.

- In verse 1 of Romans 12, Paul says – “I urge you” – which is one of the tenderest expressions in the Bible.

- The Greek says – I exhort therefore you, brothers through the compassions of God.
- Another way to say it is, I strongly encourage you!
- Paul uses this expression, at least 50 times in his letters and the reason I am highlighting this word is because – Paul doesn't put forth this statement as a command.
 - He isn't forcing them to do this, which is where freewill enters the picture BTW
 - We have a choice in the matter. We can do it or not.
 - But if we do it – we must do so, with the correct attitude which is from a place of humility!
 - So – the concept is this – I am urging and encouraging you to do this, but it's your choice.
- You can live your life in an intentional and deliberate way, at least in your intent of living for Christ or you can skip it.
 - But if you skip it, your life lived out on this planet will not be a fulfilled one.
 - Matter a fact, your life will look a lot like the life of an unbeliever.
 - Which is what?
 - Confused – without understanding.
 - And without the Peace that only God can give.

[Romans 12:1](#) Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship.

- The concept here is that of any sacrifice – it's an all or nothing proposition.
 - Meaning – it's not a partial sacrifice.
 - Paul wants us to present our bodies.
 - Our whole being.
 - Everything we have as a Holy Sacrifice.
 - And that and that alone – is all that will be acceptable before God.
- When we do that, it's at that point we have fulfilled our obligation to our Lord and Savior – hence our Spiritual Service of worship (as Paul calls it).
 - But how do we do that?
 - How do we present our bodies as a living and holy sacrifice?
 - Well – he tells us in verse 2 of Romans 12.

[Romans 12:2](#) And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

- Once again, let's talk freewill here. We are urged to do something. To not be conformed to this world.
 - But how do we do that? By staying out of it.
 - What does that mean?
 - It means stay out of it
 - Stay away from the things the world loves.
 - That's how we please our Master – it's by the choices we make with our time.
 - By the things we read – watch – participate in.
 - By what we allow to enter our minds.
 - One more time –

[Romans 12:2](#) And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

- So – how do we become a living and holy sacrifice?
 - By refraining from participating in the things of this world.
 - And replacing that activity with something else.
 - Which is then what transforms us and or renews our mind!
 - I love the way Paul says this because it tells us a couple of things.
 - Number 1 – it tells us we can do what God has urged us to do
 - Which means it's accomplishable.
 - Number 2 – the way we accomplish it is by renewing our mind.
- And this is where we will close because honestly – this is where we begin to grasp the concept of what it means to be a slave or prisoner or bondservant.
 - Which (as I said) is how we should see ourselves if we want to see ourselves in the correct light.
 - We must look into a Spiritual Mirror, and see ourselves not the way we imagine ourselves to be.
 - Rather we must see ourselves as the way we truly are.
 - Which is a people of unclean lips.
 - And the only way that can happen is when we study God's Word and He reveals Himself to us.
 - That's what Paul means when he says, “But be transformed by the renewing of your mind”.
 - One quick note relating to Paul's words here, I want you to notice – this is not a one-time thing.

- Paul's words convey to us that this is something ongoing – meaning we must do it repeatedly.
- If we desire to stay in a right relationship with God, and this process is simple – yet complex at times.
- If we want to be renewed in Christ – and become that living and holy sacrifice, it all begins by replacing the things of this world – with the things of God.
 - And for believers that thing of God is only one thing.
 - It's His Word!
 - Because His Word is Him in Word Form!
- Which means on a practical level, instead of watching something that would not please our Master, we must read or listen to something that is.
 - Which is tough – trust me I know.
 - Primarily because the things this world offers requires little to no sacrifice.
- It's easy to get caught up in the things of this world.
 - TV – Internet – our Phones.
 - Requires little to no effort.
- Whereas the things of God require sacrifice.
- It requires us to make an intentional and or conscious decision – specifically as it relates to what we will spend our time on.
 - Is it “Tik Tok” or “Facebook” or “Instagram” or whatever.
 - Or is it time in God's Word studying or listening to sermons of Bible Teachers.
 - And so, let me just say as we close, Paul calls himself a prisoner because that's what he was.
 - And that's what we are.
 - God owns us – and our life is not our own, and his calling is our calling.
 - We are no different!
 - Amen – Amen!

- So, this morning we pick back up with the letter of Philemon where 2 weeks ago we spent most of our teaching on the introduction of this letter.
 - And of course, as you know the introduction is my favorite part of any new book or letter.
 - Primarily because it is essential in understanding the “who” and the “why” of the letter
 - Which means the introduction is key if you want to stay in “context” which is critical - if you want to interpret the book - letter and or the verses correctly
 - I am not going to re-hash the whole introduction this morning, but I do feel we need to do a quick re-cap of it so that we can follow along accurately with today’s teaching
- So, Philemon – Who wrote it – well, it was Paul – right?
 - But why did the translators name this letter Philemon?
 - It was entitled Philemon – because it was written to a man named Philemon.
 - And who was Philemon. He was a wealthy man – who lived in the town of Colossae.
 - A man who came to faith under Paul’s teaching while Paul was teaching and preaching in Ephesus.
 - But why did Paul write it? He wrote it – because while Paul was in Rome, he encountered a runaway slave.
 - A man who came to faith – under Paul’s teaching.
 - Also, a man who became very useful and helpful to Paul in his ministry.
 - And this man’s name was none other than Onesimus.
 - Now slaves were very common in those days, nothing unusual about that.
 - The unusual part was Paul eventually discovered that this runaway slave wasn’t just any runaway slave.
 - He was a slave who belonged to Philemon, which meant he was Philemon’s property.
- So – Paul does what he should have done and he convinces Onesimus to return to his master.
 - Now this sounds simple enough, and it was – but it wasn’t.
 - Reason being Onesimus wasn’t just a runaway slave. He was a runaway slave who stole from his Master.
- Now – I want to pause here for just a minute and let you know that during our introductory teaching of Philemon I made a statement, and upon further study this past week I discovered that statement was incorrect.
 - And what was the statement? I said Onesimus fled his Master, but I didn’t think he did anything wrong. He simply ran away!
 - The truth is – that wasn’t the case, and it turns out that before he ran away, he stole some money from Philemon.

- But for some reason, I didn't catch it.
 - Paul tells us this in Verse 18 of this letter and we will see that when we get there in our study.
- So, in the spirit of teaching things correctly I wanted to speak a re-traction – and just let you know that sometimes – not often – but occasionally, I may miss something
 - But if I do – I assure you I will correct it.
 - So, with that information before us, let's pick back up with the purpose of the letter.
 - Because that information – changes things quite a bit – as you might imagine.
 - Onesimus was a runaway slave.
 - Who stole from his Master Philemon.
 - And as you can imagine, a runaway slave – who stole money from his master wouldn't generally be looked upon in a favorable light if he returned home.
- So, Paul – in effort to potentially pave the way for Onesimus to return in the most favorable way possible, he writes this letter to Philemon.
 - Hoping He will not only be accepted but be accepted back as a brother in Christ.
 - Not just a slave
 - And that my friends is the context of this letter.
 - But there is much more to it than Paul simply trying to encourage Philemon to receive Onesimus in a favorable way.
 - And the extraction of the much more to it part, is what my job is.
- As a Pastor / Teacher I am to reach into the old and teach the manuscript to you in context and then pull “the old” into a practical application for all of us sitting here today.
 - An example of that being – What we did in the opening introduction of this letter, where Paul started out his writings by calling himself a “prisoner” of Jesus Christ.
- Now, for most of us sitting here today we would read this and simply pass it by – but not us.
 - Because God's Word is so powerful that even the opening salutation warrants an entire sermon built around it.
 - Let's read our opening verses one more time, so we can keep with the theme or context of Paul's letter.
 - [Philemon 1:1-3](#) My NASB 95 translation calls this section *Salutation* –
 - And as previously stated “The Salutation” is nothing more than a greeting! So, once again – here is what Paul wrote.

[Philemon 1:1](#) Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,
 To Philemon our beloved *brother* and fellow worker,
[Philemon 1:2](#) and to Apphia (Aaa -fee- uh) our sister, and to Archippus (ahh-key-
 pus) our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house:

Philemon 1:3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

- Paul begins this letter by identifying himself as a prisoner of Jesus Christ.
 - Which makes him what? Essentially a slave.
- Now – I want you to remember, Paul was imprisoned when he wrote this letter.
 - So – writing a letter about a slave while he was slave should have had some impact on the content and context of his writings – wouldn't you say?
 - In other words, because Paul was a slave – that experience allowed him to write from the perspective of a slave.
 - And by the way God knew Paul would be imprisoned and He also knew that as a prisoner he would garner the perspective it took – to write to Philemon.
 - And I touched on this last time a little bit but let me further expound on it before we move forward.
- When I teach you Philemon in context, you get the story. You hear and read it for what it is.
 - A letter written by Paul – To Philemon on behalf of a runaway slave named Onesimus – that's the story.
 - But the story behind the story is where today's application comes into play.
- Let me explain what I mean. You see because Paul was a slave himself, he could write this letter with authority.
 - Authority as one who knew what it meant to be a slave.
 - Which tells us something – it tells exactly what James told us in [James 1:1-2](#) when he explained how God uses trials and tribulation to accomplish certain outcomes in our lives.
- And what is it – that those trials and tribulations accomplish? Well, James tells us that it creates in us – endurance, which results in us becoming “complete lacking in nothing”
 - It also strengthens our resolve as it relates to our faith, and it does this by building us up and by breaking us down.
 - And once that process is complete, it affords us the ability to become a useful instrument of God.
 - Meaning, it builds us up so that we can in turn minister to others.
 - That's why James says, “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials”.
 - In essence, what James is saying is that you can never totally appreciate light unless you have known darkness.
 - And the same is true for Peace. You can never totally appreciate peace unless you experienced turmoil.
 - And you can never appreciate God's Goodness – unless you've experienced evil.

- So, God's instrument for your development (if you are a believer) is Hard Times
- If you see those hard times in that light – it will give you peace when you're in the middle of the storm.
- So, Paul – as a prisoner of Jesus Christ, knows a little about what it means to be a slave, and his experience affords him the ability to write from that perspective.
 - And so, what's the application for us?
 - Well, it's simple. Your life hardships are what qualify you for ministry.
 - Meaning, if you've ever been divorced – you probably understand what that feels like and therefore you can speak authoritatively on the subject.
 - If you've been broke, then you probably know a little about how that feels
 - If you've lost a child – a parent.
 - If you've had cancer.
 - Etc.. so, on and so forth. You get the point.
 - Whatever it may be, your hardships have done something to you.
 - They've molded you and afforded you the opportunity to minister to other people who are experiencing the same thing.
 - This next statement is the key.
 - Every hardship you have endured, (all of it, every millisecond of it) has purpose and meaning.
 - And God (believe it or not) has deemed you worthy to go through that trial.
 - In reality, He's allowed it to happen to you, all for His Glory!
- So, the only remaining question for you and I is – Are you using what God has allowed you to go through for His Glory?
 - Or have you put it on the shelf, only pulling it out at “cocktail parties”, using it as a talking point!
 - I hope that's not the case, but for many Christians it is.
 - And if that's true for you, that you haven't put your hardships to work in your calling, then just know – that was not its purpose.
 - God means for you to put your experiences to good use.
- Which means if you are sitting here today and you've been wondering how you can get involved in the work of ministry, then the answer might be staring you in the face.
 - It could simply start with the trial and tribulations you've experienced.
 - Let me explain what I mean and then we will press on further into Philemon.
 - If you've been divorced – maybe you would like to help start a divorce recovery ministry.
 - If you have experienced financial hardship, then maybe you bring Dave Ramsey's Financial Peace class to our fellowship.
 - If you have lost a child – maybe you start a grief care ministry.

- I am not saying that you must do this, I am simply saying – your life disasters (those experiences), have given you the opportunity to give back.
- And to do it, all for God's Glory
 - So, consider allowing God to use you.
- By the way – if God lays something like this on your heart and you feel led to do something, but don't know what do – please grab me and let's talk – because I assure you that I can help you with it.
- Moving on – back to our introductory verses:

Philemon 1:2 and to Apphia (Aaa -fee- uh) our sister, and to Archippus (ahh-key-pus) our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house:

Philemon 1:3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

- So, who in the world is Apphia (Aaa-fee-uh) and Archippus (Ahh-key-pus)?
 - It appears based on the final words in verse 2, which give us a hint by the way, Apphia (Aaa-fee-uh) was Philemon's wife, and Archippus (Ahh-key-pus) was Philemon's son.
 - And that seems plausible since Paul is addressing the household of Philemon.
 - The place where they are having church.
 - Home church – which was common in that day!
 - Then Paul says, “Grace to you and peace from God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ”
 - This was a common greeting that Paul uses in all 13 of his letters
- So, Paul not only addresses Philemon directly, but he also addresses Philemon's family, who know doubt – also knew Onesimus the runaway slave.
 - Moving on – next, we enter a section that the translators entitle “Philemon's Love and Faith”.

**Philemon 1:4 I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers,
Philemon 1:5 because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints;**

- Now let me pause here for just a moment because what I am about to point out is very critical as it pertains to prayer.
 - Paul says, I make mention of you in my prayers, but my question is – What exactly is he praying for on their behalf?
 - Let me ask it a different way, what is it that you would pray for – if you were praying for this group and or situation?

- Let's just take a stab at it by asking ourselves the question, what is it that we pray for (generally speaking)?
- If there is nothing to pray for specifically –
 - Prosperity?
 - Health?
 - Protection?
 - Peace?
 - Comfort?
 - Safety?
- But what does Paul pray for? I'll give you a hint – it's the same thing he always prays for, and it shows up in verse 6.

[Philemon 1:6](#) **and I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake.**

[Philemon 1:7](#) **For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.**

[Philemon 1:8](#) **Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you to do what is proper,**

[Philemon 1:9](#) **yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you—since I am such a person as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—**

- Paul begins verse 4 by saying “I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers,”
 - Paul says, I thank my God, and I want to stop here for just a minute to explain something.
 - I want you to notice – 2 things.
 - And the first is simple – Notice that Paul thanks God.
 - I won't spend too much time on this, only to say – never forget to thank God!
- And remember – thankfulness is not something you should have to think about doing, but rather it's an attitude. An attitude of gratitude
 - But what if I don't feel being thankful?
 - Thank Him anyway.
 - Matter a fact, I would tell you that thanking God – when you don't feel like it might be one of the most powerful things you can do.
 - Because thanking Him when everything is going your way is easy – anyone can do that – but praising Him in the storm is tough and it requires an act of faith.
 - And according to [Hebrews 11:6](#) Without faith it's impossible to please God.
- I just want you to know that trusting God when things are bad - specifically - in the midst

- of heartache, is one of the deepest acts of faith a Christian can ever display.
- And possibly – it’s that act of faith that pleases God more than any other act.
 - And it just may be that act that brings you through the trial.
 - Trusting and praising God when you don’t feel like it is key, but there is a second point I would like to make about verse 4
 - And that is – I want you to notice how personal Paul’s relationship with God is.
 - Paul’s God – isn’t just some God – it’s his God – and he has an intimate and personal relationship with Him.
 - He said I thank my God.
 - The Greek says it differently.
 - It says – “I thank the God of me”.
 - And these words tell us something – They give us insight into what would be the unique and strategically designed relationship that God has with each one of His children.
 - Meaning – the personal nature of his relationship with God tells us that God has an individual, unique, and special relationship with every one of His children.
 - And with that understanding before us, Paul is letting us know that our God isn’t just some God with a hands-off approach
 - A God who has a one size fits all relationship with His people.
 - On the contrary, each and every one of His children are different, just like each and every one of our children are different. And God knows that.
 - Matter a fact – the scriptures testify to exactly that and it goes as far as telling us in [Luke 12:7](#) that God knows us so well that He actually knows how many hairs are on our heads.
 - Which means, He knows us better than we know ourselves
 - And so, our relationship with Him is unique and special and it can be as deep and personal as you will allow it to be.
 - So – once again, does your relationship with God look this way? Or maybe a better question is, can you imagine it being this way?
 - Because if not, then I want you to know it can be that way.
 - All you must do is prioritize Him in your life – through prayer and the study of His word, and if you do that then I assure you your relationship with God will take on a whole different meaning.
 - Pressing on, verses 4-6 – one more time, and back to Paul’s prayer for these people
 - I made the statement earlier that Paul makes mention of them in his prayers, but do you wonder what the prayer he is praying on their behalf? Well – let’s see

**[Philemon 1:4](#) I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers,
[Philemon 1:5](#) because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward**

the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints;

Philemon 1:6 and I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake.

- So Paul says, I am praying for you – and when you study it in the Greek, the sense is that he prays for them often.
 - And by the way, I would think that Paul had an extensive prayer list.
 - And just FYI to you, one the best things you can ever obtain as a believer is a prayer journal because it's really difficult to remember everyone we say we will pray for.
 - Mrs. Daffney bought me a really nice prayer journal a few years back, and it really helps keep you on track with your prayer life.
 - So – if you don't have one then consider getting one.
- Anyways, back to the text. Paul says he's praying for them, and then in verse 6 he gives us insight into the specifics of his prayer
 - And what is it? One more time Verse 6 – and this is where we will close this morning.

Philemon 1:6 and I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake.

- The Greek actually says “So that the fellowship of “the faith” of you, effective might become in (the acknowledgement) of every good (thing) that (is) in us, in Christ”
 - So, notice Paul doesn't pray for prosperity, he doesn't pray for protection, for healing, for peace – for anything that relates to improving their earthly life.
 - Instead, he prays that their faith might become “effective”.
 - Another way to say it is “Activated”
 - And how is it activated? Through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake
- Let me paraphrase it for you – Paul's prayer for them is the same prayer he always prays.
 - He prays that by the increasing of the knowledge of who God is they would be moved to action in their faith.
 - In other words, knowledge of who God is – (those ahh haa! moments of who God is), is what activates our participation in the work of ministry.
 - Knowledge is key because knowledge is what produces action.
 - And one of the best section of verses that models this concept shows up in the book of Acts, where Peter speaks to the crowd and lets them know – that the man they crucified was none other than the Messiah.
- I am not going to read it all other than to highlight the “spirit” of Acts 2 – which then will give us insight into this concept of knowledge and or revelation being the key in moving us to action

- Specifically, what happened after the people came to the knowledge of what they had done to Christ
 - And moreover, how their actions were prophetic in nature.
- Meaning – how everything that happened to Christ was preplanned by God in advance
 - Listen to Luke's words here.

[Acts 2:22](#) “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—

[Acts 2:23](#) this *Man*, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death.

[Acts 2:24](#) “But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.

- These were Peter's words to the crowd – after they had already crucified Him.
 - Which then – that knowledge (when fully realized) – is what led them to say this:

[Acts 2:37](#) Now when they heard *this*, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brethren, what shall we do?”

[Acts 2:38](#) Peter *said* to them, “Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

- Next, let's skip forward to their response – and we will close.

[Acts 2:41](#) So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

[Acts 2:42](#) They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

- This is just one example of many in the scriptures of how knowledge about God, specifically about His plans, moved these people through an “ahh haa” moment to a place of action.
 - Which tells us why Paul always prays a prayer that revolves around God's people becoming enlightened through knowledge of Himself.
 - And that statement should give us an “ahh haa” moment in of itself.
 - And what is the “ahh haa” moment we should be having?

- It's that if we want to please God, and if we want to participate in the calling we have as believers – Which is what? To participate in the work of ministry – We cannot do that if we walk around clueless and confused about who God is and what He expects.
- Coupled with the realization and knowledge of how our life on this earth should not be our focus.
- I'll leave you with this to better explain what I mean. Paul put it all into perspective when he said this in [Philippians 1:21](#)

[Phil. 1:21](#) For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

- In other words, no matter my plight – no matter my situation – my life belongs to God.
 - And if he decides to leave me here on this earth, then I will live my life for Christ.
 - And if he takes me home – Praise God – I consider this gain.
 - Amen – Amen!!

- This morning, we will pick back up with our journey through Philemon. Today will be in our 3rd teaching in this letter and so far, we only managed to get through roughly 9 verses, and then of course of those 9 verses, I have only taught 6 of them.
 - So, this morning we will pick back up where we left off last week.
 - And as I always do, I want to bring you up to speed as it relates to where we are
 - And so, where are we?
 - Well Paul (as you know by now) wrote the letter of Philemon – on behalf of a man named Onesimus.
 - And as we have learned, Onesimus was a runaway slave – who belonged to a man named Philemon.
- Now what we know about Philemon is this:
 - First – he was a wealthy man.
 - Second – he lived in Colossae.
 - And third – he was a man who came to faith under Paul’s teaching while Paul was in Ephesus.
- Onesimus on the other hand:
 - He was a runaway slave who not only ran away from his Master, but (apparently) as he was fleeing he stole some money from Philemon as well.
 - Which – as you could imagine – was not a good thing.
 - Given the punishment Onesimus would face if he were caught now – when Onesimus left, he headed for Rome.
 - Which was some 1300 miles away!
 - And while he was in Rome, he “coincidentally” ran into the Apostle Paul.
 - Where Paul had the honor and privilege of leading him to Christ as well.
- Now we don’t know for sure, but it doesn’t appear that Paul (at first) knew that Onesimus was Philemon’s slave.
 - But at some point he made that discovery, and upon that discovery Paul knows he must talk Onesimus into returning to Philemon.
 - And by the way there were at least two reasons for that.
 - 1st – it was the law, and it was the right thing to do.
 - 2nd – Philemon was a person who was near and dear to his heart.
- So Paul convinces Onesimus to return to his Master. And in an effort to “soften the blow” upon his return, Paul decides to write the letter of Philemon.
 - And to be honest with you – who better to write a letter to a Master about his slave than a man who knew what it meant to be slave/prisoner himself.
 - Our man the Apostle Paul.
 - The reason that he was God's perfect choice was simple.
 - Paul (as we know) was in prison himself when he wrote Philemon.

- So, who better to craft this letter!
- So that's a little background on the letter, and as always – if you want the full introduction, you can also find this on the [Verse by Verse Ministry International website](#), and begin with our first teaching on this letter.
 - Anyways, so back to our teaching of Philemon, where I will pick back up to verse 1 – and bring us forward to verse 9 and then begin today's teaching with verse 7. Follow with me if you will – [Philemon 1:1-9](#)

[Philemon 1:1](#) Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,
To Philemon our beloved *brother* and fellow worker,

[Philemon 1:2](#) and to Apphia (Aaa -fee- uh) our sister, and to Archippus (ahh-key-pus) our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house:

[Philemon 1:3](#) Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

[Philemon 1:4](#) I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers,

[Philemon 1:5](#) because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints;

[Philemon 1:6](#) *and I pray* that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake.

[Philemon 1:7](#) For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.

[Philemon 1:8](#) Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you *to do* what is proper,

[Philemon 1:9](#) yet for love's sake I rather appeal *to you*—since I am such a person as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—

- Picking up – Paul says in verse 7:

[Philemon 1:7](#) For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.

- I won't spend a lot of time on this verse, only to say that isn't it interesting – what brought Paul joy and comfort.
 - It was Philemon's love for the people.
 - Specifically, how it refreshed the hearts of the saints.
 - In other words, Philemon's love towards the saints refreshed them.
 - It wasn't a motivational speech that refreshed them.
 - It wasn't his giving or generosity that refreshed them, even though he was a wealthy man.
 - It was the love he showed toward them.
- Now this word "refreshed" got me thinking – what does it mean to be refreshed by the love of another believer?

- And so – as I often do, I wanted to study it a little more in depth. So, I went and researched this verse (this phrase) in the Greek, and specifically, homed in on the word “refreshed”.
- I just thought to myself you know, in the world we live in, in a world full of stress and anxiety, it would be interesting to see how we as believers might help give a little reprieve to our brothers and sisters in the faith.
 - Give them a little relief from all the hustle and bustle of life.
 - And apparently, one method of relief – or refreshing – comes by way of one believer showing love to another.
- Which let me say, sounds simple enough – but really, is it?
- Well, I would say it's simple enough for those receiving the love – but what about those who are giving it? Maybe not so much?
- The word “refreshed” in Greek here, isn't a stand-alone word. At least not here in verse 7
 - Instead, it reads this way, “have been refreshed”
 - So, what does this tells us is?
- We as believers – need refreshing. And why?
- Because as my former secretary once said, “There is something always taking the joy out of living”.
- Now, one might think that we as believers would spend most of our time riding high on the mountain, but the reality is nothing could be further from the truth.
 - Primarily because once you surrender your life to Christ, your life is no longer your own.
 - And because that is the case, the enemy immediately begins working diligently, steady, constant, working overtime, trying to dishearten us, make us question and confuse us.
 - Doing his dead level best to slowly drag us off track and divert our attention away from the things of God.
 - And in its place – cause us to focus our attention on “the things” of this world.
 - Which in turn causes us to be stressed out and full of anxiety.
- And what's interesting is that in today's society, where things (economically speaking) are as good as they have ever been – it's kind of odd that we would be living in what is arguably the most stressed-out society that our planet has ever seen.
 - And so, because that is the world we live in – it means, we all need refreshing from time to time.
 - And the love you all have for one another is “Key” in refreshing your Christian brothers and sisters.
 - But what does it mean to love one another – and furthermore – what does that look like?
 - Well, if you study it in the Greek, it is a verb – an action.

- And it means “to give rest”.
 - And then this is my favorite descriptor – it says “To give intermission from labor”.
- Isn’t that interesting – do you need an intermission from your labor?
 - Are you exhausted – wore down?
 - Have you been trampled by the trials and tribulations of this life?
 - If so, one way to become refreshed is through the love of the brotherhood.
- Which is another reason we should listen to [Heb. 10:25](#) which says:
 - “To not forsake the assembling of believers”
- Guys, I am not sure if you have ever thought about it, but there is power when God's people assemble.
 - Which means – there is power in this room today.
 - And that power has many purposes.
 - And one of those purposes is to refresh the assembly.
 - And if you have been in church very long – you should know what that feels like.
 - Don’t you feel so much better when you leave on Sunday.
 - Do you ever say man – I wasn’t going to attend today, but I am sure glad I did.
 - That is just a little bit of God's power – that is available from the assembly.
 - Which means watching church on Television won’t do it.
 - Reading a devotional won’t do it.
 - Chatting online won’t do it.
 - We must gather together!
 - On a side note, the usage of this phrase in the Greek says “I make to rest or give rest to”.
- So essentially – your love, your kindness, your care and concern for fellow believers is what activates a refreshing in the individual or individuals you show or are showing love, kindness or concern for.
 - I won’t belabor this point but just remember that each one of us has a responsibility to do this for other believers.
 - And by the way we should do this even if we don’t feel like it.
 - Also, one more side bar on this topic – our fellowship does (I believe) a decent job of this, and I feel like this is the case because we have had (little to no disagreements) in our church.
 - And trust me when I tell you that this is very rare.
 - Especially for a church who has been in existence for over 10 plus years.
 - And we should thank God for it!
- Moving on, next – in verses 8&9 Paul writes the following

**[Philemon 1:8](#) Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you *to do what is proper*,
[Philemon 1:9](#) yet for love's sake I rather appeal *to you*—since I am such a person as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—**

- When Paul says “therefore” or when anyone in scripture says “therefore.”
 - What they’re saying is, because of, or based on my previous statement – I am now making this next statement.
 - In other words, because of Philemon’s love for the saints, the love he displayed for other believers – it yielded great joy and comfort for Paul.
 - “And remember” – Paul is in prison at this time; therefore, joy and comfort are at a premium in his life.
 - Paul says, because of your love – which refreshes the saints – I am making this next statement, which is what?

**[Philemon 1:8](#) Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you *to do what is proper*,
[Philemon 1:9](#) yet for love's sake I rather appeal *to you*—since I am such a person as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—**

- Now, do you wonder where Paul is going with this statement?
 - He says – therefore Philemon, since you have shown such love for the saints, I appeal to you.
 - And instead of asking God, to make you do it.
 - Which is an interesting statement because I see two forces at play.
 - Man's will versus God's Sovereignty.
 - And both are highlighted here.
 - It’s kind of like your father or mother saying, “I could make you do this or that – but instead, I am going to ask you to do it on your own.”
 - “I am going to ask and believe – that you will do the right thing.”
 - But if you don’t, well then Paul says I have enough confidence in Christ to ask him to force you to do it.
- So, here we clearly see where man is given the opportunity to do the right thing.
 - But if he doesn’t, well then God can step in and force him to do it.
 - I also feel there may be a little manipulation being used here by Paul.
- Now – let me be clear, it doesn’t say Paul is being a little manipulative.
 - So, don’t leave here today and say, “Pastor Greg said that Paul was a manipulator” – because that’s not what I am saying.

- I am just saying Paul is human – just like you and I, and therefore, it kind of feels like Paul is saying – Hey, I am so proud of you Philemon.
- You have shown such love for the saints.
 - So much love that it brings me joy and comfort.
- Therefore, based on the love you have shown the believers, “I know you will do the right thing.”
 - The text doesn’t specifically say that, but when we read on later in the chapter we will see more of the same language.
- When he speaks specifically about the money Onesimus stole from Philemon, and I believe I am right in what I’m saying, as it relates to how Paul uses his words as a motivator for Philemon.
 - I also believe there is a deep application for all of us sitting here today as well:
 - Just like Philemon, we too have freewill – and God expects us to use it to do the right thing.
 - But just in case we don’t – God will step in to ensure that His will ultimately prevails.
 - And so, just remember that when struggling with any decision.
 - When you don’t know what to do, just simply revert to this question:
 - Is what I am doing glorifying God or crucifying Him?
 - Or would God be pleased with this decision or that decision?
 - Or is my decision simply satisfying my flesh or someone else’s flesh?
 - Meaning, is it easier to go along with whatever – just so I don’t have to deal with it?
 - And just on a side note – let me say, you may be going along with some wrong decision (just for the sake of peace) but eventually you will have to deal with it.
 - Maybe not in the moment – but you will in the long run!
- So, what is it that Paul is asking Philemon to do?
 - Maybe better said, what is it that Paul is highly encouraging Philemon to do?
 - Well, because we know how this story ends, or because we know the purpose and intent of this letter, it’s a real easy question to answer.
 - Remember – Paul is writing this letter to Philemon on behalf of his runaway slave Onesimus, and he is not only asking Philemon to forgive Onesimus for running away and stealing money.
 - Paul takes it a step further and asks Philemon to accept Onesimus as a brother in Christ.
 - Basically – he wants Philemon to see Onesimus as an equal.
- Now folks – I want you to think about this for just a minute because I feel like if we don’t home in on this then we will miss it.
 - Onesimus was Philemon’s slave – which meant he was Philemon’s property – and I assure you that regardless of salvation, for either he or Onesimus, the culture in

Philemon's time was much like gravity as it pertained to slaves.

- Meaning, it had a strong pull in the way people viewed slaves, because slavery was normal.
- Slaves were intrinsically looked at as second-class, or maybe even third and or fourth-class citizens.
 - Really I shouldn't say citizens, because they weren't citizens.
 - They were property.
- Therefore it would be hard for any master (even a Christian slave owner) to forgive – much less look upon a runaway “slave/thief” as an equal.
- It's easy for us to read Paul's words and say – Oh, no big deal! Philemon just needs to forgive, forget and accept.
 - We don't understand just how tough that would be.
 - Matter a fact, I would tell you it would almost be impossible.
 - Especially as related to your internal feelings toward the slave.
- And Paul knows that.
- He also knows that what Onesimus did was punishable by death under Roman Law.
- So think about it, Paul made the statement that Onesimus had become a very valuable helper to him, but then he discovers Onesimus is a runaway slave.
 - He belongs to a man that Paul himself led to Christ, and now he has no choice but to encourage Onesimus to return to his master.
 - Even though he knows the penalty for what Onesimus has done could potentially cause him to be put to death.
 - He still must do the God honoring thing by encouraging Onesimus to return to Philemon.
 - But why?
 - Why can't he just let sleeping dogs lie?
 - I mean after all, who is going to know right?
 - Seriously – who is going to know?
- Onesimus's hometown is 1300 miles away. So – why not just ignore it?
 - Well there are two reasons he can't ignore it, and we will close with this.
- First – it is the right thing to do. If he doesn't do it then Paul would be breaking the law.
 - But hold on Pastor, that law sounds dumb. It's inhumane to have slaves.
 - It doesn't matter because the law is the law.
 - The rule is the rule.
 - And in our society today we have forgotten this.
 - I want you to remember that laws (good, bad, or indifferent) were established for a reason.

- Some of which revolves around our protection.
 - And the Bible tells us that we are to obey the laws of the land.
 - We are to pay our taxes etc.
- The Bible also tells us Kings and rulers (even unbelieving Kings and rulers) were either:
 - A – allowed to be there by God.
 - Or B – they were placed there by God.
- Which means, if you don't like who the President is, it makes no difference.
- You are still required to obey them
- 2 – But there is a second reason Paul did this, and honestly it might be the most important reason.
 - And that is, Paul's witness and testimony was tied to his decision.
 - You see – I was raised in the South, in the Bible Belt, where for some reason Christians became known – more by what they didn't do, or by what they refrained from – than by what they did do!
 - Meaning if you don't:
 - 1 – Cuss
 - 2 – Drink alcohol
 - 3 – Or smoke
 - 4 – Or date girls that do
 - You have reached the heights of Christianity.
 - Problem is, the only people this means anything to – is other Christians.
- Now, I know this sounds like I am painting with a broad stroke, and I am – but what I'm saying is true.
 - And in some respects – it still holds true today
 - And by the way there is nothing bad about saying as Christians we should refrain from those things.
 - But not as a way to identify Christians.
- Now – I may be losing you a bit here so let me give you an example of what I mean:
 - You ever say to someone – that person is a good person, or that person is a Christian because they don't cuss or drink, as if that is what lets us know someone is or is not a believer.
 - That's the crux of what I am saying.
 - But I have a news flash for Christians all around the world. We can refrain from those things, and we should, but if we think that the outside world cares, then we would be wrong.
 - The unbelieving world is not making decisions about Jesus Christ or the validity of His existence simply based on how we refrain from those things.

- If we think that's the case – we are clueless.
- As I said, the unbelieving world could care less.
- What they do care about is much more tangible for them:
 - They care about things like do you talk about others.
 - Because in their minds, if you talk about others you will talk about them.
 - They care about things like –
 - Do we keep our agreements do we give an honest day's work for an honest day's pay.
 - Do we cheat our employer.
 - Do we keep our word.
 - Do we cheat on things like taxes, bills etc.
- These are the things that matter to unbelievers, and these are the things the world looks at when deciding what it means to be a Christ follower.
 - This whole refraining from whatever it is we think the world cares about only accomplishes one thing.
 - It makes us as Christians feel good about other Christians.
 - Specifically, as it relates to whether someone is really a Christian or not.
 - And the unfortunate part of all this is, for most Christians – we believe this is our testimony.
 - And I assure you it is not, and if you don't believe me, just ask an unbeliever!
 - And so, one of the main reasons (if not the main reason) Paul tells Onesimus to return to his master is because the outside world is watching what he does.
 - They are watching to see what Paul does.
 - Does he say – I know what the law says, and I know Onesimus belongs to Philemon, but I don't like that law.
 - And furthermore, Onesimus is saved now, and he is a big help to my work in the ministry. Therefore – God would want him to stay with me.
 - Or does he say – Onesimus, you must return.
 - God is in control
 - Don't worry, but the law is the law.
 - And we must honor God!
- I think we see the answer to that question because even though Paul had concern for this man's life – and even though that thought was weighing heavy on his mind – Paul still makes the right decision.
 - He writes the letter to Philemon.
 - And he honors God regardless of the fact that his advice to Onesimus could get him killed.

- And so, what have we learned here today?
 - It's simple – and here is where we will close.
- No matter the situation our circumstances you find yourself in – Honor God!
 - And if you do, I assure you – He will honor you!
 - Amen Amen!

- Today will be our 4th teaching in this letter, and I would say that we have extracted some (of what I would call) serious applications from the first 9 verses of this letter.
 - Last week we ended our teaching all the way through verse 9.
 - But as always, and in the “Spirit of Context”, I want to back up and re-read verses 1 through 9 as I bring us with to today’s set of focus verses – and here is what Paul wrote

[Philemon 1:1-9](#)

[Philemon 1:1](#) Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,

To Philemon our beloved *brother* and fellow worker,

[Philemon 1:2](#) and to Apphia (Aaa -fee- uh) our sister, and to Archippus (ahh-key-pus) our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house:

[Philemon 1:3](#) Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

[Philemon 1:4](#) I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers,

[Philemon 1:5](#) because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints;

[Philemon 1:6](#) *and I pray* that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ’s sake.

[Philemon 1:7](#) For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.

[Philemon 1:8](#) Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you *to do* what is proper,

[Philemon 1:9](#) yet for love’s sake I rather appeal *to you*—since I am such a person as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—

- So, the narrative is this: Paul led a man named Philemon to Christ while he was preaching and teaching in Ephesus.
 - And of course, what we learned about Philemon:
 - He was a wealthy man.
 - A man who owned slaves at that time, which was very common in those days.
 - Philemon also lived in the area known as Colossae.
 - At some point, one of Philemon’s slaves, a man named Onesimus, decided to run away.
 - And on his way out the door, he makes another decision to steal some money from his Master. Which sounds bad – but honestly makes sense seeing how I am sure Onesimus was broke.
 - So, Onesimus flees for Rome, which was some 1300 miles away, where he “coincidentally” runs into the Apostle Paul.
 - And by Paul’s own admission through his writings, he tells us that Onesimus had

- become very useful to him, which is ironic – since Onesimus' name means “useful”
- Now the problem is, Paul (at some point) discovers that Onesimus is Philemon’s slave, which is obviously a game changer, and it created an internal conflict inside Paul.
 - Maybe a better way to say it is – it created an internal conviction of the Holy Spirit with the Apostle Paul.
 - And so what is Paul to do?
 - Does he keep this new information to himself – keep it silent and press on like nothing has changed?
 - Or does he do the right thing and tell Onesimus that he must return to his Master?
 - The answer is – He does the right thing.
 - Another way to say it is that he does the God Honoring thing.
 - And yes – even though it was Paul, and even though Onesimus was helping Paul with the work of ministry, the God honoring decision was to send Onesimus back to Philemon.
 - And why? Because it was the law and because the world was watching.
 - They were silently saying to themselves, is Paul going to honor Roman Law?
 - Or was he going to declare himself immune to Roman law – all in the name of Christianity?
 - You see – that is the question, and this story tells us something.
 - Which is, we cannot make decisions – based solely on the fact that we are doing something in the name of God.
 - A good example of this would be blowing up an abortion clinic simply because we know God is against the taking of innocent life.
 - I can tell you – with 100 percent certainty – that if someone does such a thing, they are not honoring the Lord!
 - And how do I know this to be the case?
 - I know it to be the case because that’s exactly what Paul is modeling for us – in his decision to send Onesimus back to Philemon.
 - And that decision, is where we get the letter we are studying today.
 - A letter Paul wrote while in prison to this man Philemon on behalf of his runaway slave Onesimus.
 - And he writes this letter hoping that when Onesimus returns that he can hand deliver Paul’s words to his Master, and do so with a few goals in mind.
 - And what were those goals?
 - A – at a minimum, Onesimus would not be severely punished.
 - And or B – Not be punished at all.
 - But honestly, Paul’s goal is much loftier than that.
 - He not only wants Philemon to accept Onesimus back.

- He wants him to accept Onesimus back as an equal!
 - Not as a slave – but as a brother in Christ!
 - Which would be a long shot, but that was Paul’s goal.
- And so – it’s with that background in mind that we will proceed into our next set of focus verses, [Philemon 1:10-16](#), where the translators entitle this next section: Plea for Onesimus, a Free Man

[Philemon 1:10](#) I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment,

[Philemon 1:11](#) who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me.

[Philemon 1:12](#) I have sent him back to you in person, that is, *sending* my very heart,

[Philemon 1:13](#) whom I wished to keep with me, so that on your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel;

[Philemon 1:14](#) but without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will.

[Philemon 1:15](#) For perhaps he was for this reason separated *from you* for a while, that you would have him back forever,

[Philemon 1:16](#) 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.

- Now, before digging too deep into this text, I want you to look at these verses – with somewhat of a “predisposed” set of eyes.
 - Meaning, I want you to read these verses while trying to place yourself in Paul’s position.
 - And my next statement may get me in a little trouble with the Theological or Doctrinal Police, but I’m going to say it anyways.
 - Paul words have an “air” or “spirit” of manipulation to them.
 - They really do – and there’s no way around it.
 - Which is okay, because Paul has something he is trying to accomplish in ministry, and he sees Onesimus as an asset in accomplishing that goal.
 - But there is a problem, he cannot move forward without Philemon’s blessing.
- Let me say it a different way – he could move forward, and as I stated earlier, no one would probably know. But guess who would know?
 - Paul would know. And possibly the unbelieving world around him might know.
 - And let me say something about all of this before moving forward.
 - Something – I think you may find profound:
 - “Right is right and wrong is wrong”

- And that statement does not change just because you are doing something wrong in the name of Jesus.
- I want you to think about what I am saying here. Paul – the greatest writer of the New Testament, the greatest evangelist of all time and by all accounts, and in my opinion, the greatest Apostle of all time. He has but one goal.
 - To further the work of ministry.
 - And in, and through Onesimus, he sees a way forward in accomplishing that goal.
 - But what does he do?
 - He does the right thing – he obeys the law and sends Onesimus back to Philemon.
 - Which tells us something about Paul and ultimately tells us something about God and His Character.
 - And that is: “Two wrongs don’t make a right”
- But it goes deeper than that. You see, even though Paul is working for God, he models for us a fundamental truth of our Lord.
 - Which is, just because we can justify our position by saying that we are doing God’s work, specifically, as it pertains to the church, ministry etc., we still must follow the laws of the land – and do what’s right – while we are living here on this planet.
 - And even more than that, I would tell you that God “expects” us to do the right thing here on earth.
 - And Paul’s reaction to Onesimus' situation establishes that truth for us.
 - It’s an example for what is – and what is not – the God honoring choice we should make.
 - So – let that that thought sink in for a minute.
- What Paul just did is answer a question for all believers, a question I have been asked many times throughout the years as it relates to what we should do when faced with a similar situation.
 - When we can clearly justify our choices all in the name of God or the church, but the reality is if we make a choice based on that logic, we are dishonoring our Lord all because (in this situation) the decision conflicts with the laws of the land.
 - And so – guess what? We just learned something.
 - That is just because we make a decision in the name of God, it does not mean it’s always the right thing to do.
 - And Paul (who by the way I assure you was pure in heart), who was a prisoner in Rome when he wrote this letter,
 - Who was using Onesimus to help him with the work of ministry while he was incarcerated.
 - He made a decision – opposite of what you might think he would have done.
 - As he sends Onesimus back to Philemon (his Master) knowing the entire time that

there was a chance that Onesimus might be killed or at a minimum severely punished.

- But even in the face of all of that, he still makes the right decision and sends Onesimus back to Philemon.
 - But he doesn't send him back blind, rather, he sends him with a letter he hopes will soften the return for the runaway slave.
- He makes this decision – while using his words (if you will) as ammunition, hoping to influence Philemon's reaction.
- And it's for that reason, that I say you can feel Paul using a little “manipulation” in his words, which we will see even more clearly in next week's lesson.
- But regardless of how Paul feels about the situation, he still makes the right decision even though he does so with reluctance in his writings.
 - And his counterbalance or maybe better said, his way of trying to accomplish the same result – all while honoring God – is to remind Philemon of how he too must do the right thing as well.
- And so, through Paul's situation – the Bible teaches us something.
 - Which is no matter the situation we find ourselves in, and no matter the potential outcome, we must always make the God honoring decision and simply let God handle it from there.
- But why? Why does Paul make this decision?
 - It's simple – it's all for the sake of the Gospel.
 - Because the unbelieving world is watching.
 - Remember – it's not what you say that carries the most impact.
 - And it's not what you necessarily refrain from that grabs the unbelieving world's attention.
 - Your testimony to the unbelieving world around you is derived through Optics – not words!
 - Another way to say it is – talk is cheap!
- Now personally – as a business owner, I run into these situations all the time.
 - Where the choices I make on the surface seem harmless.
 - Where no one would ever seemingly know the difference.
 - But the reality is that there is always someone watching.
 - They may not necessarily care but my choices will leave an imprint on the minds of those around me.
 - Especially those who may not be believers.
 - You see – as believers we are all under a microscope.
 - And of course – as a Pastor I'm examined with an even higher level of scrutiny.
 - Which means our actions matter!

- And by the way on a side note, just in case you are wondering – when we are faced with a tough decision, we should never justify our actions based on what the other person may or may not do if they were in the same position.
 - That is not how you come to the God honoring conclusion!
 - Matter a fact, I would tell you (many times) what somewhat else would do when faced with the same set of circumstances would be the worst thing you could do.
 - And you know what I mean where we say, “Well, I will guarantee you that if the shoe were on the other foot, then they would do this or that. Therefore – that’s how I will make my choice.”
 - If that’s what motivates your decisions – you need to know (as I said), that is not how you make God honoring choices.
- Now why am I driving this point home so hard?
 - Because I see this happen all the time with Christian men and women, where a Christian person tries to anticipate how the other person would react if they were in the same position and then they let that drive their behavior.
 - I have seen this happen so many times – especially when dealing with the church.
 - Matter a fact, this just happened to me a few weeks ago in a discussion with another Pastor.
- I’m not going to get into all the details of it, just to say that this Pastor's basis for his situation drove his reaction when he tried to justify his response based squarely on the fact that he was a Pastor of church
 - And I will tell you that he was wrong.
 - He was right on the surface – but wrong – in the way he tried to justify his reaction.
 - Basically, he used the fact he was a Pastor – and had responsibilities to the church as the overseer/elder to justify his response.
 - At which point I quickly reminded him that he was missing the forest for the trees.
 - I will also tell you – in the moment it became intense and a little contentious.
 - But contentious as it was, a couple days later – the man apologized. Which was good!
 - You see, the situation this Pastor found himself defending was very similar to Paul’s response.
 - Where (unlike Paul) – the Pastor felt like, because he was the Pastor his position and intent justified his reaction.
 - But he was wrong!
 - And here is what I learned from my interaction with this man.
 - I learned that it is always best to state your case and to let God work it out!
 - And guess what! God did exactly that.
 - He worked it out – the man apologized for his reaction, and we are moving forward in peace – and we were able to avert all the ancillary damage that could have been

caused to those who were on the outside looking in, the unbelievers.

- So I would say, based on the way Paul handled this situation, he gave us a very powerful application.
 - And that is – making the God honoring decision doesn't always line up with the logic that says what I am doing, I am doing in the name of God.
 - Therefore I am justified in my position.
- Moving on, Paul says in Philemon verse 10:

[Philemon 1:10](#) I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment,

- Let me stop here for just a minute because I found it interesting that Paul called Onesimus his child
 - So – I did a deep dive into the Greek for further clarification.
 - The Greek word for child is “Tek’-non”
 - It is neuter – neutral in sex. Meaning can be either Male or Female
 - And it means properly, a child (figuratively) – anyone living in full dependence on the heavenly Father i.e. fully (willingly) relying upon the Lord in glad submission.
 - A commentary I read on this said, to be a child of God means we live our lives with our full dependance placed in Him, and that dependance is what prompts our Lord to transform us into His likeness.
- So basically, because Onesimus is now saved, (surrendered his life to Christ) – he is a child of God and by extension a child to Paul.
 - But not just any child – he was “Paul’s child”
 - And why – because Paul is the one who led him to Christ.
 - Next at the end of Philemon verse 10, Paul says:

[Philemon 1:10](#) I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment,

- Whom I have begotten in my imprisonment. What in the world does that mean?
 - Well the phrase in the Greek says, “I have begotten.”
 - Which answers a question I had – concerning where Paul was when he led Onesimus to Christ.
 - When we study the word begotten, it means – to beget, to bring forth, to give birth.
 - Meaning, when Paul says, whom I have begotten while in prison – it tells us that Onesimus was born again while Paul was in prison.

- That's what Paul means, when he says in verse 10

[Philemon 1:10](#) I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment,

- Next in verse 11, Paul makes another interesting and somewhat bizarre statement where he says the following:

[Philemon 1:11](#) who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me.

- As I previously stated, Onesimus' name means "useful."
 - The sense here is that when Onesimus was a slave, he was not living up to the potential of his name.
 - Meaning, only now had he become truly useful – because now he was working for Christ.
 - Then he says, and this where we close:

[Philemon 1:12](#) I have sent him back to you in person, that is, *sending* my very heart,

[Philemon 1:13](#) whom I wished to keep with me, so that on your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel;

[Philemon 1:14](#) but without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will.

[Philemon 1:15](#) For perhaps he was for this reason separated *from you* for a while, that you would have him back forever,

- I want to finish today's lesson with a couple of final thoughts.
 - First – once again notice how Paul honors Philemon by asking his consent to do what it was that he was wanting him to do.
 - He didn't just do it.
 - Even though what Paul was doing was more important than anything else.
 - Because obviously the work of ministry trumps everything else – but Paul doesn't pull that card.
 - No – instead he honors God by asking Philemon's permission
 - But there is one more thing I want you to see.
 - Something very powerful – and it shows up in verse 15, and it gives another fundamental truth of God.
- God is always doing something inside his creation. And many times – we cannot see

what he is doing.

- Listen one more time to Philemon verse 15

[Philemon 1:15](#) For perhaps he was for this reason separated *from you* for a while, that you would have him back forever,

- Paul was saying, Hey Philemon – I hate that all this has happened, but perhaps it was for a reason.
 - All so that you might have him back forever.
 - What this tells us is that all progress is not forward.
 - All progress is not forward when you are faced with a tough decision, and you know in your heart what the right thing to do is.
 - Simply do it!
 - We have no clue how God is going to work it out.
 - Because we have no clue what God is doing in the moment – and remember [Romans 8:28](#), which lines up perfectly with Paul’s choice:

[Romans 8:28](#) And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.

- Amen – Amen

- So, this morning, please turn with me if you will – to the book or letter of Philemon and of course, as we know – this letter – is short. Consisting of only 1 chapter and 25 verses
 - Having said that, we have been in this letter for roughly a month, and we have extracted (including today) 5 teachings in total – with more to go.
 - And (as with all of God’s word), we have been able to redeem some serious application from our time in this letter.
- Now, just to bring you back up to speed on where we are, let me highlight the purpose of this letter one more time.
 - Remember, we ended our teaching last week by expounding on, or exegeting verses 10-16, where Paul, in this letter to Philemon, is asking Philemon to receive back – his runaway slave.
 - A man named Onesimus
 - Who – also as we’ve discovered – appears to have stolen money from his Master on his way out the door as he fled to Rome, some 1300 miles away.
 - The interesting part of all this is that Philemon owns Onesimus
 - Which means – Onesimus is in fact, Philemon’s property.
 - Even though – Philemon is a recent convert to Christianity, any master – saved or not saved – during this time in history, will find it hard to accept a slave back into the fold without at a minimum, punishing the slave in some sort of way.
 - That’s not the bigger issue; the bigger issue is that Paul doesn’t just want Philemon to accept Onesimus back as a slave.
 - That falls way short of Paul’s overall goal.
 - No – he wants Philemon to accept him back as an equal – a brother in Christ, not just as a slave.
 - Which – that decision in and of itself would have to be a God thing, because “no way” Philemon would do it on his own.
 - Why is this the case? Primarily because Onesimus is now a believer.
 - He was saved under Paul’s teaching.
 - That’s not the only reason; he also has found Onesimus to be very “useful” in helping him accomplish the work of ministry.
- And so, with that quick introduction behind us let’s back up and re-read [Philemon 1:10-16](#) – and here’s what Paul wrote, where the translators of my NASB Bible entitle this next section: Plea for Onesimus, a Free Man

[Philemon 1:10](#) I appeal to you (speaking to Philemon) for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment,
[Philemon 1:11](#) who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me.
[Philemon 1:12](#) I have sent him back to you in person, that is, *sending* my very heart,

[Philemon 1:13](#) whom I wished to keep with me, so that on your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel;

[Philemon 1:14](#) but without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will.

[Philemon 1:15](#) For perhaps he was for this reason separated *from you* for a while, that you would have him back forever,

[Philemon 1:16](#) 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.

- So, in verse 11 – Paul clearly points out how “useful” Onesimus had become to him.
 - What’s interesting is how Paul says in verse 11 who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me.
 - The sense here – is that when Onesimus was a slave working for Philemon, he was working on worldly things.
 - Things like tending to the land and making money for Philemon.
 - Which is “useless” as it pertains to the most important work.
 - Which is what? Doing the “Work of Ministry”.
 - But now, after becoming a Christian, he has in fact become very “useful.”
 - Not only to Paul but to Philemon as well, as it relates to ministry!
 - That’s the context of verse 11.
- So moving on, Paul has found Onesimus to be very “useful”, and he has done so – while being incarcerated.
 - Which was a familiar place for Paul to find himself.
 - And so, the sense of Paul’s writing is that, here is a man (Onesimus) who has come to faith.
 - Led there by Paul – all while Paul was in prison.
 - At some point he discovers that Onesimus is in fact a runaway slave of Philemon.
 - Another man whom Paul led to Christ some time ago, while Paul was preaching in Ephesus.
- So obviously, Paul has a deep connection to this Philemon, and he uses his connection and influence over him to compel him to do the right thing.
 - Now the question that looms in my head is, could there be anything wrong with what Paul is doing? Anything wrong with using his influence to persuade Philemon to do the right thing?
 - The answer is a resounding “No”
 - And why?
 - Well, it all boils down to a heart issue.
 - Paul is doing what he is doing for the right reasons.

- And based on Philemon verse 12, we can clearly see that is the case, when he says:

[Philemon 1:12](#) I have sent him back to you in person, that is, *sending* my very heart,

- So Paul's heart is pure in its intent.
 - Meaning, his motivation is not self-serving but rather clearly focused on furthering the work of ministry.
 - And so, for that reason there is nothing wrong with using his influence over Philemon to compel him to do the right thing!
 - But I want you to notice, he doesn't want to force Philemon to do something against his will, but rather he says:

[Philemon 1:12](#) I have sent him back to you in person, that is, *sending* my very heart,

[Philemon 1:13](#) whom I wished to keep with me, so that on your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel;

[Philemon 1:14](#) but without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will.

- I love verse 14 – and I will tell you why. It's because you can hear your mom or dad or grandparent or maybe even a teacher speaking to you in this way.
 - At one time you may have asked one of them a question about what to do, and they say to you – “You shouldn't do this or that, but I'll let you decide on your own what the is the right thing to do.”
 - Has that ever happened to you?
 - Where you ask your mom about maybe going somewhere with friends and she says, “I don't think that is a good idea but I'm going to let you decide.”
 - Now, obviously – when and if that ever happens, you and I both know what she meant.
 - She meant, don't do it!
 - But she said “I'll let you decide”
 - Which was just a way of making you think and then feel guilty as you processed through it.
- Well, Paul is doing the exact same thing, and we see that when we back up to Philemon verses 8-9:

[Philemon 1:8](#) Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you *to do* what is proper,

[Philemon 1:9](#) yet for love's sake I rather appeal *to you*—since I am such a person as

Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—

- And then – he keeps with that same theme in verse Philemon verse 14:

[Philemon 1:14](#) but without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will.

- Now – let me ask you guys a question. Can you find any application for yourself inside this section of Philemon’s story?
 - The answer is “Yes.”
 - You see – as believers – it’s my belief, that for the most part, when faced with difficult decisions we intrinsically and internally (through conviction) know what decision to make.
 - Problem is that we get bogged down with all the “noise.”
 - Primarily the noise that comes from our fleshly desires.
- Follow me here and think about what Paul is saying.
 - Paul very much desires for Onesimus to stay with him.
 - Matter a fact, I would say if there were phones back then, Paul would have picked up the phone an called Philemon and said:
 - Hey brother – good to talk to you – I have led someone to Christ whom I believe belongs to you, and I would like to discuss what has been going on with him and myself.
 - You see Philemon – my friend, I did not know Onesimus was your slave, but I discovered it after leading him to Christ.
- So, because he belongs to you, and because it’s the law that he returns, I am sending him back – but would love it if you would consider allowing him to stay with me.
 - Matter of fact, he has become very “useful” person to me – and part of his “usefulness” includes ministering to me.
 - Therefore Philemon, would you consider allowing him to stay?
- Now, I want you to consider what is happening here.
 - Paul is the man!
 - I am not just saying this because he is Paul, and we have the benefit of hindsight.
 - Because we have the Bible it would be easy for us to say, Paul is the man!
 - And yes – he is the man – but I’m telling you that even before he wrote most of the New Testament, he was the man back then as well.
 - His reputation had proceeded him – and it did so because of who he was before he was saved.
 - Which was what? A Jew and Roman citizen and a well-trained Rabbinical Jew.

- And he passionately persecuted God's Church and more specifically the Christian people who made up God's Church.
 - But then God converted him, and now he has gained a reputation as the man who flipped sides - from persecuting Christians - to the man who leads men and women into Christianity.
- He was also well known for his conversion.
 - Matter of fact - his conversion was historic, and it reverberated throughout all the land. Even 1000's of miles away.
 - Therefore, if anyone had the right to put his foot down and say, Onesimus is staying with me!
- Paul would have earned that right, and to be honest with you, had Paul been able to make that phone call to Philemon, he probably would have said - no problem. Paul, do what you need to do!
- Now obviously - I am just making conjecture here, but I feel confident in that conjecture because Paul wasn't just a popular Apostle.
 - He was "The Apostle".
 - He was the man at that time with a big reputation that preceded him wherever he went!
 - And so, I could see Philemon telling Paul to keep Onesimus, but Paul doesn't assume that will be the case.
 - And he doesn't say, I'm Paul - I can do whatever I want to.
 - Even though as I said last week, no one would have probably known.
- But let's explore that theory for just a minute. Let's begin that exploration by asking ourselves the question - What might have happened if Paul would have chosen to keep Onesimus without Philemon's permission?
 - If he would have said to Onesimus - Don't worry, I led Philemon (your Master) to Christ, and therefore - he will be okay with this.
 - What might have been the outcome?
 - And am I going down this path for reason - so bear with me.
 - Inside this story lies a major application that all of us need to glean.
 - One that all Christians need to hear, especially as it relates to why Christians generally know the right thing to do, but they allow the noise of the flesh to get in the way.
 - You see - there is no doubt that Paul's flesh was screaming when speaking to him, helping him justify his position in telling Onesimus to stay.
 - But what would have happened if he made that choice?
 - What might have been the fall out, or result of that decision?
- Well first, let's think about it from Philemon's point of view.
 - What kind of effect might it have had on him?

- Let me ask it another way – Have you ever had a Pastor or Elder or someone in church authority let you down?
 - Specifically, by something they said or did.
 - Do you remember how you felt in that moment?
 - Do you remember how it put a ding or nick maybe, in your faith?
- Over this past couple of weeks one of my all-time favorite Bible teachers did something that permanently disqualified him from ministry.
 - And I will tell you; it has taken its toll on me this week, and I have struggled mightily with what happened.
 - So much so, it caused me to question and rethink ministry all together.
 - Not my call to ministry, but rather it caused me to question and rethink some of the theories and beliefs I have developed over this past decade or so.
 - Beliefs that by the way found their basis and foundation in the scriptures I have taught.
 - In other words – what I am saying is that my belief system has evolved overtime as I have studied and taught the Bible.
 - And that evolution has helped establish (what I call) a “Biblically internal” and or “personal constitution” about Christianity and ministry as a whole.
 - That belief system is what guides my life.
 - And so, over this past couple of weeks, my personal and spiritual constitution has been disrupted.
 - It has been called into question if you will.
 - And it’s been hard to digest, causing my foundation to become a little shaken – not too much, but a little.
 - Which may not seem like a big a deal to you, but for me – it was a huge deal.
- And so, when we think through the situation and then reflect on what Paul did vs. what he probably wanted to do, how it would have affected Philemon if he found out that Paul told Onesimus to stay – it’s very sobering!
 - Remember – I have been a Christian for 35 years.
 - I have been preaching for roughly 33 of those years.
 - And I have been teaching the Bible, exegeting the scriptures in depth for almost 20 of those 33 years.
 - So – I would say – spiritually speaking, my maturity level is probably a little bit further along than Philemon – a man who was a new convert.
 - Which means, if what happened to me over these past few weeks shook me, then what do you think Paul’s decision to ignore doing the right thing could have possibly done to Philemon’s faith?
 - I promise you – it wouldn’t have been good.
 - But there’s more to it than that. What about other people?

- People who were associated with Paul in Rome.
 - What would it have done to them?
 - What about other Christians in other areas who heard about what he did?
 - And then of course, what about the people who were listening to Paul – those people who weren't saved – those non-believers.
 - What would it have done to them?
- So, do you see why it's so important – for us as believers to “pause” and think through our decisions?
 - And then to make the God honoring decision.
 - Not to try and rationalize our fleshly choices.
 - There is a whole lot at stake here folks – especially as it relates to Paul's usefulness to God and furthering the work of ministry.
 - To be honest, what Paul did all boils down to his words in [1 Corinthians 9:19-23](#)

[1 Cor. 9:19](#) For though I am free from all *men*, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more.

[1 Cor. 9:20](#) To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law;

[1 Cor. 9:21](#) to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law.

[1 Cor. 9:22](#) To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some.

[1 Cor. 9:23](#) I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I may become a fellow partaker of it.

- Paraphrasing here: I will do whatever I need to do. I will become whatever I need to become – All for the sake of the Gospel.
 - And so – when you are faced with a tough decision, do the God honoring thing.
 - If you don't know how to determine what the God honoring thing is all you must do is ask yourself a simple, yet profound and important question.
- Here it is: Ask yourself, is what I am feeling in the moment satisfying me – by exciting my flesh?
 - Or is it honoring God?
 - And if you are still confused what the God honoring decision looks like, just refer to Paul's actions here in Philemon.
 - Look at what he did.
 - Think about it, if Paul had done what he wanted to do, he would have told Onesimus

to stay.

- But that's not what he did.
- He made a choice – that honored God, all for the sake of the Gospel.
- And so, once again, that is how you make decisions as a believer.
- Not by emotion and not by worldly logic.
- Worldly logic by the way, many times, is backed up by what my friends and or family says
- So Paul says in Philemon verses 14-16

[Philemon 1:14](#) but without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will.

[Philemon 1:15](#) For perhaps he was for this reason separated *from you* for a while, that you would have him back forever,

[Philemon 1:16](#) 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

- Then he moves into the next section – where he says:

[Philemon 1:17](#) If then you regard me a partner, accept him as *you would me*.

[Philemon 1:18](#) But if he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account;

[Philemon 1:19](#) I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand, I will repay it (not to mention to you that you owe to me even your own self as well).

[Philemon 1:20](#) Yes, brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ.

- Verses 17-20 – begins a new section of verses in my translation, and it too has some interesting insights into the mind of Paul and God.
 - Paul says and paraphrasing here – Hey Philemon, I am sending Onesimus back to you, and I would appreciate it if you would treat him the same way you treat me.
 - And that is as a “partner”
 - So, not only does Paul want Philemon to forgive Onesimus and skip over punishing him, but he wants him to receive him back as an equal.
 - But then he takes it a step further and says, “Treat him the way you treat me.”
 - And consider him a partner.
- Now, this scene got me to thinking about what it would be like for Philemon when he looked up and saw Onesimus coming home.
 - What emotions – he must have felt in the moment.

- I would say, whatever he felt, it would have probably began with his blood pressure rising.
 - Then, in that moment, right when Philemon is about to give it to Onesimus, he walks up to his Master and hands him a letter – written by Paul.
 - Now at that point, no doubt Philemon would have been shocked.
 - I mean, how in the world did his slave obtain a letter written by Paul.
 - You see, the only way you and I can truly understand this moment, is to understand how a slave was viewed and treated in those times.
 - If you can understand that, then you would understand what’s being asked of Philemon.
- And let me say one more thing related to this story, Philemon would have experienced some social pressure from his friends and family in dealing with the Onesimus situation
 - I mean – what would the neighbors think?
 - Especially those who owned slaves themselves.
 - What precedent is Philemon setting for other slave owners – by flipping and accepting Onesimus as an equal and or a partner.
 - That would be unheard of, and by the way I am sure it would take Philemon a minute to process what was happening.
 - And so, just in case Philemon tries to justify his anger, and or disappointment with Onesimus by rationalizing what he wanted to do to this man.
 - Because, after all – Onesimus did steal money when he left.
- Well, Paul anticipates this and heads his thoughts off at the pass when he says the following in verses 18&19:

[Philemon 1:18](#) But if he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account;

[Philemon 1:19](#) I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand, I will repay it (not to mention to you that you owe to me even your own self as well).

- So, what in the world is Paul talking about?
 - Did he loan Philemon money?
 - I highly doubt it – given the fact that Paul was (more than likely broke), and Philemon was wealthy.
 - Some commentators say Paul must have had some money.
 - Why else would he have offered to pay Onesimus debts?
 - But I question that – simply because when Paul took in money, he always gave it away to the poorer churches.
 - That doesn’t mean he didn’t have some money to live on.
 - But I highly doubt he was loaded.

- So, what else could it be when Paul says, “Charge that to my account”?
 - He means, impute whatever he owes you to me!
 - Another way to say it is – Whatever he owes you don’t worry about it; I will cover it!
- So, if Philemon had any animosity toward Onesimus in the moment and could justify his feelings by leaning in on the fact that Onesimus stole from him, Paul just eliminated that excuse.
 - Once again, what an interesting position Paul just put Philemon in.
 - I mean, we are talking about a real heart check here – and once again, I feel through the humanity of this situation.
 - Meaning, by humanizing this situation, we can learn a thing or two.
 - And what would that be?
 - It is that many times doing the God honoring thing will require you to feel like you’ve lost.
- One more time – many times, doing the God honoring thing will be tough because sometimes the God honoring decision will make you feel like you’ve lost.
 - All because you will not feel vindication or personal satisfaction in the moment.
 - You will often feel yourself saying, well – I guess I got messed over in this deal.
 - I guess everyone else gets what they want, and I get nothing.
 - Here’s how you cope with that feeling:
 - I want you to remember God is always doing something – working inside his creation – all for His Glory.
 - Many times, you will have no idea what he is doing in the moment, but you can find great peace and comfort when you give it to him and let it go!
 - Forget about it!
 - Say to yourself – Lord I have no idea what you are doing, but I am yours and you have got this.
 - That is the only way to get through a decision, and that (on the surface) seems simple enough.
 - And many times, it is, as it relates to satisfying our wants and desires.
 - But not so much when the God honoring choice runs counter to our fleshly desires an emotion.
- Let me say one final thing about this before moving on: On many occasions I have found myself in these types of situations, and when I made a choice based on honoring God (even though I did not feel like it) there have been times later down the road that God revealed to me the purpose of my decision.
 - Which always brought honor to Him.
 - It was in that moment that God gave me a little glimpse into why it is that we must stick with Him.

- We couldn't see when it was all happening, but later I was able to see and say to myself – Oh, now I see!
 - Guys, it really boils down to one thing:
 - Am I going to trust in the Lord?
 - Or am I going to trust in me and my wants and desires?
- Moving on, let's finish by expounding on verses 19-20, where Paul ends this section with the following words:

[Philemon 1:19](#) I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand, I will repay it (not to mention to you that you owe to me even your own self as well).

[Philemon 1:20](#) Yes, brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ.

- Paul says, I am writing this with my own hand.
 - Now why is this significant?
 - Because Paul (for the most part) never wrote anything.
 - He would use a transcriptionist or secretary of some sort to write.
 - But in this case – He writes it himself.
- So, what's the deal with that?
 - Well obviously – by Paul writing this letter in his own handwriting (which probably included some handwritten guarantee) it shows us the importance of the situation.
 - No doubt that he wanted Philemon to feel the heat.
 - Then to really top it all off, just in case Philemon saw a way to get out of it or justify what he wanted to do to Onesimus in his flesh, Paul reminds him of something I think we must all remember.
 - Doing the God honoring thing brings with it a refreshing of sorts.
 - Maybe not for you, but many times for those watching you.
 - Look one final time at verse 20.

[Philemon 1:20](#) Yes, brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ.

- In other words, when you get mad, when you are disappointed in people, and even when you are 100 percent justified and no one would blame you for reacting a certain way, (which would be in your own self satisfying interest) remember – God (many times) will be most Glorified when we do the opposite of what everyone expects us to do.
 - Because – you see, with God – the God honoring choices and decisions almost always run contrary to the way we feel.

- And that my friends is one of the most frustrating things about living out our Christian lives here on earth.
 - I want to end today's teaching by telling you a story about something that happened to me just a few months back.
 - It's a story about a man who wronged me all the way back in 2002.
- Now, let me say this before proceeding forward. I am not a grudge holder. It's not that I am wonderful, it's just not in my DNA.
 - I can get mad or upset and be over it in 30 minutes.
 - That is just how God made me, but even though I don't struggle with grudge holding, trust me when I tell you, there are plenty of other things I deal with.
- Anyways, I had a man who wronged me over 20 years ago and I never forgot how he made me feel in front of an important person one day.
 - This was at a very low point in my life – financially speaking.
 - This man was trying to make a name for himself by placing his foot on my head as I was sinking!
 - The best way I can describe this individual is as arrogant and extremely prideful, and he made me feel about 2 inches tall that day as I was trying to humbly solve a financial situation in my life.
 - And solve it by the way, by doing the God honoring thing!
 - This man used that moment when I was at my lowest, to basically mash me into the ground.
 - I never forgot it until about a month ago when I encountered him once again, except this time I was in the right, and he was in the wrong.
- So, guess what I did? I prayed, kept my mouth shut, and dealt professionally with this man all while maintaining my witness.
 - While internally, I was exploding inside and wanting desperately to give him a piece of my mind!
 - Sounds pretty good, doesn't it?
 - Well – guess what church? That is not what I did!
- Instead of doing the God honoring thing, I allowed my flesh to come alive, and I fed it in my mind.
 - And let me say this, if I told you what happened you would say to me – good for you.
 - There would be no one who wouldn't have championed what I said to this man – I mean I was loaded for bear.
 - It had been 20 plus years and finally I get to say my peace. And I did.
 - I didn't get nasty – I didn't use foul language.
 - I just simply told this man – “How the Cow ate the Cabbage.”
 - And it was so good. But there was a problem.
 - The entire time I was taking a pound of flesh out of his backside, I felt convicted.

- I was totally justified, but I felt convicted.
- When I got through giving him the business, the man did something that I never would have imagined.
 - Matter of fact, he did something that made me kind of angry at God.
 - He said, I am sorry I did that to you. No one should ever be treated that way and I apologize.
 - I remember thinking to myself in that very moment, Lord seriously.
 - My anger turned to a little bit of shame.
 - Disappointment in myself.
 - I felt like I failed the test with God.
 - And with all that anxiety in the air – with the pressure at an all-time high, he said – I am sorry.
 - And I said, well – crap. (sorry for the language)
 - But I said – Lord you have got to be kidding me; I never get to indulge in my flesh.
 - Just this one time – I wanted to feel vindicated.
 - Even though I was 100 percent justified in what I said, I was 100 percent wrong in my reaction.
 - And God let me know that through this man’s reaction!
- Here’s my point – the God honoring decisions and choices we will be faced with in this life will often run counter to what excites our flesh.
 - Just remember that. If you don’t know what to do, just know what we feel like doing in our flesh will almost always be the wrong decision.
 - Amen – Amen!

Today, we finish our journey through Philemon and let me say that Philemon is a book or letter that very few Christians know anything about.

- As a matter of fact, I have had several Christian men and women say, I have never heard of Philemon.
- I have also had several people say, I thought it was called 'Phili-A-Mon.'
- So, this is not a very well-studied or taught letter.
- Not sure why, but maybe it's because it's only 1 Chapter and 25 verses.

Regardless of that being the case, what we have learned over the past 11 years is that every word, every sentence, and paragraph in God's Holy Manuscript has purpose and meaning, as you have heard me say before.

The Jewish Rabbis used to say, even the spaces between God's Word have meaning, and sure enough, I have found all of that to be true.

So, what does that tell us?

- It tells us that all Christians, every believer, man/woman, and child, should desire to become more well-rounded and well-versed in God's Manuscript.

Any why?

- Because inside of "His Words" lies the answer to life, and it pertains to everything you will ever face.
 - From Cancer or Criticism.
 - Car wrecks, Death, or Loss of a job.
 - Divorce or Financial Ruin.
 - You fill in the blanks.
- Whatever this life dishes out, you will find, at a minimum (which is not really a minimum), the comfort and peace it requires to carry you through whatever it is!
- Because, as we know, everything negative in this life finds its origin, as well as its end, inside of God's Word.
 - And the "Origin" BTW, is always the same.
 - We live in a "fallen world."
 - One that the "Prince of the Air" controls.
 - But having said that, his control is temporary and or limited at best.
 - And even at that, it's all because God allows him to be in control.

So, thanks be to God for not only the solutions He provides, but also for the comfort and peace He makes available to us.

- All by letting us know who is truly in control.
- Which, BTW, let me say, this understanding is only made available through the revelation of His Word.
- Which means that we must know it.

Moving on, let's finish the letter to Philemon.

We will do that by expounding on [Philemon 1:21-25](#), where we pick back up with Paul's narrative.

But before I read [Philemon 1:21-25](#), as always, I want to back up and re-read our ending focus verses from last week.

However, before we proceed, I would like first to highlight the context of the letter.

Let me do a real quick recap to bring everyone back up to speed.

- So, Paul wrote the letter of Philemon to a man named Philemon on behalf of Philemon's runaway slave.
 - A man we've come to know as Onesimus.
 - A slave whom Paul met and led to Christ while he was in prison.
 - The problem is that once Paul discovered that Onesimus was a runaway slave, and not just any runaway slave, in fact, he was Philemon's runaway slave, but he knew what he had to do.
 - And what was that?
 - He had to encourage Onesimus to return to his master.

Also, don't forget that Philemon was a recent convert to Christianity, and Paul was the one who led him to Christ.

- He did so while he was preaching and teaching in Ephesus
- Which, BTW, made it an even more difficult decision. Especially, since Paul said that Onesimus had become very "useful" to him while he was in prison.

So, we can see the dilemma, and what does Paul do?

- He sends Onesimus back with a letter.
- A letter that Paul wrote with his own hand.
- A letter that would hopefully help influence Philemon's decision to receive Onesimus back.
- And that letter, of course, is the letter we've been studying. The letter of Philemon

And in this letter, Paul asks Philemon not only to accept Onesimus back, which would have been difficult enough to do, but He asks him to accept Onesimus back as an equal.

- Because Onesimus is now a believer
- That is the crux of the letter.

And so, with that background behind us, let's back up and re-read [Philemon 1:14-20](#), and bring us forward in context.

And here is what Paul wrote:

[Philemon 1:14-20](#)

14 but without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will.

15 For perhaps he was for this reason separated from you for a while, that you would have him back 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.

17 If then you regard me a partner, accept him as you would me.

18 But if he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account;

19 I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand, I will repay it (not to mention to you that you owe to me even your own self as well).

20 Yes, brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ.

Now, really quick, I want to highlight something I really didn't touch on in previous teachings, and it shows up in verse 15, where Paul says:

15 For perhaps he was for this reason separated from you for a while, that you would have him back forever,

I am not sure if Paul is saying what he is saying just to try and "smooth over" the situation with Philemon.

- Regardless of what it is, there is a powerful truth that each of us should grab hold of.
- And that is, God is always doing something inside his creation, and we will not always realize what He is doing in the moment!

Paul says:

15 For perhaps he was for this reason separated from you for a while, that you would have him back forever,

In other words, Paul is saying, Hey Philemon, I know it wasn't good that Onesimus ran away, but perhaps God allowed this to happen so that you might have him back forever.

This same type of thinking applies to every believer when bad things happen or when things don't work out for us.

- It could be with a job, or career change, or whatever it is.
- Maybe, perhaps it's because God is
 - A – protecting us from something.
 - B – He has something better in store for us.

Now, I realize this can kind of sound cliché, or at a minimum, it might sound like a way to make us feel better when things don't work out in our favor, but to be honest, Paul's words are 100 percent true.

- Which means that it's not a cliché thing to say when things go south or don't work out, so don't feel bad about saying it!
- Even if you don't completely know whether things will work out the way you hope they will. It makes no difference!
- As a matter of fact, I would tell you that you shouldn't feel bad, even if you don't necessarily completely believe that things will work out.

You see, trusting God doesn't mean that you are 100 percent convinced in your heart that everything is

going to work out!

Placing your faith and trust in God doesn't require you to be completely convinced in your mind about a particular situation.

- It simply means that you move and or act on that trust in faith, even when and if you still have doubts.
- Honestly, I would tell you that your faith in God is never more displayed than when you trust God blindly.
- When you choose to move forward in faith, despite your worry and fear.

As I think of stories in the Bible that best model this type of trust and faith (and there are many), I thought about the woman who had been hemorrhaging blood for 12 years.

That story is also known as "The woman with an issue of blood."

You may or may not remember the story, but I would like to read it to you and it shows up in [Mark 5:25-34](#)

And here is what John Mark wrote -

[Mark 5:25-34](#)

25 A woman who had had a hemorrhage for twelve years,

26 and had endured much at the hands of many physicians, and had spent all that she had and was not helped at all, but instead had become worse—

27 after hearing about Jesus, she came up in the crowd behind Him and touched His cloak.

28 For she had been saying to herself, "If I just touch His garments, I will get well."

29 And immediately the flow of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease.

30 And immediately Jesus, perceiving in Himself that power from Him had gone out, turned around in the crowd and said, "Who touched My garments?"

31 And His disciples said to Him, "You see the crowd pressing in on You, and You say, 'Who touched Me?'"

32 And He looked around to see the woman who had done this.

33 But the woman, fearing and trembling, aware of what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth.

34 And He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be cured of your disease."

You see, this woman heard about Jesus and the miracles He had been performing, and she believed that if she touched the hem of His garment, she would be healed!

- I would tell you that she did not know for a fact that this would happen, but upon hearing about the miracles Jesus had been performing, it created in her a belief or a hope that it was true!
- Just hearing about Him gave her a spark, and so, when she came to the end of her rope, when all else had failed, despite all attempts to be healed in her most desperate time of need, it was in that moment when someone told her about Jesus, He became her last hope and or option.

- And so, she took her desperation, coupled with her belief, and put it into action.
 - And that, my friends, epitomizes what true faith looks like.
- She believed, but there is no way she knew for sure what the outcome would be, but still she fought the crowd and barely managed to brush up against him.
 - And her actions are what yielded the result.
- Once again, let's not be fooled into thinking she didn't have doubts.
- She is human, so I would say that she had doubts, but regardless, she acted and put legs to her belief.

You see, the reality is we have no clue what God is doing, or for that matter, what He will do.

All I know is that when we place our trust in Him, even when we have doubts, God will take it from there.

Hence, why Paul said, and paraphrasing here, perhaps Onesimus ran away so that you might have Him back forever, Philemon

- In other words, perhaps God planned to allow Onesimus to run away so that he might be saved.
- And then return to you as an equal, so that both of you might serve God together for the rest of your life.

What an odd way for God to accomplish His will, but to be honest with you, more times than not, that is how He works.

- Very rarely is it in the way we think He should work.
- It's almost always through trial & tribulation.

So moving on, and we will close out Philemon by reading the final verses of this letter

[Philemon 1:21-25](#)

21 Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, since I

know that you will do even more than what I say.

22 At the same time also prepare me a guest room, for I hope that through your prayers I will be given to you.

23 Epaphras (Epp-a-phras), my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you,

24 as do Mark, Aristarchus (eh-ruh-staar-kus), Demas (Da-ma), and Luke, my fellow workers.

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

Paul says that I have confidence in your obedience.

Once again, this is a subtle hint or urging, if you will, by Paul to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus. For him to do the right thing!

Once again, you can feel a little manipulation going on with his words!

Which means, Paul is not sure that Philemon will respond correctly, which is why he gives him a little

nudge.

- Nothing wrong with that BTW.
- Nothing wrong with Paul making Philemon think about his next move as it relates to Onesimus.

Remember, Philemon is human, which means that he will be fighting his human instincts (his flesh).

- And the range of his emotions will be all over the place.
 - From shock – to disbelief – to rationalization – to justification – and then, of course, hopefully, to his eventual acceptance of Paul's request.
- And this is exactly what you and I would do as well.

So, it helps when a brother or sister has a word for us, especially if that word lines up with God's Will!

- It helps because it acts as a counterbalance of sorts to all the other noise rattling around in our heads.
 - Noise from other people who are not thinking in Godly terms.
 - It helps in combating our fleshly emotions and desires, such as anger, stress, or rationalization in the situation.

Never forget there is always a battle raging in our heads.

- Especially when it comes to the choices we should make in life
- And all that noise can only be calmed when we line up what we feel with what God wants and desires.
- And the only way we can know what God wants and desires is by knowing Him more intimately.
 - Which (one more time) comes by way of knowing His Word, because His Word is Him in word form.

So, Paul urges Philemon (once again) to do the right thing, and he takes it a step further by saying, I believe you will do more than you're supposed to.

Now,

I don't know how he could do any more than simply follow through with what Paul requested him to do, and so, I studied it a little bit more in depth, and the sense of what Paul was saying is that he wanted Philemon to be excited about receiving Onesimus back as an equal and not just a slave.

- Basically, what Paul was saying was, Hey Philemon, I trust you will accept Onesimus back as an equal, since now he is one of us, since now He is a believer.
- But I believe you will do more.
 - You will be excited and enthusiastic about the entire situation!

That's what most commentators believe he is saying, and that makes sense to me because what more could he possibly do than simply accept him back?

- And this is interesting because not only was it not good enough to simply accept Onesimus back, but Paul would like Philemon to be happy and enthusiastic about it.

You talk about assuming the sale!

Paul models that assumption quite well in this story.

Speaking of “assuming the sale”, and when I say, “assume the sale.” Let me be clear about what I mean.

- I mean, anticipating and or expecting the best out of Philemon, which is why Paul says this in verse 22:

22 At the same time also prepare me a guest room, for I hope that through your prayers I will be given to you.

Interesting concept here, and one that we need to talk about for a minute.

Paul says to go ahead and prepare me a guest room.

Once again, notice he is assuming he will be released.

And he ties Philemon’s prayers to the results.

So, what does that tell us?

- It tells us that we should pray for people and or situations.
- And when we pray, we should pray believing.

At our old church, which we attended for almost 20 years. The church adopted a tag line which was – “Expecting a miracle.”

And that is the attitude we should have.

You see,

There is zero guarantee that God is going to rule the way we pray.

- He may or may not, but I will tell you this, regardless of how He rules, our obedience in prayer is a requirement.
- It’s not that our prayers will change God’s mind, because ultimately, His Will will be done!
- But many times, He works through our prayers!

Let me also say that if the only reason you pray is that you believe that without your prayers, a person may or may not be healed, or because that is the only way you may get what you want or desire.

- If that is your thought process, then you do not understand the purpose of prayer.
- Prayer is simply one of the mechanisms good gives us so that we can commune with Him.
- And we are commanded to pray, but not in the way we all have become accustomed to praying, where we pray to Jesus, like He is “Santa Claus,” or a “Genie” in a bottle.
- Our prayers are not to be a wish list comprised of what we want.
- On the contrary, our prayers should be all about God. His wants and desires.

And there is no better proof of this than in

[Matt. 6:7-15](#)

Where Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray

Listen to what Jesus has to say about his topic

[Matt. 6:7-15](#)

7 “And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words.

8 “So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

Let me pause here. Jesus says don't be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.

Well, if that's the case, then why do we have to ask?

And why do we have to pray?

That's the question I have, because once again, it's all about being a part of what He is doing.

- And once again, it's of the mechanism's God gives us so we can commune with him.

It's kind of like one of your children, when they were little, how you would let them help with whatever you might have been doing, even though you could do it faster alone.

- And of course, you also wanted to teach them something in the process.
- Well, it's the same with us. Jesus said, The Father already knows what you need before you ask, but you should pray anyway.
- But when you pray, you shouldn't do it with fancy repetitive words, all so that the people can be amazed by your super spiritual prayers.
- No, when you pray, you should pray like this.

Now, before I recite the Lord's prayer, let me say this:

The Lord's prayer is not a prescription for the exact words we should pray, but rather it provides the framework for how we should pray.

Listen to it and see if you can pick up on what I am saying.

[Matt. 6:9-15](#)

9 “Pray, then, in this way:

‘Our Father who is in heaven,
Hallowed be Your name.

Very important words here, when we enter prayer, we should do so in reverence.

- We should enter prayer, realizing who it is we are praying to, which is “The Creator” of the universe.
- So, we are commanded to recognize this as we begin our prayer and not simply enter a prayer just as a sidebar, or as if we are praying haphazardly, or simply as if we are talking to a buddy.

Throughout my career in ministry, I have often heard preachers say, just talk to God as if He is your buddy. That is not what Jesus just told us in verse 9. He said that we should enter prayer knowing that we are praying to a Holy and Righteous God.

- So, as I said, enter prayer with reverence

Next, he says this in verse 10,

10 'Your kingdom come.

Your will be done,

On earth as it is in heaven.

Once again, our prayers are not about our wants and desires. They are about God and His Will!

- It's all about Him, and we should want what He wants because what He wants is ultimately what's best!

And then in keeping with this theme, Jesus says:

11 'Give us this day our daily bread.

In other words, give us today the things we need. What you determine we need

- And do it one day at a time!

And why is this?

- Because that is all we are promised.
- So, it's just one day at a time.
- There is no 401K when it comes to God and His wants and desires for our lives, no banking of favor in our lives.
- We get one day at a time, and that's it!

Which makes sense, since He already knows what we need before we ask.

And then, in verse 12 He says,

12 'And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

What He's saying here is that we are to pray for forgiveness.

- Our debts are just another way of saying our offenses against Him, and what we owe Him is a result of our sin!

And in turn, we are to forgive those who have offended us.

So not only are we to ask for forgiveness when we pray, we are to forgive others who have offended us.

- And I want you to notice that the forgiveness we give is not "predicated" on someone asking us for forgiveness.
- It's all based on the fact that God forgave us, which means that it's automatic, without condition.

And why?

- Because that is the way He forgave us!

And from there, He finishes up the framework of prayer with verse 13, where He says:

13 'And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]

The sense here is not that God is going to tempt us.

Dr. Thomas Constable of DTS said it this way: "Temptation" translates the Greek peirasmos (pear-

rass-mos), and in this case it means "testing."

- It refers not so much to the solicitation of evil, here, as to trials that test the character.
- God does not test (peirasmos- "pear-rass-mos") anyone (i.e.,
- Meaning, He does not seduce people to sin.
- And [James 1:13-14](#) tells us exactly that.

So, if that's the case, then why do we need to pray that He will not lead us into testing?

- Well, even though God is not the instrumental cause of our testing, He does permit us to experience temptation from the world, the flesh, and the devil (cf. 4:1; [Gen. 22:1](#); [Deut. 8:2](#)).
- Therefore, this petition is a request that He would minimize the occasions of our testing that could result in our sinning (cf. 26:41).
- It expresses the humble disciple's felt weakness to stand up under severe trials, in view of his or her weakness and sinfulness (cf. [Prov. 30:7-9](#))

And so, as I said earlier, the Lord's Prayer is not a prescription of the words we should say, but rather the framework of our prayer!

And then finally, Paul ends Philemon by saying the following in verses 23-25

Philemon: 23-25

23 Epaphras (Epp-a-phras), my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you,

24 as do Mark, Aristarchus (eh-ruh-staar-kus), Demas (Da-ma), and Luke, my fellow workers.

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

Now, last week, I was asked the question: How did Paul lead Onesimus to Christ, if he was in prison?

The answer is that on this occasion, Paul's imprisonment was house arrest.

- Which may not seem like prison, but I assure you, it was because he couldn't go anywhere.
- And he was being held by guards against his will.

Having said that, we know that he was allowed visitors, and apparently, he isn't the only one being held by the Roman authorities.

- It appears there are some others with him, or at least, it appears the others mentioned are experiencing the same type of imprisonment.
- Regardless, he is obviously not alone.

And from there, he ends this letter with a familiar final benediction in typical Pauline fashion.

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

Now, before we close, we must ask ourselves the question: What happened with Philemon and Onesimus?

Did Philemon ever forgive him and receive Him back as an equal?

- The answer is that we are never told.
- But, based on the fact that Philemon preserved this letter and allowed it to circulate to other

churches, coupled with what Paul said in [Colossians 4:9](#), where Onesimus is referred to as “Our faithful and beloved brother”, and then finally, based on some beliefs of church historians who say that Onesimus may have become the Bishop of Ephesus.

- Which cannot be confirmed 100 percent for sure.
- Some say that it may have been a different Onesimus who became the bishop.
- Regardless, based on what the Bible says about this man, I tend to believe it was in fact the Onesimus we have been studying about.

So, there it is, another letter or book of the Bible explicated, and rightly divided into God's Word of Truth.

And so, the next question you should be asking is, where do we go next?

Well, how about I do something I don't normally do?

How about I tell you where we are going next!

Come back next week, as we venture into our 18th Book of the Bible.

The Book of Thessalonians!

Amen- Amen!