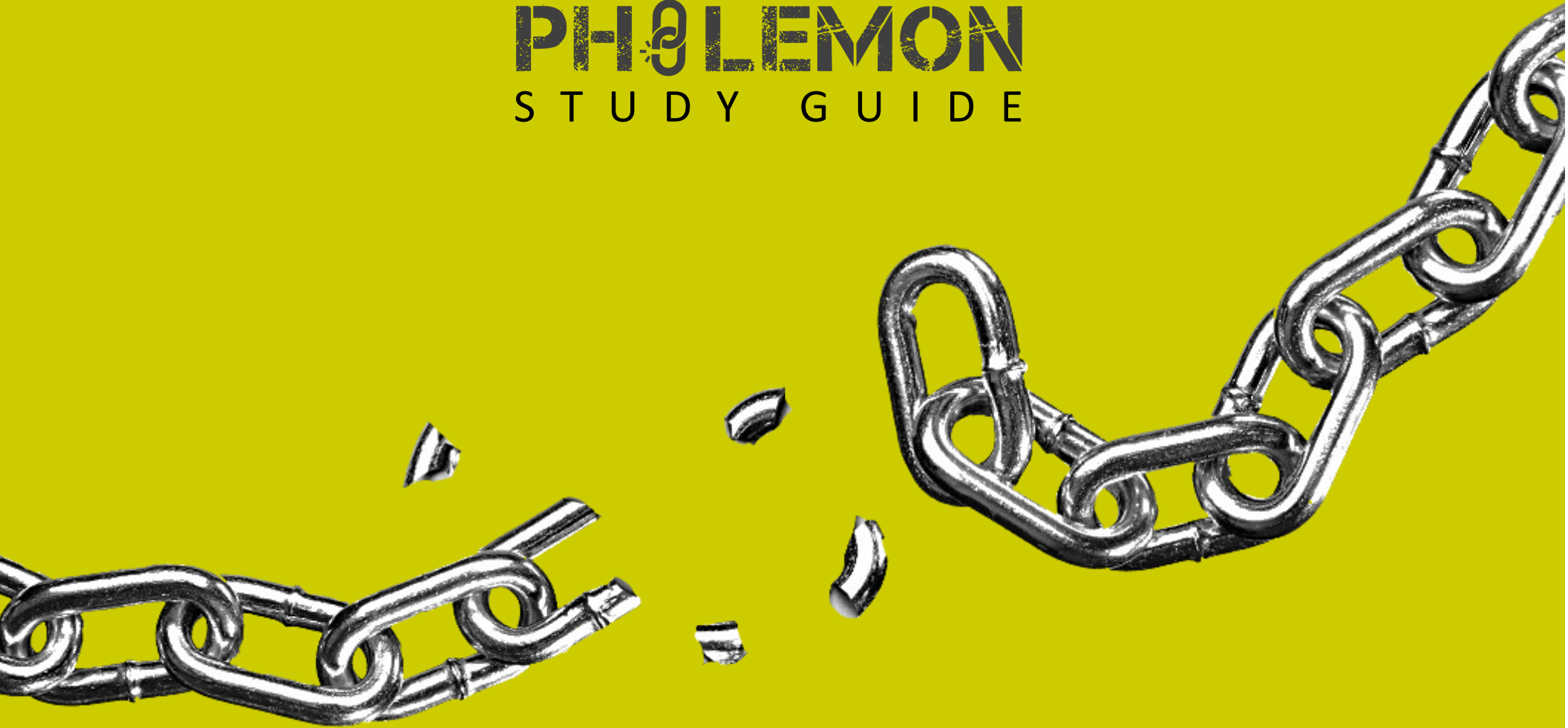


PHOENIX LEMON

STUDY GUIDE



eastside CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

Book of Philemon (*New Living Translation*)

Greetings from Paul

1 This letter is from Paul, a prisoner for preaching the Good News about Christ Jesus, and from our brother Timothy. I am writing to Philemon, our beloved co-worker, 2 and to our sister Apphia, and to our fellow soldier Archippus, and to the church that meets in your[a] house. 3 May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.

Paul's Thanksgiving and Prayer

4 I always thank my God when I pray for you, Philemon, 5 because I keep hearing about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all of God's people. 6 And I am praying that you will put into action the generosity that comes from your faith as you understand and experience all the good things we have in Christ. 7 Your love has given me much joy and comfort, my brother, for your kindness has often refreshed the hearts of God's people.

Paul's Appeal for Onesimus

8 That is why I am boldly asking a favor of you. I could demand it in the name of Christ because it is the right thing for you to do. 9 But because of our love, I prefer simply to ask you. Consider this as a request from me—Paul, an old man and now also a prisoner for the sake of Christ Jesus.[b] 10 I appeal to you to show kindness to my child, Onesimus. I became his father in the faith while here in prison. 11 Onesimus[c] hasn't been of much use to you in the past, but now he is very useful to both of us. 12 I am sending him back to you, and with him comes my own heart. 13 I wanted to keep him here with me while I am in these chains for preaching the Good News, and he would have helped me on your behalf. 14 But I didn't want to do anything without your consent. I wanted you to help because you were willing, not because you were forced. 15 It seems you lost Onesimus for a little while so that you could have him back forever. 16 He is no longer like a slave to you. He is more than a slave, for he is a beloved brother, especially to me. Now he will mean much more to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord. 17 So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. 18 If he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge it to me. 19 I, PAUL, WRITE THIS WITH MY OWN HAND: I WILL REPAY IT. AND I WON'T MENTION THAT YOU OWE ME YOUR VERY SOUL! 20 Yes, my brother, please do me this favor[d] for the Lord's sake. Give me this encouragement in Christ. 21 I am confident as I write this letter that you will do what I ask and even more! 22 One more thing—please prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping that God will answer your prayers and let me return to you soon.

Paul's Final Greetings

23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you his greetings. 24 So do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my co-workers.

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

Week #1—*What I Love About You*

Philemon 1:1-7

Nicole Gosney & Sarrie De Jong

BIG IDEA:

As our hearts and lives are transformed by a relationship with God, we begin to speak from a place of building up our brothers and sisters in love, respect and affirmation while gently instructing when needed.

COMMENTARY:

A personal letter from Paul to his beloved co-worker Philemon (as well as Apphia & Archippus) on behalf of his son (in Christ) Onesimus. This letter is unique in that it addresses the individual yet is also meant to be openly read to the church. Paul is showcasing Philemon's Christ-like character traits to the church that meets in his house by affirming Philemon's character and giving thanks for the love he shows others. In these opening words there appears to be a call to hold Philemon accountable by including Apphia and Archippus.

Paul notes in the very first verse that he (Paul) is a prisoner for preaching the Good News about Christ Jesus. This may serve as a reminder to Philemon and/or Onesimus about the situation they are finding themselves in and help them see the perspective Paul is coming from. Paul's heart for the matter stems from his passion to share the Gospel.

Paul seems to burst out in prayer, *"I always thank my God when I pray for you Philemon, because I keep hearing about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God's people (v. 4-5 NLT)."* If we focus in on the love for all God's people, we will be able to see them as equals in Christ.

Vs. 4-7 is what we are calling the "What I Love About You" and it serves as the meat of this section. In Warren Wiersbe's Commentary, he explains how Paul is appreciative, gracious and tactful in how he approaches Philemon before asking anything of him. "This is not empty flattery; it was sincere Christian appreciation, 'the love of God shed abroad' in Paul's heart." Paul is taking a moment to give his beloved co-worker some extra encouragement and prayer out of love and respect. When was the last time you stopped and really affirmed a brother or sister in Christ?

RESPONSE:

History with others can help or hinder the "love" we are to give. Christian love is to open our hearts (and homes) to others as if they were Christ themselves, that is the goal. For me, Nicole, to love unconditionally can come easily and freely to MOST people, but there are others that I find myself having a slower reaction to freely love, forgive and honor. I have to tell myself to "trust the transformation". Especially to those people who may have wronged me personally (or someone I love), or those who I assume are not "walking the talk". I would like to think that I generally think the best of all people and see the good in people FIRST... but often history can raise its haunting head. After all, when I think of God's unconditional, unending, unwavering love, grace and mercy that I receive daily, it's overwhelming and undeserved...so shouldn't I then extend "a bit" of that same love, grace and mercy to His other children? I must continue to remind myself that we are all a work in progress. Philippians 1:6, *"And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns."* (NLT).

What I Love About Paul, is that without hesitation, he expresses his love and respect for Philemon, using direct and clear affirmations, with words of familiarity (dear friend, fellow worker, brother) along with reciting Philemon's accomplishments and giving him praise for his love and heart for God's people. As we will see in later verses, Paul goes over and beyond to make sure that all parties involved are trusting the transformation, the work that Christ is doing in each of us. May we all be seen as Paul saw Philemon, (vs.5-7) one who is loving, generous, kind and refreshes the heart of God's people.

Words have power, so we must choose them wisely. The praises that Paul chooses to express towards Philemon directly correlate to him continuing to grow in faith and leadership, which is where Paul is steering him. Because Philemon is strong in the area of relationships and love, he is set to the task of forgiveness of his former slave, publicly showing others what reconciliation within the body looks like.

QUESTIONS:

1. Can you recount a time when you needed to gently guide a brother or sister in Christ towards a decision that honored God? Have you ever had someone gently guide you on your path? What role did affirming them play in the process?
2. Share how speaking with appreciation has worked in your life or a time when it didn't work for you.
3. How can we practice speaking from sincere Christian appreciation more?
4. What does the Bible say about approaching others gently with love?

Week #2—*Standing In The Gap*

Philemon 1:8-16

Dave Parker & Kasra Soltani

BIG IDEA:

Love and not obligation, as we pursue reconciliation toward those who have done us wrong and as we seek to stand in the gap for others as they seek reconciliation.

COMMENTARY:

There are two stark lessons in this passage. One is a lesson of two brothers in Christ who need to reconcile and the other is an example of a mutual friend (Paul) who stood in the gap between those brothers in Christ and encouraged healthy reconciliation.

Paul starts off with a pretty strong appeal to Philemon in regard to Philemon's former servant Onesimus. It's an appeal steeped not in legalism but in love. Paul wants Philemon to forgive and restore his relationship with Onesimus, now a brother in Christ, out of love and not out of obligation...and yet Paul is certainly doing some arm twisting! Paul is making a big appeal here. Something like... *"I am old...you wouldn't want to spite an old man, would you? Onesimus is like a son to me...surely you would take back someone I consider a son. I have the right to order you but I wouldn't do that! No...instead do it because you are supposed to love others."*

Paul is really putting the pressure on Philemon to do the right thing and why shouldn't he? Isn't that what holding each other accountable is all about? Your Bible probably has a footnote by Onesimus' name...What does it say his name means in Greek? Notice the play on words Paul uses with that in verse 11.

Then in verse 16 Paul brings it all into perspective. While Onesimus is a slave the reality is something much bigger and more important than that. What does Paul mention about Onesimus in verse 16 that will basically force Philemon to do the right thing? He simply asks Philemon to see Onesimus as God sees him. This really puts into perspective the struggle we all face when it comes to reconciliation toward those who have done us wrong.

Another item to note here is the fact that the reader is never privy to what the actual offense of Onesimus towards Philemon was other than we are left with the impression that Onesimus may have stolen from Philemon. Again, scripture is being intentional in its design. Paul leaves this out because it's truly irrelevant. His focus is reconciliation. Also, the above mentioned "arm twisting" is very different than a high-pressure sales person making you uncomfortable and squirm in your seat. It's a true example of propitiation (reconcile or appease on behalf) which is at the center of the Gospel.

RESPONSE:

This dynamic is truly one of the more difficult ones for believers. Difficult in the sense that it goes against our carnal core, the part of us that wants to hold onto every wrong that was done to us and cling with dear life to the bitterness with the hopes of getting even some day. Then we transpose this core to the gospel and see zero wiggle room. Is it any wonder that when God defines Agape love for us in 1 Corinthians 13 that embedded in the description is: *“Love keeps no record of wrongs”*.

The fact that God CHOSE to look past our inequities and offer His son to stand in the gap for us, leaves those that believe and accept His sacrifice no choice other than to forgive and to forget without adding a caveat. This in no way circumvents the forgiveness process. God values the restoration process just as much and desires that through our forgiveness we experience a restoration that is healthy and two-sided.

Of course, there are exceptions when one side is completely unwilling, but that should never deter us from pursuing reconciliation.

So where does that leave us? Where do you put the pain? The betrayal? The bitterness? The easy and only answer is, at the foot of the cross. Jesus knows sorrow (Matthew 26:38). As you walk the process of forgiveness and reconciliation, remember to navigate it through God’s lens. In the sense of how He sees the transgression (Which He gave His son for) and the transgressor (which He also gave His son for). Perspective often gives us a reprieve and perspective through the biblical lens will always give us freedom from the anger and bitterness.

QUESTIONS:

1. How can we, like Paul, still see people who have messed up as “dear to us” again?
2. Like Paul did with Onesimus, who can you stand in the gap for to help reconcile with another brother or sister in Christ?
3. Why do you think Paul wants this to be Philemon’s own decision and not something done because Paul is twisting his arm?
4. Are there people in your life whom you have never forgiven or “taken back”? If so, why? Would you reconsider?

Week #3—*Living Out the Gospel*

Philemon 1:17-25

ConnieSue Soules & Zac Price

BIG IDEA:

As Christians we need to live out the gospel that Jesus has demonstrated for us.

COMMENTARY:

In these final verses Paul demonstrates what it looks like to live out the gospel. We see that Onesimus is a runaway slave who is now considered a brother to Paul. Verse 17 begins with a plea to Philemon to love and receive Onesimus as he would Paul.

It's almost as if Paul is saying, "Philemon, when you look at Onesimus you are looking at me." We are not saying that Paul is actually comparing himself to Jesus at this moment, but rather that Paul is appealing to that great truth of the faith. This is called 'substitution' which is something that Jesus did on our behalf.

The story in Luke 10 demonstrates how we should show love and gives another example of substitution; this one told by Jesus himself. The Samaritan paid for the care of the injured man and offered to cover any additional costs. Jesus took the sin of the world on his shoulders and carried it to the cross. Jesus was fully man yet fully God and took our place. Jesus substituted himself on our behalf and took on all the punishment of sin. We now see Paul substituting himself for Onesimus. Paul is living out the Gospel of Jesus by doing this.

Not only is Paul using substitution, but he is also showing Philemon the power of atonement or "at-one-ment." Jesus was sacrificed on the cross for our sins which made it possible for us to be 'at one' with him. He did it for us, he paid the debt that our sins owed. The worship song that always comes to mind is, 'Jesus paid it all'. He paid for all of it. He is the perfect judge who is so gracious. We see Paul demonstrating that for Philemon by offering to pay his debts and for it to be charged to his account. He even says in verse 19, "*I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it*". Is that not the gospel? Paul just showed not only Philemon what it means to live out the gospel, but the whole church!

"Oh praise the One who paid my debt and raised His life up from the dead." - Jesus paid it all

RESPONSE:

We are Onesimus. We are slaves to our sin and we fall short of the Glory of God, but Jesus came and took our place. Through the atonement on the cross, all of our sins, transgressions and mistakes were taken away because of the sacrifice of Jesus. We as Christians are not to only share this story, but we are called to live it out just like Paul did with Onesimus. Paul was willing to pay all his debts. Now we don't know exactly what happened between Onesimus and Philemon so we don't have an exact number that he owes, but it must be a big deal because it is mentioned in this letter. Paul was willing to take on the debt, the shame, and the embarrassment. He was willing to do that for a fellow brother in Christ. This is what we are called to do. Paul was a living example of what it means to live out what Jesus did on the cross.

For me (Zac), I used to work at Starbucks and every year around the holiday season people would start buying drinks for the people behind them in the drive thru. It was a fun way of loving people and showing people that they are cared for... But was it hard to do? Was it an actual sacrifice to pay for someone's coffee? When was the last time I knew someone was in trouble because of natural consequences and helped them, or took on their consequences? When have I paid someone's debt? This passage is not meant to shame us into paying off people's debts, although that is always an option, but rather the point is to show us that we need to love others regardless of their circumstances and to live out the true living Gospel.

My (CSue) thoughts went to parent/child relationships and how one of our jobs as parents is to determine when to allow natural consequences or suffering to take place vs our natural protective instincts to rescue. In this story Paul, the wise parent, manages to do both. Onesimus is sent home to make things right, but Paul also offers substitution and thereby rescue.

QUESTIONS:

1. Tell about a time when you demonstrated substitution?
2. How would you explain atonement?
3. As you look back at this story, what are the main take-a-ways for you?
4. What truths are you going to be able to apply in your life and in your relationships today? Explain.
5. Since last week, have you thought anymore about someone you can stand in the gap for? What action can you take this week?

PHILEMON STUDY GUIDE

RESOURCES



Paul and His Letter to Philemon communicates the importance of breaking down and confronting social norms. Watch along as Prof. N.T. Wright discusses this timeless message.

<https://www.ntwrightonline.org/portfolio-items/philemon/>



bibleproject.com/explore/philemon/



Why Study Titus & Philemon?

<https://www.ttb.org/resources/study-guides/titus-study-guide>



ECF meets every **Sunday @ 10 AM** online (YouTube) and at
*Rose Hill Middle School in Redmond WA. Visit ecfconnect.org
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**Pending COVID Restrictions*



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