

Little Letters | Philemon 8-25

February 10th, 11th, 2024

My Story Questions

These questions/activities help the group know one another and transition to deeper discussion. Choose one. OR.... You might start the meeting with one person sharing highlights of their story. Set up a rotation.

- 1) St. Valentine was a Christian who sent notes about God's love. How do you show God's love on Feb. 14th?
- 2) When have you received an impactful handwritten letter?

Study Questions

*Notes to leaders: This week the questions are arranged according to the method of interpretation used by the teaching team. The method has three main steps outlined in the sermon last week. We were encouraged not to shortcut from step one (observation) to step three (application). Instead, we are to spend time in step two, discovering the true meaning of the text by exploring the context and the original intent of the author (Interpretation). I have grouped questions into each of the three steps. We will try this new format during this sermon series. Feel free to give me any feedback.

Go in order from observation to interpretation to application but feel free to choose a few questions you like from each section or add your own.

Observation Questions: What do you observe about the text?

Read Philemon 8-25

- 1) What jumps off the page? What do you notice?
- 2) What stands out to you in the way Paul describes his relationship with Onesimus? What gives an indication that Onesimus has changed?
- 3) What was Philemon's past relationship with Onesimus? What indicates Onesimus may have owed Philemon a debt of some kind?
- 4) What was Paul asking Philemon to do?

Interpretation Questions: What does it mean?

- 5) What do you know about being a bond-servant at that time? How does the issue of slavery in this letter form a barrier to understanding this passage?
- 6) How does Paul show that Onesimus and Philemon are now equals? How is this radical? (See Col. 3:9-11)
- 7) Paul offers to pay the debt for Onesimus. How is this Christ-like and a demonstration of the gospel? What lessons do you learn about the radical nature of forgiveness?
- 8) How does this situation compare to Jesus' words about forgiveness? (see Matthew 18:21-35, Luke 18:9-14. These are passages used in Live It Out this week)

Application Questions: What do I do?

- 9) How can we live out Paul's approach to advocate for reconciliation in church? in the home?
- 10) How could thanking God for his radical forgiveness of you help soften your heart toward others? Spend time with your group thanking God for His forgiveness?
- 11) Onesimus changed from "unuseful" to "useful". What words describe your transformation in Christ?

Responding to Jesus

Offer these questions for personal reflection before your group prayer time. Practice listening for God's voice.

- 1) Lord, "Who needs an apology from me today?"
- 2) Lord, "Who do I need to forgive more fully?"