



the Source

Let anyone who is thirsty come to me...

If Paul lived today, surely his letter would be unnecessary. After all, slavery, as a legal institution, is practically non-existent. The Civil War and Thirteenth Amendment resolved the issue in our own nation. Case closed, right? Well, not exactly. While we don't hear much today about slavery in the traditional sense, where a person is the property of another person, there is a form of it today. The U. S. Department of State has names for modern slavery, including various types of human trafficking, forced labor, domestic servitude, and forced child soldiering. Millions of people suffer some form of this modern version of the ancient practice today in countries including India, Germany, France, Britain, and yes, even the United States. Modern slavery is estimated to be a \$150 billion-dollar global industry. It is estimated that in Texas alone in 2016, there were approximately 313,000 victims of human trafficking.

Today's reading reminds us that the foundation for all Christian relationships is love, in families, among business associates, with friends, and with the worker who does your landscaping. It is love that should define who we are to them, and they to us, especially when "they" are the most vulnerable. In Paul's day, the most vulnerable were the likes of one by the name of Onesimus.

— Rev. Van Dickens, Retired Clergy-in-Residence

Consider the Source Philemon 8-21

Monday: Philemon 8-10

Paul genuinely appreciates Philemon for his love for the "saints." That said, he appeals to Philemon in the name of love regarding a runaway slave, Onesimus. Paul considers him as a son, while Paul identifies himself as an "old man," a "prisoner of Christ Jesus."

- How does our relationship with the Lord Jesus change traditional relationships with the people we meet? How do you see others as mutual members of the family of Christ?
- How does that inform the way we should treat each other? How does neighborly love translate in terms of a fair wage for someone you hire, who may be used to receiving much less?

Tuesday: Philemon 10-12

Under Paul's mentorship and by God's grace, Onesimus, the useless slave, became a valued co-worker in Christ. Still, Paul sends him back to Christian slave-owner Philemon as a family member, a man after Paul's own heart. Will he be treated as such?

- Before people come to Christ, how should we treat them?
- What did Paul do that was different than Philemon in their relationship with Onesimus? In what way did Paul's relationship with Onesimus change Onesimus? Do you think it changed Paul too?

Wednesday: Philemon 13

Paul reminds Philemon that as a fellow Christian, he too is a servant. Paul puts Onesimus in parity with Philemon, saying that Onesimus is now doing the work Paul would otherwise have Philemon doing.

- Have you ever felt ignored by others, looked down upon, seen as inferior? Ever felt like running away from that? Who are the "Pauls" in your life who lifted you up and brought you back into the community as a valued person of sacred worth?

- In what ways do you make it clear to others that you view them as equals, that is, of equal value, deserving of the same respect, fairness, opportunity, and dignity as yourself?

Thursday: Philemon 8-21

Paul knew Philemon as a dear friend and co-worker, and appealed to his better self. He could have bossed him but instead chose persuasion. In doing so, he shows the Christian example of first offering people the opportunity to make the right decision, to "come around." There are productive ways, and unproductive ways to "pick a bone" with someone.

- Think about Philemon and Onesimus. Imagine their new relationship, no longer as slave/slave owner, but as partners in Christ. How does Christ persuade you and me to treat people as family, even when they seem useless? Is there room to see others, and yourself, as "works in progress?"
- Will Onesimus view his former master as a brother? If it came to pass, as Colossians 4:9 indicates, then, to borrow from that famous movie, *Casablanca*, "...I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship."

Friday: Philemon 8-21

Paul ends his appeal strongly, with a reminder of the debt Philemon owes Paul for his life in Jesus. Here, refreshing Paul's spirits requires tangible action by Philemon and not mere lip service. This letter is not private. The entire house church is aware of the situation. Philemon's treatment of Onesimus is a public matter, with public repercussions.

- Do you know of an individual, or groups of people, who are treated with less than the dignity that all human beings should receive? Does Christ obligate us to reach out to them?
- What should we do to become more aware of today's modern forms of slavery, and ways in which we as a church and as a community can address it?
- Imagine being seated in the great banquet hall of God's kingdom, a place where everyone present has the same status (risen), same credentials (forgiven sinner), same rewards (eternal life), where no one is more or less important than others, and where everyone receives the same love from the same Father, who counts all of us as part of the same family. Imagine preparing for that day now through the kind of relationships you build with others. What might that look like for you?

A Family Affair

Read 1 Chronicles 29:1-9. Why do we give? What does this Scripture say about why David gave his personal fortune to construct the Temple of the Lord?

David gave willingly, joyfully and in response to what God had already given him. All we have comes from God. We are caretakers of his earthly kingdom. Discuss this responsibility.

What have you given as a family and as individuals? To whom did you give? Is there a right time of year to give? There is an opportunity to donate money in Sunday School every week. Our current offering is for **Heifer International**, an organization that provides livestock to needy families. It is important to remember that giving does not always have to be monetary. In some families, children do not have their own money to give. Giving your time is another way to show God's love. Could you visit someone in a nursing home or spend some time with a new student in your class? How can you give in some way this week?

Dear God, help us to remember to give of ourselves joyfully in response to all you have already given to us. In Jesus name, Amen.

— Children's Ministry