

What stood out to you most from the sermon? Why?

Key Takeaways:

1. The gospel is not meant to stay in conversation — it is meant to change the way we live and respond to others.
2. Forgiveness means canceling a real debt and absorbing the cost yourself.
3. Grace received is always meant to be grace given.
4. A heart that refuses to forgive may be evidence that the grace of God has not fully taken root.
5. Forgiveness is not a single moment. It is hard, holy work that must often be chosen repeatedly.
6. You are not alone in the process. God, community, and wise counsel are all available to help.

Discussion Questions:

1. Think about a time when good news traveled quickly in your community. What made it spread?
2. Paul opens his letter by affirming Philemon's love for the saints and his participation in the faith before making his request. Why do you think Paul structured his letter that way? What does that tell us about how we should approach difficult conversations?
3. Paul says he could command Philemon to do the right thing, but instead he appeals to him on the basis of love. What is the difference between compliance and genuine, heart-level obedience? Why does that distinction matter to Paul?
4. Paul tells Philemon that Onesimus was once useless but is now useful, and asks him to receive Onesimus back "no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, as a dearly loved brother." What would it have cost Philemon — practically, socially, emotionally — to actually do that?
5. Paul offers to personally absorb whatever debt Onesimus owes. How does that offer reflect what Jesus did for us? What does it tell us about what it actually costs to extend forgiveness?
6. Jesus told the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18. In that story, a man forgiven an unimaginable debt immediately refuses to forgive a much smaller one. Where do you see yourself most honestly in that parable — and why is that an uncomfortable question?

7. Matthew 18 models a framework for forgiveness: count the debt, cancel it, confront when it is safe to do so, and then cancel it again and again. Which of those steps feels most difficult to you, and why?
8. Do you see the distinction between forgiveness and reconciliation, noting that confrontation should happen when it is safe to do so? How do you think about the difference between forgiving someone and restoring a relationship with them? Are those always the same thing?
9. "Forgive and forget is such garbage." Do you agree? How does understanding that forgiveness is a repeated choice rather than a single moment change the way you approach it?
10. Put it to the test: Can you pray the words of the Lord's Prayer — "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us" — and genuinely mean it toward the person who hurt you? What does your honest answer reveal?
11. When forgiveness was mentioned, a face or a name may have come to mind for you. You do not need to share details, but is there a relationship or a wound in your life where you sense God is calling you to begin this work?
12. Maybe your first step is simply saying, "God, I am willing to be willing." What would it look like for you to take that first step this week?

Practical Applications:

1. Identify the debt. This week, take time in private prayer to honestly name a hurt you have been carrying. Write it down if it helps. Do not minimize it. Name what it actually cost you.
2. Bring it to God. Before trying to resolve anything with another person, bring the wound to God first. Ask him to meet you there since the cross is where Jesus meets us in our wounds, not just where he deals with our sin.
3. Take one step. Forgiveness rarely happens all at once. Identify one concrete step you can take this week, whether that is praying for the person who hurt you, speaking with a pastor or counselor, or simply telling God you are willing to begin.
4. Pursue community. This work does not have to be done alone. If you are carrying something heavy, consider reaching out to a trusted friend, a small group leader, or a counselor this week.
5. Read Philemon again. The entire book is only one chapter. Read it again on your own and pay attention to the emotional weight of what Paul is asking Philemon to do. Let it make the gospel feel as personal and costly as it actually is.