

# A Community of Faith and Love

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Preacher: Thomas Davis

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, I'd like us to turn back to Paul's editor, Philomon, because tonight we are going to begin a very short study on what is the shortest of Paul's letters.

I should probably comment on pronunciation to begin with. Some people say Philemon, some people say Philomon. Some people say Philemon.

So we're going to look together at Philomon. We'll look at the first part this evening. Let me just read verses 4 to 7 again. I thank my God when I remember you in my prayers, because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have towards the Lord Jesus and for all the saints.

And I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ. For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.

It's not often that we look at a letter like this, and sometimes our attention can often be drawn to the bigger and perhaps more famous books or letters that we find in Scripture.

[ 1 : 23 ] But looking at a book like Philemon is different, but also it's quite wonderful because it's one of those rare occasions when we get to read the whole of a book of the Bible in a church service.

We went through the whole thing in one go. And I want us to think and talk a little bit about that tonight, because it gives us the opportunity to think and talk about how we approach reading a book of the Bible.

And I hope that will help us as we begin this study, which we'll have over the next four weeks. But I hope it will also help us just in terms of our general reading of the Bible as well.

Whenever we come to read a book of the Bible long or short, there's two important things that we want to keep in view. And you'll have to forgive me that I don't really have very kind of technical theological language for these two important things.

They are the big picture and the cool details. And these are our headings for this evening. These are the things we want to keep in view when we approach a book of the Bible.

[ 2 : 34 ] So for Philemon, let's look at these two together, starting with the big picture. There's lots of ways you can do that. You can ask the question, who, what, when, where. You can explore things like structure, themes, content.

Or you can think of headings like period, people, places, and purpose. These are all very helpful for reminding us that the books of the Bible arose out of a wider context and out of real life situations.

We'll go for the 4-P approach tonight. So for a period, Philemon was written probably in the early 60s of the first century.

When you think of the timeline of the New Testament, sometimes it's helpful to think in terms of 30s, 60s, and 90s. So 30s, the year 30, and the years around them, around that is when Jesus' ministry took place and all the major events of the Gospels are around that time.

After Jesus died, rose, and ascended into heaven, the church began to spread bit by bit from Jerusalem into the surrounding region as recorded in the Book of Acts.

[ 3 : 47 ] In the 40s and the 50s, the church is growing, and in particular, Paul is becoming increasingly prominent as a missionary, a leader, and an apostle.

It all culminates in the 60s, which is when the Book of Acts concludes. Paul travels to Rome where he's imprisoned, and from there several of his letters were written.

And then 90s is a helpful date to have in mind, because it was sometime in the 90s, probably around 94, 95, that Revelation was written, and that's the last book of the New Testament to be written.

And from the 90s onwards, we go into what's called the post-apostolic period, which is after the New Testament era. So it can be helpful to have that 30s, 60s, 90s just to kind of roughly find your way around the New Testament period.

Philomon falls into the 60s category. It was written by Paul towards the end of his life. For people, there's three main people involved, Paul, Philomon, and Onesimus.

[ 4 : 54 ] Paul is an apostle and a key leader in the early church, and he clearly has a previous connection to Philomon, and it seems very likely that Paul was instrumental in Philomon's conversion.

And as we read towards the end of the chapter, Paul's hoping to come and stay with him. So there seems to be a fairly well-established relationship between them. At the moment though, Paul's a prisoner, probably in Rome.

Philomon is a Christian living in Colosse, or possibly in Laodicea, which was nearby in southwest Asia Minor, what we would call Turkey today. We don't know an enormous amount about him, but he must have been at least a little bit up the social ladder at the time because he owned at least one slave and he owned property.

And he also seemed to have a prominent role in the church because it was in his house that the church meets. And then we have Onesimus. He's not mentioned until verse 10, but he's actually the whole reason that this letter was written.

He's also from Colosse. He's actually mentioned in the letter to the Colossians chapter 4, verse 9. Those two letters, Colossians and Philomon, were sent together. And he was a slave of Philomon's who had ran away.

[ 6 : 11 ] In terms of places, three key places, Rome, Colosse, Laodicea. There's a map, just so we know roughly. Rome, we've all heard of. Colosse is there, kind of southwest Turkey, as we would call it.

And Laodicea was just nearby. We don't know exactly which one Philomon was in, but it doesn't really matter because they're very close to one another anyway.

And then the purpose. Well as we said, Onesimus was a slave in Philomon's household who appeared to have run away. He had possibly stolen from Philomon in the process because in verse 18, Paul talks about Onesimus owing Philomon something.

We don't know for sure, but that could well have been the case. At the very least, he had fled from his responsibilities towards his master. And in doing that, he had broken both the law and the customs of that time.

But while he was away, he's become a Christian, probably through Paul's influence. And it's definitely the case that he's become a big help to Paul.

[ 7 : 15 ] But Paul recognizes that Onesimus still has a legal obligation towards Philomon, and even more so, they are now brothers in Christ and therefore need to be reconciled.

So the whole purpose of this letter is that Paul is sending Onesimus back to his master. And he's asking Philomon to receive him and to teach him no longer as a bond servant, but as a brother in Jesus Christ.

All of that means that this letter is a very personal letter from Paul to Philomon. It's almost a kind of semi-private issue that it's dealing with.

And it was written to address what was a very delicate and perhaps even a very awkward situation. So that's our four Ps. You can use those four Ps for any book of the Bible. If you want to find that information for yourself, there's lots of ways you can do that. So if you've got a study Bible, like the ESV study Bible or the NIV study Bible, it's great for finding that kind of information.

[ 8 : 28 ] You can use a commentary. That will tell you the same stuff. Or you can get a book that's called something like Introduction to the New Testament. You get the same for the Old Testament. Gives you all that kind of background information.

You can get it in a book or these days you can get it online. If you go to something like biblical.com, there you can find an NIV study Bible.

So go and investigate and find out more about these things. This awareness of the bigger picture around a book like Philomon is a huge help for us as we read the Bible.

It helps us to see the context into which the letter was written, which is always important for accurately understanding what is being said. And it also helps to remind us that all the books of the Bible arose from real places, real people, real situations and real problems.

In other words, it's all very real. And that's why we can go to the Bible and find so much that still speaks to our situation as well.

[ 9 : 34 ] In many ways, Philomon is just like a window into the practical day to day issues that faced the early church. Like all the other epistles in the New Testament, this is a letter to a real life church.

But one aspect of the real life-ness of Philomon that is intertwined into this letter and that we have to talk about is something that's hugely controversial.

And that of course is slavery. And I just want to say a wee bit about that before we move on further. Onesimus was Philomon's slave.

That basically means that he was owned by Philomon. And the whole concept of ownership and slavery is one that we find quite horrific.

And we read a book like Philomon, where a slave is being returned to his master. And we think to ourselves, what on earth is going on? Is the Bible endorsing slavery?

[ 10 : 40 ] What is this about? Well, there's two important things that we need to say in regard to that. One is that slavery was a big part of Greco-Roman society, but it was perhaps not what we first imagined.

When we hear that word, slavery, lots of things pop into your head. But it might not be that the most accurate picture that we have. The world into which Paul went as a missionary was one where slavery was a big part of the social structure of the time.

And it was written into the legal functioning of the Roman Empire. Indeed, we should remember that the whole Roman Empire was basically based on conquest and forced rule. So if you were a Jew or any other non-Roman, even if you weren't a slave, you didn't have a freedom and an independence that we today would regard as a basic human right.

And the fact that slavery was a big part of the society there means that it wasn't really as controversial then as it would be now. Tragically, it was a part of normal life.

That does not, for one minute, justify it, but it just needs to be recognized that that's the way things were. And a couple to that is the fact that slavery in the New Testament times didn't mean being chained up in a field wearing rags.

[ 12 : 05 ] In Greco-Roman society, slaves had a much wider range of jobs. So they would be household managers, accountants, teachers, personal secretaries, even sea captains and physicians.

It was very much encouraged that slaves would become educated because that made them more useful and more valuable to their masters. And slaves could, in fact, become quite wealthy, and if they wanted, they could buy their freedom.

And that was something that happened quite often. None of that makes slavery right or acceptable. And there would have been many slaves who had lived in very harsh conditions, but it's important that we just recognize it was a very wide-ranging social phenomenon at that time.

That means that when we think of onesimists fleeing from Philemon, we might have this image of our mind of him kind of, like, maybe in a dungeon with handcuffs on, and he kind of unpicks his handcuffs, sneaks out, and he runs down the road in his rags.

I'm not convinced it would have been like that. It could well be the case that it would be much more accurate to imagine an accountant fiddling the books at his desk and sneaking off with all the money.

[ 13 : 26 ] We don't know for certain, but it's just important we don't impose our modern assumptions about slavery onto the New Testament. So we need to just remember that it's maybe not quite what we first imagined.

The second key thing that I want to say about slavery is that Christianity made a massive difference to slaves. So in terms of challenging social norms, the second most astonishing thing that the Christian Church did in terms of first century society was that it regarded slaves and masters as equals.

Now, you're all thinking, what's the first most astonishing thing? Well, I think the first, number one most astonishing thing in terms of social change was that Christianity treated men and women the same.

But it also treated slaves and masters as equals. And for slaves, that was a huge change. And in this letter, Paul is reminding Philharmonic to treat Onesimus no longer as a bondservant, but as a brother.

And that equal value placed on people, whether they were slave or free, was crucial for showing that in the centuries to come, a society shaped by Christianity was to be one where there would be no more slavery at all.

[14:46] All of that is just a reminder that we mustn't jump to conclusions about history. When Paul sent Onesimus back to Philharmon, he may well have been sending him back to a very comfortable house and a well-remunerated role we don't know.

But it's also important that we look at our own society before we pass judgment on the past. We could look at Onesimus and think, well, even if he was well looked after, it's still a disgrace that Philharmon had him as a slave.

And yet today, you can go to any town in Scotland and you'll find people waiting for the alcohol aisle to open every morning.

And there you have a slave who is in utter bondage. You have a slave master who shows absolutely no mercy whatsoever.

And as a modern, noble, developed nation, we see that right in front of us and we just get on with our day.

[16:01] So as we approach a book of the Bible, we want to know and remember the big picture as we read. But we also want to look at the cool details of each part.

And that's what we're going to do with Philharmon over the next four weeks. And tonight, we're going to look in a little detail at verses one to seven. And there are a lot of cool details to see. These verses focus not so much on Onesimus. We'll look at him next week. But these verses look at Philharmon and the church, which he was part of. And so I want us just to whiz through these verses and see some of the details that are contained within.

So let's go, we'll start with verse one. You can see it there on the screen. Here we're told who the letter's from. But we see state of the way that it's not just Paul.

It's from Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy, our brother. It's very easy to forget that Paul had companions with him. He wasn't a lone wolf.

[17:04] Verses one, B, and two, then tell us the recipients to Philharmon, our beloved fellow worker, and Apaya, our sister, and Archipus, our fellow soldier, and the church in your house.

Straight away we see that there's more people involved than just Paul, Philharmon, and Onesimus. We have Apaya and Archipus, as you can see. We don't know exactly who they are.

I think it's probably a good guess to say that Appiah would be Philharmon's wife. Archipus, maybe their son, maybe another leader at the church.

We don't know, but these seem like fairly likely possibilities. The letter's not just a Philharmon. It's to Apaya, Archipus.

In fact, it's also to the church that meets in their house. Although it's this slightly delicate, semi-private letter, it's still to be read to the whole congregation that gathers there each week.

[18:00] That means that the need for reconciliation between Philharmon and Onesimus isn't just a private matter between them and Paul. It's a matter of concern for the whole church.

And that's, I think, a great reminder that when relationships between Christians are broken or strained, the common practice that we have today, which is basically to pretend that these issues aren't there, is the precise opposite of what the New Testament expects of us.

I want you to notice the extremely important ecclesiological phrase there, the church in your house, reminding us that the church and the building are two different things.

And that, of course, is still true today. Often you will hear this building around us here. Often you might hear that being called the house of God.

I can understand why people say that, but it's a well-intentioned phrase, but it's a well-intentioned theological error. The house of God is the people meeting in the house of Philharmon.

[19:20] Notice also the very cool descriptions we have of Philharmon and Archipas, fellow worker and fellow soldier. These are brilliant descriptions because here you have Paul, an apostle, a leader, an incredibly important person, somebody who has a hugely significant role, and yet he writes to these Christians and he calls them fellow workers, fellow soldiers.

In other words, he does not put himself in a category above them. Instead, he sees them as his teammates. Often we can think that God has this kind of super category of workers where people like Paul and Peter and a few others from history and from the present day belong.

And in comparison to that, we feel like complete nobodies. Paul never thinks like that. He looks at Philharmon and Archipas and he would look at you and say, you are my fellow worker.

We are in this together and we need each other. This has two important lessons for today. One is that the Christian church today, I think, is a little bit obsessed with titles.

So people want to describe themselves with quite elaborate titles. Founder of this, president of that, director of this, chairperson of that, and it can all sound very impressive.

[ 20 : 51 ] And we all want to be recognized as something important and we can be sucked in by the urge to have a title. I think it's helpful to notice that there is none of that carry on with Paul.

And the title fellow worker or fellow soldier should always be enough for us. The second important lesson for today is that the description fellow worker and the description fellow soldier reminds us of the crucial truth that across different congregations, different denominations and different countries, we are doing the same work and we are fighting the same fight.

That means we are not ever competing with each other. And that means we should never see a brother or a sister as an opponent. It's impossible for someone to be your fellow soldier and an opponent at the same time.

And if you're in an army, if fellow soldiers do fall out and have a disagreement, that is not the moment when you bring out the weapons, draw battle lines and start firing.

It's when you sit down, talk, listen and work hard to put things right. Paul speaks in terms of fellow workers and fellow soldiers.

[ 22 : 14 ] Then comes Paul's greeting in verse 3, grace to you in peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We could spend the whole sermon on this verse. It's a beautiful greeting and it's the kind of language that we should never hesitate to use in our own correspondence.

I just want you to notice here that we're only three verses into Philharmon and already there's a word that's appeared five times. Can you see it?

Can you see it at home? Can you see it here? It's the word our. And that is such a cool word because it speaks so powerfully of the unity and togetherness of the Christian church.

Paul when he speaks, he talks about our brothers, our sisters and most amazingly of all, God is our Father. And that reality should never stop leaving us speechless over the fact that if we trust in Jesus, God is actually our Father and we are actually his children.

We then come to a word of thanksgiving, which is a very common feature of Paul's letters. He says in verse 4, I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have towards the Lord Jesus and for all the saints.

[ 23 : 45 ] Here we see an outstanding balance between encouraging someone and not puffing them up. Often we struggle with that. We kind of lurch between feeling useless and discouraged and then we feel proud and full of ourselves and it's a hard balance because in the one hand we don't want to be puffing people up and we don't want to just be looking for people to tell us how amazing we are and yet at the same time we all desperately need encouragement because it's incredibly easy to be really hard on ourselves as Christians.

Paul gives us the answer that we need. He encourages Philemon. He tells him the positive things that he's doing but as he does that, the person he is actually praising is God.

He encourages Philemon and glorifies God at the same time. And in doing so he uses another brilliant word because he encourages Philemon but it's not empty words.

He actually tells him why. And when I saw that it made me ask myself when was the last time that I spoke to someone or message someone to say I thank God when I remember you because and then explained.

I think Paul's giving us all a really good example to follow. With Philemon, the reason that Paul thanks God when he remembers him is for something very specific.

[ 25 : 19 ] It's all to do with Philemon's reputation. We know that because of these two words, I hear. Paul has heard something about Philemon. In fact, he's heard two things in particular and I want us to look at those two things for the last wee bit of the sermon.

But before we do that, I just want to stop for a second and highlight the fact that in just a few verses we have so many cool details and we have barely such the surface.

So when you are reading the Bible, it's good to get the big picture. It's good to read through large sections and to get the feel of a whole book but it is also good to slow down, to read a few verses and to just soak it up.

So if you read two chapters on a Monday and then two verses on a Tuesday, that is totally fine. God is not keeping a tally.

God did not give you the Bible to make you a reading machine. He gave you the Bible so that you'd hear His voice.

[ 26 : 31 ] And He will talk to you through the big awesome picture and He'll talk to you through the cool, tiny details.

Theologians talk about plenary and verbal inspiration. That's the kind of technical language for what I've just translated into big picture and cool details. He is just the idea that the whole Bible, the big themes, the way everything fits together is all inspired by God.

Verbal inspiration is talking about the fact that the specific wording of each part, the cool details are all breathed out by God. God is speaking to us through both.

So always feel like that. Sometimes we can be really hard on ourselves with Bible reading and think, oh, I haven't read enough today. I haven't got through this book quickly enough. I haven't actually managed to read the Bible this year.

It's really good to try to do all those things, but it's also really good to just take a verse or two and just let it soak into your mind. Because the important thing is just hearing God's voice and letting Him speak to you.

[ 27 : 41 ] So Paul thanks God because he has heard about Philemon. It's all to do with his reputation. And there's two things in particular that Paul has heard. He has heard about his faith and about his love, as you can see.

That's Philemon's reputation, a man who displays faith and love.

I think that's an astounding example for us in terms of Philemon and his character and his reputation. So often we're concerned about other things.

We often have the phrase, have you heard about this? Have you heard about that? That applies in every part of life, but it can apply in churches as well. Often we'll talk about other churches, other Christians.

Have you heard about this? Have you heard about that? And often it's maybe not in the most positive sense. Have you heard what they've done? Have you heard what's happened there? And we're often drawn to the latest scoop or news.

[ 28 : 47 ] When Paul talks about what he's heard about Philemon, he focuses on something far better. He focuses on his faith and his love. And the interesting thing about Paul is that he actually does this all the time.

You see it in other places, like Colossians. He says, we are heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints. And there's some other verses on the screen there where we see exactly the same thing.

Wouldn't it be brilliant if it was the case that when people spoke about us, the thing that they said was, have you heard about their faith and their love?

And wouldn't it be brilliant if when we speak about others, that our focus would be on those two things as well? For Paul, the Christian church was always to be a community of faith and love.

So for Paul, faith and love is what he's concerned about in terms of reputation. These two words are then unpacked in the next two verses.

[ 29 : 47 ] So verse six talks a little bit more about faith. Verse seven talks a little bit more about love. And again, there are many cool details here.

I just want to pick out two points as we close. In the situation that Philharmon faces, there's two things that he's going to have to remember.

And these are two things that we need to remember as well. And they're brought out before us in verses six and seven. So let's look at verse six first. Paul speaking about Philharmon sharing his faith, you see it there, highlighted.

That's a key part of being a Christian. We are witnesses. We do not want to keep our faith to ourselves. We don't want to keep our allegiance to Jesus as a secret. Paul then speaks about sharing of the faith being effective, the idea that it would cause something to happen.

And that's exactly what we want, isn't it? We want the sharing of our faith to make something happen. We want there to be positive results. And as we think about that, often we would think in terms of other people coming to faith.

[ 30 : 56 ] So we'd expect verse six to say something like, I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the conversion of many others or for the growth of the church or for something like that.

But as is so often the case, Paul does not say what we expect him to say. Sometimes he doesn't say what we want him to say. He says something different.

And instead of that, Paul makes a connection between sharing faith and gaining knowledge. You can see that there in the verse in front of you. At a general level, this is incredibly important because it's directly addressing one of the most common misunderstandings of Christianity.

That is that faith is vague and mystical and that in order to have it, you need to abandon knowledge. That might be through of some belief systems. It is absolutely not true of Christianity.

In fact, our view, our belief, our claim is that the Christian faith is key to gaining true knowledge. So if we want to answer the big questions of life, where do we come from?

[ 31 : 59 ] What's right and wrong? What is our purpose? What is truth? What is the destiny of the universe? It is the sharing of the Christian faith that will give us knowledge in all of these areas.

But here, Paul is actually referring to something very specific in terms of knowledge. He refers to how we understand one another.

And in particular, he refers to knowing the good that is in us, the good things that are in us. Now, I think everybody agrees that there's good in us.

The big challenge is how do we explain it? And how do we know that that's true? Is our goodness a social construct? Is it a tool for a survival? Is it a happy coincidence?

Is it an illusion? Or is it because we are the handiwork of God Himself? And if you want a coherent explanation for the goodness in you, only Jesus will give it.

[ 32 : 58 ] And God's great plan is that through our union to Jesus Christ by faith, He will pour His goodness into us, and He'll restore us to be a fountain of goodness towards others.

So if you are a Christian or if you become one, then you are now a precious child of God. You're a beloved brother or sister. You have a renewed heart. You have God Himself dwelling within you.

You have His gifts by which you are able to serve Him. Trusting in Jesus means that there is so much that is good in you. And in terms of this letter, Paul highlighting this fact makes perfect sense because for Philomon, he is about to be confronted with a Christian brother who has hurt him.

And he needs to know and understand that there's still good in Onesimus. And when we face the same situation, when we face fallouts, if we are hurt, when all sorts of thoughts of frustration, revenge, even hatred stir themselves up within us, we desperately need a full knowledge of the fact that the person who is standing in front of us is not a devil, and there is something good in this person who has wronged us so much.

And you know, we think about that and we think, well, yeah, that all sounds ideal, but it's impossible, surely. When someone has wronged you, how can you actually conclude that there's something good in them, that there's something worthwhile in them?

[ 34 : 43 ] And that's why fallouts last forever because people just refuse to believe that and they see people as just enemies and horrible and someone that they're just not going to have any time for.

I might say this and you say to yourself, well, yeah, but I've been hurt, I've been let down and I can't bring myself to see what's good in someone else.

It can seem too hard, it can seem impossible, but never forget that's exactly, exactly what Jesus did for you.

When Jesus concluded that you were worth dying for. In a world where we can so quickly fill our heads with reasons to hate others, faith in Jesus gives us knowledge that helps us to see how precious people actually are.

And it's a great irony that without Jesus, there's actually only blind faith that people are actually good. Last of all, we come to verse seven.

[ 35 : 52 ] And here we have a beautiful description of the effect that Paul, that Philharmon's love has had through Philharmon, the hearts of the saints have been refreshed. Isn't that a beautiful description?

Wouldn't that be a great thing to have written on your obituary or on your gravestone that the hearts of others were refreshed through you? I want to focus especially on that word heart.

It's a really interesting Greek word. It's the Greek word *splachna*, which I couldn't resist saying because it's a very cool sounding word. And that's what it means because it actually means your bowels or as we would maybe say, your guts.

It's conveying the idea of the deep down core of our feelings and our emotions. And that means that what's so wonderful about Philharmon's love is not that it gave people a kind of superficial fuzzy feeling for a while.

It actually gave them deep relief and refreshment. Philharmon's care has allowed others to recover their strength and be restored.

[ 36 : 54 ] And this is where we have to remember that this letter is written in an awkward situation. And what is what happens to your guts in an awkward situation?

They get all twisted, don't they? So when we're worried, we have a knot in our stomach. When we're hurt, we feel like we're punched in the stomach. When we're alone, we feel empty in our stomach.

When we're overwhelmed, we feel sick to the stomach. Jesus has brought us into a community in which we are loved by Him and loved by one another in a way that brings relief to all of these things.

Can you imagine Onesimus standing in front of Philharmon returning to this master who he had deserted, holding this letter, anxious about what the reaction would be?

I'm sure that as Onesimus stood there, his guts would have been amassed. And all of that would be undone through Philharmon's forgiveness.

[ 38 : 16 ] In a real life church, there will be mistakes and there will be broken relationships that need to be restored. That's why it's so important that every church is like Philharmon's church, that this church is like Philharmon's church, that it's a community of faith and love.

That's the community that Jesus died to establish and into which He is calling us. And all He asks us to do is trust Him and follow Him.

And it's a great reminder that this is maybe the, I don't know, it's probably the least theological language I've ever used.

But if your guts are a mess about something, whether it's a relationship with someone else, a bad experience you've had, or fear about life and death, if your guts are a mess, you can go to Jesus. And He will give you peace and refreshment that isn't superficial. He'll give you peace that goes right down to your guts.

[ 39 : 35 ] And it never goes away. And in a way, I think that's the big difference I would say in my own life being a Christian. I would say that, you know, maybe before I was a Christian, you know, you'd have times when everything would look great on the outside, but deep down something was wrong.

When you become a Christian, it's the other way around. Sometimes the outside can be a bit tough, but deep down, it's brilliant.

And so Jesus is calling us into that community. He's calling you. And so may we be like Paul, like Philharmon, and like Onesimus. May we all take our place in that community of faith and love.

Amen. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we thank you for the difference that you've made in our lives.

And we pray that you'd help us just to see more of the details that are in your word, that it would shape us and mold us so that we too would be men and women known for our faith and their love.

[ 40 : 50 ] And that that would display ourselves, itself, both in how we live for you and also in terms of how we treat one another. And if any of us do have strained relationships with other people, we pray that even this week that these would be healed, that we would continue in the great line that includes Philharmon and Onesimus of difficult situations that have been healed.

May that be true for us all. And for those who have been hurt and who do suffer, we pray that you would bring healing. In Jesus' name, amen.