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**Big Idea:**

The Gospel is not just to be believed but it is to be lived.

**THE STORY SO FAR:**

The Pharisee Saul of Tarsus has an encounter with the resurrected Jesus and spends the rest of his life telling people about the good news of a resurrected Jewish savior. Saul starts going by his Roman name of Paul. He travels through the important cities of the Roman world spending time in each city working, teaching, and preaching about the way of Jesus.

As Paul moves from area to area, he invites people like Timothy and Luke to travel with him and help plant fledgling churches wherever he stops. The epistles or letters in the New Testament are letters to these churches that Paul and his friend's plant. The letters are for encouraging them to live out the good news of Jesus, answering questions they have and correcting misunderstandings they have about following Jesus.

The message of a Jewish savior or Messiah was not always well received to the places Paul would travel. Several times he was run out of town or imprisoned for telling people that there was a God that loved them so much that he sent his son to die for them. Paul

uses these times of imprisonment to correspond to some individuals and these churches with letters.

**Read** Acts 9:1-19 to understand Paul's conversion.

We know from the book of Acts that Paul traveled through the region that Philemon lived in several times and from the years 52-54 AD Paul lived in Ephesus nearby to the city of Colossi. The letter to Philemon is one of these epistle letters written by Paul and Timothy while Paul was in prison and is his shortest letter that we have. This letter while small has some very powerful implications.

What we know about Philemon is that he was head of a Roman household and even became a leader in the church in Colossi. All heads of Roman houses of that day would have owned slaves and we know that one of those slaves is named Onesimus.

Onesimus is actually the reason that Paul writes the letter to Philemon. We know at some point Onesimus runs away and eventually finds Paul. After that meeting Paul, Onesimus becomes a follower of Jesus and spends time helping Paul. Paul writes the letter to ask that Philemon take back Onesimus.

**Read:** Philemon

**Questions:**

What are the parts of Paul's request of Philemon?

What kind of positive encouragement does Paul use to leverage his request?

What kind of strong encouragement does Paul use to leverage his request?

What are some possible social implications for Philemon to follow Paul's request?

What are personal implications for Philemon?

What stands out to you about Onesimus's faith that he is willing to risk his worldly freedom to pursue reconciliation with Philemon?

Paul challenges a number of things that could be difficult for Philemon discuss those that come to mind.

**Discuss:** These challenges with your community.

- Gospel identity **Over** role identity
- Gospel obligation **Over** His Roman right
- Gospel purpose **Over** his societal purpose.
- Gospel acceptance and gospel community **Over** worldly acceptance and worldly systems
- True gospel **Over** the partial truth