

A Picture of Gospel Partnership

Philemon 1-7

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November 1-2, 2025

Perhaps you've wondered about the process I go through to choose what to preach on. After an extended time of prayer, I think through our four G's (Gather, Grow, Give, and Go) to see if there's a value that we need to give extra attention to. I also run the ideas by our staff team.

The series we just completed called, "Here Am I" was designed to mobilize us to go, or to send others who will go with the gospel to the nations. We also talked about the importance of first taking the gospel to our families and our neighbors, as we live on mission to our campuses and workplaces. Over 30 people filled out Go Con Response Cards and are taking their next steps. Last Saturday night, 8-10 people stood at the end of the service to indicate they were surrendering to the Lord by saying, "*Here am I. Send me.*" About that same number stood at the end of the 9:00 a.m. service.

I didn't see anyone stand at the end of the 10:45 service but I did get this message a couple days later: "*When you gave everyone the opportunity to stand and say 'Here Am I,' I wanted to stand so badly but I kept thinking I misunderstood the opportunity...no one stood...and that blew my mind...regardless, I got on my hands and knees on my doorsteps upon returning home and cried out to Him to allow me to go wherever He leads me and live every second of every day on mission for His glory, no matter where that may put me...*"

Another Edgewood member gave his insight into what God did at Go Con and through our recent series: "*He has called us out of our comfort zones to be available for what He is calling us to do.*" Someone else offered this feedback: "*I believe the church will complete the Great Commission and the fullness of the Gentiles will be achieved. We have a way to go, and a lot of work is still ahead. Now is not the time to quit. When the Lord returns, it won't be to rescue a failed church. It will be to claim the victory!*"

Our December series will be called, "Behold the Wonder" as we walk through the first chapter of John's gospel. This past Tuesday, I asked the staff team what they thought of us preaching through the Book of Revelation in 2026. Everyone was excited about the idea. As we were discussing the possible length of the series, I asked this question: "*Give me your thoughts how long a series should be on the*

Book of Revelation.” Just then, Siri suddenly woke up on someone’s iPhone and blurted out in her computerized voice, “*I can’t help you with that!*” We all burst out laughing.

For November, I wanted to preach through one of the shorter, relatively unknown books of the Bible. So, here’s a question for you: Can you name the five books in the Bible with only one chapter? I came across this brief video in which some guys gave it a try.

Play Video

These five books have two things in common: They all have one chapter, and they are among the least-read books in the Bible. Perhaps because of their length, and because we tend to flip right past them, we often assume that they don’t have anything important to say to us today. But, as 2 Timothy 3:16 says, “***All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.***”

The Book of Philemon (or “Philamon” from the video) is a unique masterpiece of tactful persuasion. If you ever want to learn how to write a letter, or have a conversation, with someone you need to convince about an important matter, study how Paul approached Philemon about a very delicate issue. In the end, his appeal for Philemon to receive his converted runaway slave as a brother in Christ was compelling.

I appreciated Warren Wiersbe’s helpful summary of the situation: “*Paul was a prisoner in Rome, his friend Philemon was in Colossae, and the human link between them was a runaway slave named Onesimus... Onesimus robbed his master [Philemon] and then fled to Rome, hoping to be swallowed up in the crowded metropolis. But, in the providence of God, he met Paul and was converted.*”

This powerful letter is all about redemption and reconciliation and serves as a primer in applied Christianity. Through it, we see how the gospel changes everything, including relationships and social structures. While Paul did not directly confront the institution of slavery, he effectively *undermined* it by emphasizing the transforming power of grace and the equality of all believers in Christ.

Let's read verses 1-7: ***“Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, to Philemon our beloved fellow worker and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 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 toward 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.”***

Here's a summary of the sermon: *When we're gripped by the grace of the gospel, our hearts overflow with love for God's people.*

In verse 1, Paul calls himself ***“a prisoner for Christ Jesus.”*** In many of his other epistles, he appeals to his authority by referring to himself as an apostle, but here he begins with humility because it is a personal letter. Technically, he was a prisoner of Rome, but Paul had such a high view of God's sovereignty that he saw his imprisonment in the light of the providence of God. As such, his imprisonment became a platform for ministry. He also wrote Philippians, Colossians, and Ephesians from prison, where he had a profound gospel ministry with the guards who were chained to him (see Philippians 1:12-14).

This is a good reminder that no matter what circumstances we are in, we can still serve Christ, whether we're in prison, or homebound because of health issues. One pastor gives this insight: *“If God is always good and He always loves me, and if God is always all-powerful and always in control, then what's happening to me is always a part of God's good plan for my life and I can and should always rejoice.”*

Paul refers to being a prisoner several times in this brief book:

- Verse 1: ***“A prisoner for Christ Jesus.”***
- Verse 9: ***“A prisoner also for Christ Jesus.”***
- Verse 10: ***“In my imprisonment.”***
- Verse 13: ***“During my imprisonment for the gospel.”***
- Verse 23: ***“My fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus.”***

In Ephesians 3:1, he calls himself, ***“a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles.”*** In 2 Timothy 1:8, Paul refers to himself as ***“His prisoner.”*** In

Colossians 4:18, he urges believers to, ***“remember my chains.”*** The author of Hebrews 13:3 urges us to, ***“Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body.”***

On this International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted Church, we’re reminded that Paul was in prison *because* he was a Christian. In a similar way, we want to remember our brothers and sisters being persecuted today. Here are some recent stats from Open Doors and Voice of the Martyrs:

- Over 380 million Christians (1 in 7 globally) face high levels of persecution.
- Just this year, more than 7,000 Nigerian Christians have been martyred, and 18,000 churches have been burned since 2009.
- Two weeks ago, China Aid founder Bob Fu made this statement: *“We are witnessing the most extensive and coordinated wave of persecution against urban independent house churches in China in over four decades.”*
- Recently, American missionary pilot Kevin Rideout was kidnapped in Niger.

To help raise awareness and mobilize us to prayer, I recommend the VOM Radio podcast (vomradio.net). This week, I started following a group called 8Thirty8 on Facebook and have set my phone alarm to 8:38 at night for a prayer reminder based on the wonderful promise of Romans 8:38-39: ***“For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*** The founders of this group give two reasons why they’re calling people to pray at 8:38 pm:

- As we in the West are getting ready to rest, the believers in the “hot zones” are getting ready to face a new day. Their day will be faced with uncertainty and probable danger simply because they follow Jesus in a hard place.
- Because Christian persecution is at an all-time high, the lives of our persecuted brothers and sisters are a testimony of Jesus in their lives. *Since persecuted Christians are willing to die for their faith, we should be willing to pray for them.*

BTW, I also have an alarm set for 9:38 every morning as a reminder to pray Matthew 9:38: ***“Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.”*** I also pray for the Langworthy family when this alarm goes off. I’m looking forward to the Unreached Prayer Night on Monday as we pray for the countries of Yemen and Jordan.

After reminding them he was a prisoner for Christ, Paul focused on his relationship with the redeemed. This is a good place to start if you need to have a hard conversation with someone. Instead of dissing or demonizing an individual you disagree with, it's important to appeal to relationship.

Appeal to Your Relationship

While Paul was a bold preacher, he was also a relational pastor. We can learn at least five things from his approach.

1. Treat believers as fellow family members. He refers to Timothy as ***“our brother”*** and to Apphia as ***“our sister.”*** Most commentators believe Apphia was the wife of Philemon and would have served as the supervisor of slaves in the household. The Greek words for brother and sister refer to, *“sharing the same womb.”* Believers have a shared origin through the new birth and are thus from the same spiritual womb. We've been given new life and have been adopted into God's family by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, according to Scripture alone, for the glory of God alone.

I've mentioned this before, but it would be good for us to call each other brother or sister to emphasize we are part of God's forever family. One additional plus is if you don't remember someone's name you can simply refer to him or her as brother or sister. In verse 7 and verse 20, Paul calls Philemon ***“my brother.”*** This emphasizes their shared identity in Christ and a sense of belonging within the family of God. In Colossians 4:9, Paul refers to Onesimus, the former runaway slave as, ***“our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you.”***

Allow me to make an application to the younger brothers among us. I celebrate how God is at work in Gen Z and how a lot of younger guys are taking their faith seriously by getting more involved in church. As you get to know young women and seek out a possible dating relationship, remember to treat this beautiful image bearer of God with respect, honor, and purity. Keep 1 Timothy 5:2 in the forefront of your minds and treat ***“younger women as sisters, in all purity.”*** I strongly encourage the men of Edgewood to join one of our five men's groups and for women to join groups as well.

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2. Treat believers as beloved fellow workers. In the last phrase of verse 1, Paul writes, *“To Philemon our beloved fellow worker.”* The word *“beloved,”* which is also translated as *“dear,”* was used only of Christians. As far as I can tell, these two men never ministered side-by-side, but Paul considered Philemon to be a co-laborer in the gospel. Once again, we see that Paul does not elevate himself as an esteemed apostle but sees himself as a fellow laborer for the Lord. Another example is found in Romans 16:3: *“Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus.”* When he writes to a church filled with conflict, he says these affirming words in 1 Corinthians 3:9: *“For we are God’s fellow workers. You are God’s field, God’s building.”*

3. Treat believers as fellow warriors. Paul refers to Archippus as *“our fellow soldier”* in the middle of verse 2. Interestingly, Paul uses this same term for Epaphroditus in Philippians 2:25. Archippus was thought to be the son of Philemon who was serving as pastor of the church. Paul says this about him in Colossians 4:17: *“See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received from the Lord.”*

The fact that Archippus is called a fellow soldier reminds us that the Christian life is not a playground but a battleground because we are in a spiritual war. That’s why we must put on the full armor of God every day. And we don’t fight alone. We need fellow soldiers to stand beside us, shoulder to shoulder, as we contend for the faith. Our battle is not against one another, but against Satan, who is our true enemy. Sadly, it’s often been said that Christians are the only army that shoots its own wounded. May that never be said of anyone at Edgewood.

4. Treat believers as fellow worshipers. Even though this is a very personal letter to Philemon, Paul brings in several individuals and the church as a whole. We see this in verse 2: *“...and the church in your house.”* Since there were no dedicated church buildings until the third century, believers gathered for worship in homes. We see this in Colossians 4:15: *“Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.”* Many of you are involved in a home Growth Group and are experiencing biblical community. If you’re not, let us know if you’d like to join a Sunday morning or midweek Growth Group.

5. Treat believers as fellow recipients of grace and peace. The ground is level at the foot of the cross as we see in verse 3: *“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”* In each of the apostle Paul’s letters, he gives a greeting of *“grace and peace from God”* to his readers (in his letters to

Timothy, he includes, “*mercy*”). In the apostle Peter’s two letters, he adds, “*May grace and peace be MULTIPLIED to you.*”

Grace is God’s underserved favor and peace comes through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the cross. The order is always grace, then peace. Grace is the first thing that comes from God, and peace is a gift that flows from that grace. Until we receive the grace of the gospel, we can’t be at peace with Him...or with others. And, without God’s grace, we won’t experience inner peace. May those of us who know God’s grace show that grace by living in multiplied peace internally and with those around us today.

Affirm What is Right

Paul begins by appealing to their relationship, and then he affirms what he sees as right in Philemon in verse 4: “*I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers.*”

1. Celebrate with thankfulness. Notice that Paul gives thanks “*always,*” which means, “*perpetually, at all times.*” Gratitude wasn’t occasional for Paul; it was habitual. He didn’t just pray *about* people; he prayed *for* them. If you’re in some relational conflict with someone, and you’re struggling to be thankful for them, start praying for them. It’s hard to stay bitter toward someone you regularly bring before the throne of grace.

This past Wednesday, I busted out into thankfulness when I received a calendar notification that Edgewood’s mortgage for our renovation and expansion project was due. I put this date on my calendar five years ago when we took out a \$3.2 million dollar 30-year-loan with a five-year balloon. Amazingly, and all glory to God, due to the joyful generosity of God’s people, this entire amount was paid off in three years!

Speaking of being thankful, since we are now in November, try to list one item and one individual you’re thankful for every day this month.

2. Celebrate the evidence of love and faith. In verse 5, we read the first reason for his thankfulness for Philemon: “*Because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints.*” The Bible often puts faith in God and love for others together. If we have faith in God, then our love for others will be a natural overflow of the love that God has for us as 1 John 4:19

says: ***“We love because He first loved us.”*** Philemon loved others precisely because his faith was in Jesus Christ.

It's interesting that Paul reverses the order from his other letters. Perhaps he listed love first because he is going to appeal to Philemon's love later in the book when he asks him to reconcile with his runaway slave Onesimus.

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3. Celebrate evangelistic efforts. It's humbling to see so many at Edgewood active and intentional about evangelism. Paul spots this in Philemon in verse 6: ***“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.”***

The word ***“sharing”*** is the word translated as *“fellowship and partnership.”* It's the idea of being in close relationship with others who have been redeemed as we see in Acts 2:44-47: ***“And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”***

This verse also speaks about the evangelistic side of sharing our faith with others. This week, Nick Juenger passed along a devotional from Ron Hutchcraft based on this verse:

“In sharing your relationship with Christ, you actually begin to really understand your relationship with Christ as you never did before. If you remain silent about Jesus, you can just coast along in a comfortable but shallow spiritual rut. But once you step up to your responsibility to get this life-saving message to the people around you, something awakens in your own soul...

*“If you're like most believers, you're actually missing this life-changing, faith-expanding experience. Surveys show that up to 90% of Christians never talk about their relationship with Jesus Christ. Which means 90% are missing what Paul calls **“the full knowledge of every good thing we have in Christ.”** It's time to start blowing the lid*

off our relationship with Jesus by telling people about that relationship...because when you show someone else this Jesus that you know, He'll mean more to you than He's ever meant before!"

4. Celebrate how people refresh you. Paul expressed how much Philemon impacted him in verse 7: ***“For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.”*** The word **“refreshed”** means to give **“quiet rest.”** It was used to describe an army at rest after a long march. It’s the same word used by Jesus in Matthew 11:28: ***“Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”*** After Paul asks Philemon to accept this runaway slave as a brother, he exhorts him to ***“refresh my heart in Christ”*** in verse 20.

Paul was built up by others as we read in 2 Timothy 1:16: ***“May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains.”*** In Romans 15:32, Paul describes why he wanted to visit the church in Rome, ***“By God’s will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company.”***

One reason we’re planning to have four short-term mission trips in 2026 and are putting together a Disaster Relief Force team is to refresh people who are feeling downcast as we go with the gospel to them. Lord willing, we’ll be going to Mexico, India, Japan, and Kenya.

These verses from Philemon remind us that the gospel doesn’t just change what we believe; it changes how we behave because *when we’re gripped by the grace of the gospel, our hearts overflow with love for His people.* Paul saw that kind of refreshing love in Philemon and he thanked God for it.

Who are you thanking God for? And who might God be calling you to *refresh* this week? Is there someone you know who’s weary, overlooked, or difficult to love? The grace that saved you is the same grace that empowers you to love others deeply.

Let’s be a church that doesn’t just talk about love but lives it out. Let’s be all about giving *and* forgiving. We want to be a community so shaped by the gospel that when others think of us, they say what Paul said of Philemon: ***“I thank my God every time I remember you.”***

This passage also invites us to look in the mirror. Are you a refreshing influence on others? Do you build people up or tear them down? Do people move toward you or run the other way when they see you coming? Do others thank God for the way you love the church family? Do you bring encouragement or exhaustion? Refreshment or resentment?

Conclusion

Imagine a dim, dirt-floored hut in a remote village in northern Nigeria, where the air hangs heavy with the scent of smoke from a recent attack on Christians. It's 2022, and Pastor Emmanuel, whose name means "*God with us*," huddles with his family after Fulani militants burned their church to the ground and killed 12 members of their congregation just days before. His wife, Ruth, clutches their young daughter, tears streaming, whispering, "*Why us, Lord? All we did was share the gospel.*"

Emmanuel, scarred from earlier beatings he endured for preaching Christ, could have fled with his family. He could have cursed the attackers or hardened his heart in bitterness. But gripped by the grace of the gospel (the same grace that saved a runaway slave like Onesimus and transformed a master like Philemon) something supernatural stirred within him.

In that moment, Emmanuel didn't see enemies; he saw image bearers in need of the Savior. He gathered the survivors and prayed not for revenge, but for boldness to love like Paul loved. Days later, risking everything, they returned to the ashes of the church. There, under a makeshift tarp, he preached a sermon on forgiveness.

Amazingly, one of the young militants, haunted by the pastor's unyielding joy, slipped in secretly. Hearing the gospel, he fell to his knees, and confessed Christ as his Lord and Savior. Emmanuel embraced him, not as a former killer, but as a beloved brother, a fellow worker, a fellow warrior in the faith. The runaway enemy had become family. Hearts once shattered were refreshed, just as Philemon's love refreshed the saints.

Friends, this is the gospel's power because it changes *everything*, even in persecution, even in our own fractured relationships. Over 380 million Christians face this fire today, yet like Paul, they overflow with love because grace has gripped them.

I've been thinking about the young woman who fell on her knees as she opened the front door of her house, while crying out, "*Here am I. Send me!*" Or the dozens who stood last weekend, surrendering to live as sent ones. That same grace is calling each of us right now.

Who in your life needs reconciliation? Is it an estranged family member, a coworker you've demonized, a brother or sister in Christ you've wounded? Don't wait for the perfect moment. Appeal to your relationship. Affirm what's right. Let the grace of the gospel overflow from your heart today. Refresh someone. Forgive as you've been forgiven.

Because when we're gripped by the grace of the gospel, our hearts will overflow with love for God's people.

Let's pause for silent prayer. When we're finished, I'm going to ask you to respond. If God is speaking to you about reconciliation, evangelism, or full surrender, and the Spirit is stirring you to say, "*Here am I,*" decide right now to surrender to the mission, no matter the cost.

Communion

The bread and the cup remind us of the broken body and shed blood of Jesus. But they also redirect us to the scope of His mission. His death wasn't limited to one culture, language, or ethnicity. Jesus said in Matthew 26:28, "***This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.***" That word "many" stretches across continents, cultures, and centuries.

As we eat and drink today, we are joining a global family of blood-bought believers. Let's be mindful today of our brothers and sisters who are being persecuted for their faith. Communion is both a memorial of what Christ has done and a preview of the great wedding feast of the Lamb, when all nations will be glad, as together, we gather around His table to give Him praise.

When we eat this bread and drink this cup, we remember that Christ died not only for us here, but for people everywhere. Every time we take communion, we're proclaiming the gospel—to one another and to the world—until He returns.

Distribute Elements

Benediction

Receive this benediction from the book of Philemon: ***“I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ...the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.”***

Pick up the free book called, “When Faith is Forbidden” as you leave today.