

COMMUNITY GROUP GUIDE

PHILEMON Part 1 – The Gospel Gets Personal – 9/27/2026

COMMUNION

Read 2 Corinthians 5:18–19: *“God...reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.”*

As you take communion, thank Jesus for bearing the cost of your reconciliation with God. Ask Him to make you someone who brings His reconciling love into the relationships around you.

REVIEW

- Rather than explain the gospel in theological terms; Paul is applying it to a complicated, real-life relationship involving Philemon, Onesimus, and the early church.
- After becoming a follower of Jesus, Onesimus now faced the difficult question of what to do about his past. Paul sends him back because forgiveness, reconciliation, and repairing what is broken—especially in relationships—are at the heart of the Christian faith.
- The church isn't different because Christians never experience conflict or broken relationships. We are meant to be different because we don't simply run from brokenness; we seek healing and reconciliation.
- Rather than command Philemon to do what is right, Paul appeals to him on the basis of love. There is an important difference between getting someone to do the right thing and helping someone become the kind of person who wants to do the right thing.
- Faith, trust, and love cannot be demanded. They grow through persuasion and example.
- Paul reminds Philemon of who he already is, models sacrificial love himself, expresses confidence in him, and then creates space for Philemon to freely respond to what the gospel is calling him to become.
- Paul also asks Philemon to see Onesimus differently—no longer merely as a slave, but as a brother in Christ. The gospel changes not only our behavior but the way we see and categorize other people.
- Paul sees God's providence working even within a messy situation. He is able to work redemptively within our messes, sometimes creating something stronger and more beautiful through a relationship that has been broken and repaired.
- The way of Jesus is not to push, nag, shame, control, or simply avoid people who frustrate us. Gospel transformation is more like growing a tree: we faithfully plant, water, encourage, model, and love—but ultimately only God can produce the fruit.

DISCUSSION

1. What stood out to you most from this week's message? Was there something in this story that caused you to think differently about the gospel or your relationships?
2. The sermon said, "The church is not different in that we never have problems; we are to be different in that we don't run away from our problems, we face them." Why is our natural tendency often to avoid broken relationships? What does healthy reconciliation look like—and what parts of reconciliation are actually within our control?
3. What is the difference between getting someone to behave correctly and helping someone become the kind of person who wants to do what is right? Where have you seen that difference in parenting, marriage, leadership, friendship, or discipleship?
4. Our natural responses when we desperately want someone to change can be to push, argue, nag, shame, control—or simply avoid them. Which of these are you most likely to do? Why do you think love and patient persuasion can be more difficult than control?

PRAYER

Spend some time quietly asking the Holy Spirit to bring to mind relationships where He wants to do a work of reconciliation or transformation.

Then pray together:

- Thank Jesus for stepping into our brokenness and bearing the cost of reconciling us to God.
- Ask God to show you where you have been avoiding a relationship that He may be asking you to face with wisdom and love.
- Pray for freedom from the desire to control, shame, nag, or manipulate others into changing.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to transform you so that your example makes Jesus attractive to the people around you.
- Pray for patience to faithfully plant and water seeds of love while trusting God to produce the fruit.