

## Study 1

### Read Philemon 1:1-10

Philemon is a very important book. The letter to Philemon shows that the Christian faith is a practical and personal one. Christian principles are not just meant to be recited from the church pulpit. Rather, they are to be applied in the lives of every individual.

This letter gives an up-close view into how Jesus changes lives one by one and influences society from the inside out. The cultural evil of slavery would not be stamped out through a revolution. But lives could be impacted, families could be touched, and souls could be saved wherever people opened their hearts to the love of God. The doctrine of forgiveness is not mentioned, but it is shown. Onesimus' and Philemon's lives were changed forever by Jesus.

#### **I. Opening greetings (1-3)**

##### **Discussion Questions**

- Who was this letter written to?
- What is the purpose of the letter?
- Why does Paul refer to himself as “a prisoner of Christ Jesus”?
- What does verse 2 show us about the early NT church?
- Why would Paul want this letter read to the entire church since it was primarily an appeal directly to Philemon?

**Reflect** – What are the benefits of churches meeting in homes?

**Application** – Join a home group. Even if the church you attend is large, you can probably find a weekly home Bible study to join. Home Bible study groups provide amazing opportunities for Christian growth. You can also consider opening up your home or joining a home church.

**Application** – We should not make excuses for not reaching out to others. Paul could have become focused on himself and his own problems. It would have been natural for him to expect others to care for and pray for him. He could have looked back on his long ministry and rested on his laurels. But he didn't. Even in prison, Paul sought ways to reach out. Sickness, disability, persecution, age, gender—none of these are reasons to stop doing the ministry God has called us to. Serving God, even when it is difficult and there are many challenges, is a great inspiration to others as well

## **II. Words of encouragement for Philemon (4-7)**

### **Discussion Questions**

- What do verses 4-7 show about Paul's attitude toward Philemon?
- What can you learn from Paul's prayer life?
- Are your prayers for others filled with thanksgiving?
- What kind of person was Philemon?
- What kind of things did Paul pray for Philemon?
- How did Philemon give Paul joy?
- What does it mean that the "hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you"?
- How is your heart refreshed?
- How can you help refresh others?
- What do you think is Paul's purpose in sharing these words of high praise with Philemon?
- Does your testimony shine brightly like Philemon's?
- What might someone say about you?

**Application** – What is the main content of your prayer life?

Spend some time evaluating your prayer life. By all means, continue to pray for the sick, the weak, and the poor. Pray for health, strength, and provision. But go beyond this. Plead with God for character growth. Ask God to turn weaknesses into strengths.

Pray rich and meaningful prayers for others. Focus on their character, faith, ministry, and growth. In your prayers, go deeper and focus on what is really important.

**Application** – Consider what kind of things Paul would say about you. Would he express joy at your life and testimony, or would he have to rebuke you?

**Application** – Like Paul, we need to be optimistic about others and do our best to uplift them. That doesn't mean we can never point at wrongs (Paul often did), but if you look at the letters he wrote, he is intentionally very encouraging.

We also need to be encouragers. When others succeed, it should bring us joy and satisfaction. Highlight their virtues and don't take into account a wrong suffered. Be quick to praise others and point out their good characteristics. Someone once said that parents should praise their children five times for every criticism (perhaps even that is low.) The same principle is true in our other relationships.

### **III. The appeal (8-10)**

#### **Discussion Questions**

- What does Paul ask Philemon to do?
- Why could Paul give orders to Philemon?
- What did Paul decide to do instead of ordering Philemon?
- What does this teach us about using authority?
- What can you learn from this passage about communication?
- Who is Onesimus? What is his relationship to Philemon?
- What is his relationship to Paul? What does it mean “begotten in my imprisonment?”