CORNERSTONECONNECTIONS
MAY092026

Scripture Story: Philemon.
Commentary: *The Acts of the Apostles* (or *Unlikely Leaders*), chapter 43.

trading places



Photo by Colleen Cahill

flashlight

"Among those who gave their hearts to God through the labors of Paul in Rome was Onesimus, a pagan slave who had wronged his master, Philemon, a Christian believer in Colosse, and had escaped to Rome. In the kindness of his heart, Paul sought to relieve the poverty and distress of the wretched fugitive and then endeavored to shed the light of truth into his darkened mind. Onesimus listened to the words of life, confessed his sins, and was converted to the faith of Christ" (*The Acts of the Apostles,* p. 456).

keytext

"Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love."

(Philemon 8, 9, NIV)

what do you think?

Think of a time when you had to borrow someone else's clothes to wear. What did you have to wear? Did anything funny happen as a result? Were you able to find something you liked or suited your tastes? Or did you feel silly and uncomfortable because the outfits were "sooo not you"?

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did you know?

According to Webster's, the definition of compassion is: "Sorrow for the sufferings or troubles of another or others accompanied by a deep urge to help."

Paul wrote Colossians, and he also wrote Corinthians. In 2 Corinthians 1:3 he uses the same word when referring to God as the "Father of mercies." We can infer that Paul is saying that we are filled with a sense of compassion when we see someone is hurting, and we feel the urge to want to make things better, to help in some way. Compassion is not just an act for show. It should be a gut reaction—coming from deep inside.

INTO THE STORY

"I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, because I hear about your love for all his holy people and your faith in the Lord Jesus. I pray that your partnership with us in the faith may be effective in deepening your understanding of every good thing we share for the sake of Christ. Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the Lord's people.

"Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love. It is as none other than Paul—an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—that I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.

"I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you. I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do would not seem forced but would be voluntary. Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever—no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord.

"So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe me your very self. I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask."

(Philemon 4-21, NIV)



OUT OF THE STORY

From the passage above, list to whom Paul is writing and whom this letter is about. Describe their characteristics as seen through Paul's eyes.

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What is Paul asking for? What assurances does he give? Show why you think he was moved so readily to give such assurances.

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Imagine you were Philemon. What would your response be? Explain.

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How can Paul's example of appealing to love rather than displaying force be helpful in your interactions with others?

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What do you think is the "big picture" of the passages above? In one phrase sum up the main thought of the passages above. Share with the class why you made that statement.

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punch lines

"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" **(Ephesians 4:32, NIV).**

"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" **(Galatians 6:2, NIV).**

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience" **(Colossians 3:12, NIV).**

"Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn" **(Romans 12:15, NIV).**

"If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others" **(Philippians 2:1-4, NIV).**

further insight

"The sinner who has robbed God of years of service has no means of canceling the debt. Jesus interposes between the sinner and God, saying, I will pay the debt. Let the sinner be spared; I will suffer in his stead."

—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles,* p. 458

Sabbath

In a small group of friends, share the answers you gave in the *What Do You Think?* section. Believe it or not, we are asked to share not only our clothes, but everything else—including our burdens. Read the following verses and discuss what they have to say about compassion.

- Acts 2:42-47
- Acts 4:32-35
- Galatians 6:2
- Colossians 3:12
- 2 Corinthians 1:3

Sunday

Read Ephesians 4:32.

Think about the story of Onesimus and Philemon. Reflect on the following questions:

Paul believed that Onesimus had changed and was willing to vouch for him to Philemon. Have you ever helped someone out with a tough time in their life? Share that story with your class. How did it make you feel?

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Can you have compassion for someone you don't know? What about caring for people in another country? What would that look like?

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Who do you know is going through a tough time right now? How can you help that person?

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Monday

Read Philemon 8, 9.

Paul did not simply order Philemon to accept Onesimus back into his household. Instead, he pleaded with him to accept Onesimus on the basis of love. Was Paul feeling sorry for Onesimus or having compassion on him? What is the difference?

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Tuesday

Read Philippians 2:1-4.

In chapter 43 of *The Acts of the Apostles*, Ellen White gives the background story of what happened to Onesimus. Review the chapter in *The Acts of the Apostles*. Onesimus was a thief, but Paul was willing to appeal to Philemon on his behalf. Why? What does this say about the following concepts?

Repentance _____
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Forgiveness _____
_____

Compassion _____
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Wednesday

Apply the selected *Punch Lines* to your life by filling in the blanks:

"Carry each other's burdens" (Galatians 6:2, NIV). What are some burdens you can carry for your friends?

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"Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience" (Colossians 3:12, NIV). What is one way you can show compassion to a total stranger?

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"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other" (Ephesians 4:32, NIV). This is what the command is telling me to do today:

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Thursday

Read Galatians 6:2.

What is keeping me from carrying someone else's burdens or from helping those around me? How can I change that and be more compassionate?

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Friday

Read Colossians 3:12.

Ask yourself: How would the world be different today if more people had compassion for one another?

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this week's reading*

The Acts of the Apostles (or *Unlikely Leaders*), chapter 43.

**Unlikely Leaders* is a special adaptation of *The Acts of the Apostles,* created for you by the Ellen G. White Estate and Pacific Press. Get more information about it at www.cornerstoneconnections.net/article/191/about-us/conflict-of-the-ages-companion-books#.URlhF1rBO9s. By following the weekly reading plan, you will read at least one book of the Conflict of the Ages Series each year.