

Philemon-by Nathan White

Chapter 1

This letter is a powerful treatise on how the gospel radically changes the ways we relate to others. Philemon opened his home to his church and had at least one slave, Onesimus (Roman slavery was drastically different from the slavery of 18th and 19th century America). It's reasonable to conclude that Philemon was a relatively wealthy man, and it is possible that Onesimus stole from him when he ran (v.18-19). While on the run, by God's grace, Onesimus met Paul and became a believer. Onesimus served Paul in his imprisonment and now, Paul sends Onesimus back to Philemon with instructions to welcome him back as a brother (v.16). Here we see a vivid picture of how the gospel affects our relationships. Both Onesimus and Philemon had to risk, if not absorb, serious loss. Onesimus had to humbly return, knowing that justice would not be favorable, but Philemon had to welcome him with grace. To love this way is to be vulnerable. For the sake of reconciliation, we humbly suffer loss, serving as small reflections of what Christ suffered to forgive us and reconcile us to himself.

-Reflecting on Philemon-

Before moving on to our next book of the Bible, take some time today to reflect on what we've read in Philemon. Perhaps re-visit a favorite chapter or an especially meaningful passage. Or read the beginning chapter(s) again, now that you've read the whole. Or go back to a part of the book that struck you as curious and see if it makes more sense now. Or speed-read the whole thing again, seeking to reinforce its main themes. Or... perhaps you need a catch-up day to finish Philemon before we move forward?

"He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it." 1 Thessalonians 5.24