Philemon

Restoration – Leader's version

For an hour study, just do the starred * questions

Check in – ask everyone, including leaders, how they are and how they're feeling about studying the Bible today.

Paul sent his letter to the Colossians via Tychicus and Onesimus. Onesimus also delivered a letter from Paul to a man called Philemon, who lived in Colossae.

1. Philemon was a member of the church at Colossae. What would he have heard as Paul's letter to the Colossians was read to his church?

Think back over the recent studies on Colossians.

What does the passage say and mean?

90 minutes

Read Philemon

2. Who is the letter from and to? How are the relationships between these people described? (v1-2)

From Paul (who is in prison for his faith) and Timothy. (Written around 62AD from imprisonment in Rome or Ephesus).

To Philemon 'our dear friend and fellow-worker', Apphia 'our sister' (Philemon's wife?), Archippus 'our fellow soldier' and the church meeting in Philemon's home. As you read, you will see that it's primarily to Philemon. Paul seems to be writing to people he knows, although he hadn't been to Colosse. He obviously values them greatly.

*3. Read v4-7. What has Paul heard about Philemon and what does this lead Paul to do?

He's heard of Philemon's faith in Jesus and love for other Christians. Philemon's love for other people has refreshed these people's hearts and encouraged Paul, v7.

This leads Paul to thank God every time he prays for Philemon. He also prays that Philemon's understanding of the gospel will continue to deepen as he shares it with other people.

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Can you think of some ways in which you could share your faith or 'refresh the hearts' of other believers?

Consistently changed attitude/ speech/ behaviour is a powerful testimony of the power of the gospel to change people, and of the Holy Spirit in our lives

Tell someone the good news about Jesus / encourage a believer with verses from the Bible

Encourage them to come to Bible study / chapel or to read the Bible

Study the Bible with someone

Letters, email, phone, visits etc

*4. Read v8-16. What do we learn about Onesimus?

Note: 'Onesimus' means 'useful'.

He has become like a son to Paul, who says Onesimus 'became my son while I was in chains' – he became a Christian under Paul's ministry and during Paul's imprisonment. Paul finds him useful although he was previously useless to Philemon, v11. Paul describes him as 'my very heart', v12. Paul doesn't want Onesimus to leave him but is sending him to Philemon. As Philemon's slave, v16, Philemon's consent would be needed for Onesimus to stay with Paul (v14 seems to be asking for Philemon to consider this).

*5. As Philemon's slave, why do you think Onesimus is now with Paul (over 1000 miles from home)?

Let the group speculate. Then explain that Onesimus has run away from his master. He is a fugitive who ran to a big city to hide. There he met Paul who told him about Jesus.

Questions 6-8 are **SELF-DIRECTED QUESTIONS**. Let the group to work in pairs.

*6. **SDL** Read v11 and v18. Was Onesimus a valued slave of Philemon's?

It doesn't look like it! Paul says that he was formerly useless to Philemon and implies in v18 that there is some kind of debt to repay. Maybe Onesimus had stolen from Philemon before he ran away?

*7. **SDL** Read v17-18. What two things does Paul ask Philemon to do?

Welcome Onesimus back and to charge any debt to Paul.

*8. **SDL** We read that Onesimus was 'useless' but now he is 'useful' both to Paul and to Philemon. What encouragement does this give you about the power of the gospel to change someone?

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*9. What would Philemon have to do in order to take Onesimus back?

Forgive him (for running away, stealing and being a useless slave).

*10. **SHOUT-OUT** How do you feel when you haven't forgiven someone, compared to when you have?

When I haven't forgiven	***When I have forgiven***
Angry	*Set free*
Chewed up	*Peaceful*
Etc.	*Etc.*

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Is there someone you are struggling to forgive? Are there some steps you could take on the journey to forgiveness?

Forgiving someone isn't easy, it's a process. Look at realistic steps that someone can take to stop holding the grudge and start to let go.

Don't push anyone or facilitate communication with the other party – if the issue arises, take it to the chaplains.

Forgiveness doesn't mean we have to hang out with the other person, condone what they did, or trust them implicitly. Trust takes a long time to build and a moment to lose.

*11. **STICKERS** What do you think Onesimus deserved when he returned to his master?

Read out their stickers then explain that, in that culture, Onesimus could expect the death sentence for running away. A slave was his master's property; he did not own his own life. In the eyes of the world, he certainly didn't deserve to be forgiven.

12. In v17, Paul asks Philemon to treat his runaway slave just as he would treat Paul if he turned up on the doorstep. Do you think this is reasonable? Why?

13. In what way was Philemon a victim?

Financial loss (monetary value of a slave). Onesimus may have stolen from him. Decreased work force etc.

14. How do you think faith in Jesus helped Onesimus see the effects of his behaviour on Philemon?

Onesimus' attitude to Philemon would have gradually changed. As he started to 'love the saints' he would have started to think about his master and what he had done to him, arriving at remorse, repentance and desire to restore the harm. He risked his life in delivering this restorative letter to Philemon.

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15. How is Paul helping to restore the harm in v18-19?

He is offering to pay back whatever Onesimus owes / stole / is worth etc.

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In what ways might we 'restore the harm'?

Try to focus on the prison setting and crime. Pay back the value of goods stolen, listen to the victim's impact statement, say sorry, show evidence of change, help others to see how they are heading for trouble, set a better example etc.

(Don't suggest victim contact! This is done by trained Restorative Justice Practitioners and is not necessarily appropriate with the immediate victim).

*16. What is the effect of sin on our relationship with God? How is this similar to Onesimus's position with Philemon?

We are separated from God by our sin. We don't deserve to be rescued. We deserve to die for our sin. But God gives us grace – He gives us what we do not deserve.

*17. How has Jesus restored the harm that sin has done to our relationship with God?

A chance to review the gospel! Jesus mends our broken relationship with God by paying for our sin on the cross. Jesus promises justice – sin will be paid for either by Him (in our place) or by us if we reject His offer. He helps us to change.

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Do you know what it means to be forgiven by God for all your sins? Have you repented and asked for His forgiveness?

Head knowledge of the gospel saves no-one. Heart knowledge leads to repentance and belief. Try to help people see the difference and assess their own response.

18. Read v20-25. What does Paul expect will happen and how confident is he?

He expects that Philemon will forgive Onesimus and take him back, v21.

And to be released from prison and be able to visit Philemon. However, he's still on remand and knows he could get the death sentence. He doesn't know from one day to the next how long he will live.

Check out – ask everyone, including leaders, how they found the study and if they are safe to go back to the cell.

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Philemon

Restoration

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