Fugitive: **The Book of Philemon - wk 1 - Letter to a Friend**

**Imagine running - shadow to shadow - an outlaw - fugitive - wanted dead or alive. Your crime - a runaway slave - chased by bounty hunters - if caught, beaten and branded on the forehead - F = fugitives. Marked for the rest of your life. Fear of being found out - this was Onesimus.**

**This little letter was written so none of that would happen.**

**Most of the NT is reading over the shoulder of someone else's mail. The letters usually end with a hello from friends or to friends...**

**Colossians 4:7 Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. (this is the guy bringing the letter to Colossae) He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. 8 I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts, (thus the letter) 9 and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here.**

**But there is another letter. A personal letter that made it into the Bible. The Characters in this one-page letter.**

**Onesimus (useful) - salve on the run - by God's grace, his path crosses**

**Apostle Paul - under house arrest in Rome - Onesimus a fugative found refuge w/ Paul and he became a follower of Jesus Christ. The End...**

**Not quite - Philemon's boss, Onesemis was lead to Christ by Paul. What are the odds 1300 miles away.**

**Philemon – a wealthy businessman and family man who found Jesus in and opened his home in Colossae for a house church. 6yrs later their pastor (Epaphras) goes to Paul for help.**

**Paul sends a letter back (w/ Tychicus) and a small note to Philemon... delivered by Onesimus himself. This is that letter. We know he made it back because we have both letters.**

**This is the ultimate reference letter. No family, no friends, a thief untrustworthy, a history of irresponsibility, quitting, and running.**

**Paul's writing a reference letter vouching for his changed life.**

**Only letter in the Bible written by someone to someone specific about someone else. This reference letter wasn't written to help him get in school or a job - but to save his life.**

**What comes to mind when you think slave? Lincoln, 12yrs slave, roots**

**In the Roman Empire, it was not a racial issue – 2/3 of the Roman world were bondservants (60% in 1stcen) daily and common fact of life.**

**Legal servitude: By force (conquered country), by debt or taxes, by choice (temp job, training, military) - skilled and put to work.**

**Some masters/bosses were ruthless, and some were kind.**

**The Bible never condones the theft and ownership of people.**

**(Ex 21, Lev 25:43, Gal 3:28) But it does speak to the context of their lives.**

* **Philemon was a kind master - but Onesimus was a bad servant.**

**When His master's back was turned - he robbed him and ran. Pawned it all and traveled to Rome to blend in.**

**He ran into an unlikely person. Paul told him of the master who became a servant. The King who became a pauper - royalty who became poor so we could become rich in him. Onesimus heard - became a new man.**

**Over time - they became close. Paul found out who he was...**

**He tells him he needs to own up to his past. No more running - face the music and trust God… And - guess what? I just so happen to know your owner. Imagine that moment he tells Onesimus.**

**This may help - and he hands him a letter... He returns.**

**Knock Knock- it’s Onesimus (last time Philemon said his name it was not with a smile) But there he stands... head down - he hands him this letter. Philemon breaks the seal and reads...**

**Philemon 1 Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, (tell him I said hi... okay - Tim says hi) To Philemon our beloved fellow worker 2 and Apphia our sister (Philemon's wife) and Archippus our fellow soldier, (Philemon's son - tamer of horses) and the church in your house: (He host a house church) 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

**Paul? You...? What is "he" doing with you? Paul was the man who led Philemon to Christ years earlier in Ephesus in a local entertainment theater and lecture hall... he remembers...**

**Philemon became a follower of Jesus, came home, and wanted to serve God. They open up their home, and it grew. Can't preach, but he can give, support, & serve. He paved the way. His son preaches (Col 4:17 Paul tells Archippus, “Pony up ruler of horses we need you.”)**

**Philemon 4 I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, (why so thankful?) 5 because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints, (saints = all the Christians)**

**I hear about your love for the church of Jesus and your faith in the Lord Jesus! I am so thankful for you!**

**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. (I pray all you do for the kingdom will be effective, and your understanding of God increases) 7 For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints (the church) have been refreshed through you.**

**This is a personal correspondence from a friend to a friend about a friend. What a privilege to eavesdrop. This is how Paul says hi.**

**He has not even gotten to the reason for the letter yet - Next week the shoe will drop.**

**5 Truths From of Friend to A Friend**

**1 - You can't get locked out of the will of God**

**Philemon 1 Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus" - Says this 3X**

**But you’re in a Roman prison? I guess you missed God. No, I am in Christ. It is well with my soul. Jesus is in charge of my life not my circumstances.**

**I have been set free by God and am locked up by God. This circumstance does not keep me from what I am called to do. Right here in this prison - I am in the will of God.**

**Acts 9:14-15 And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name.” 15 But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. (Paul is to be my vessel to the Gentiles & kings, and Jewish people)**

**Those soldiers are Gentiles - I am not chained to them they are chained to me. He got to stand before officials, leaders, and even the emperor - to talk about Jesus.**

**\*\*\*\* Don't judge your future by your current circumstances**

**We tend to look at our suffering in life and think we are kept back from our calling. God says look around you, I put you here for a reason. You cannot be locked out of my will.**

**2 - Your gratitude influences your attitude**

**You would not think Paul was in chains if he didn't say so - he does not write like a guy who is suffering.**

**He did not allow his suffering to control his attitude.**

**He does not soak and mope around - amidst his beatings and ridicule - he writes letters of life and encouragement. He has a God perspective.**

**Philemon 4 I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers,**

**Most of us live 6 sec away from being bummed out**

**He lived what he told the church in Thessalonica - 1 Thes 5:16 Rejoice always, 17 pray continually, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.**

**He saw the goodness and faithfulness of God in all circumstances. We can't control our circumstances, but we can control our response. The only thing we’ve been called to control is our-self.**

**You want to know God's will for your life - Be thankful in everything**

**Eat pumpkin pie every day!**

***Not for everything - but in everything*. Don't be thankful for bad things happening - but in everything you can choose to trust and know God is doing something good. That you are being shaped and chiseled - in Faith- you choose to believe it.**

**If you live a grateful life - you will walk and live in freedom - and your outlook on life will be transformed.**

**\*\* Gratefulness is the remedy to discontentment.**

**Well, I have nothing to be thankful for - I disagree. Look around with different eyes.**

**3 - What God does in you - is not just for you**

**Philemon 5 …because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints… (NIV - I hear about your love for all his holy people and your faith in the Lord Jesus.)**

**Love and faith is interchangeable - they are inter-connected known as a crisscross (makes ya wanna jump, jump)**

**Like Spaghetti noodles - inter-tangled – not mean to separate them. You can't grow in one without growing in the other.**

**The great command, "love the Lord Your God and your neighbor as yourself" is a crisscross - forever together. You can't have one without the other.**

**What God does in you - reflects on others around you.**

**The closer you get to Jesus, the greater your love for people.**

**Specifically, your love for other believers - you can't love the head (Jesus) and hate his body - love the Groom but hate the bride - love the father but hate his kids - really? We won't be friends.**

**1 John 2:9 Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother (other Christ-followers) is still in darkness. 10 Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling.**

**1 John 3:14 We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. (Christ-followers) Whoever does not love abides in death.**

**1 John 4:20 If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, (another believer) he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. 21 And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.**

**Paul says, I hear of your love and it really blesses me and honors God. You truly love God - thank God for you!**

**Philemon 6 …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.**

**What God did in you is meant to be unleashed.**

**Keep growing - what God is doing in you is contagious.**

**You were not saved just for you - but that others may have a new beginning too - Many Christians are satisfied with themselves - but God has empowered us for the world!**

**4 - You matter more than you realize**

**Philemon 7 For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints (the church) have been refreshed through you.**

**Paul says - you may not realize the impact and difference you make. You refresh me and the hearts of so many.**

**You are truly making a difference in people's lives – thank you.**

**“Wow - I am making a diff in Paul's life - he is blessed by me?”**

**I think of many of you – the work you do, the relationships you have, the difference you make – is greater than you realize.**

**\*\* This is the only mention of Philemon in the entire Bible - But Paul knows him by name and is valued more than he realizes.**

**He was not an apostle, pastor, Barnabas, or Timothy - was not a preacher - didn't head up a ministry. He hosted a bible study at his house and faithfully financially supported the Kingdom - he did not go on mission trips, he sat behind a desk and sent.**

**I'm sure he wondered if he ever made a diff. "They don't need me."**

**Paul told him you're more valuable than you realize - you're changing the world more than you know. The world is different because of you**

**Galatians 6:9 And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. 10 So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.**

**Someone here needs to hear this: You matter more than you know. Your faithful piece in the puzzle is making a powerful impact.**

**Kidventure / cleaning up / media / hosting a LT / Youth / You don't have a lot but your faithful financial support matters.**

**No glamour - no spotlight – but you make a difference. People are meeting and growing in Jesus because of you.**

**5 - If you want peace, you must receive God's grace**

**Phile 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.**

**Grace is the means of salvation - peace the outcome of salvation**

**"Grace and peace" are found all over Paul's greeting - they are always together and in that order. Grace comes before peace.**

**PEACE - People chase their whole life looking for peace – job, house, relationships, drugs, alcohol, sex - but will never find peace w/out… God’s grace – his loving kindness – his undeserved love and favor.**

**Ecclesiastes 3:11- He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart, yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.**

**Inside us all, we crave something greater... Every person alive is looking for peace - but without Grace, we will never find it.**

**You can search and pursue and accomplish all your dreams - but without the grace of God, you will have no peace. You can dig water wells, and provide jobs, and houses… but without grace – no peace.**

**Mark 8:36 For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?**

**There is a hole in our soul that only grace can fill. The only way to find the peace you are after... is the grace of Jesus**

**GRACE - unmerited favor - getting what you don't deserve...**

**Jesus says - you can't do it - but I can / You can't earn it - but I can pay for it / You don't deserve but I will give it.**

**Jesus did not deserve the cross, but He got it – and you did not deserve forgiveness, but He gave it.**

**This gift is yours to receive. Showing up at the party is not enough - you need to unwrap the gifts.**

**Onesimus - Philemon's servant - feeling empty inside - took everything he could and took off looking for peace - he traveled to Rome - and ended up with a divine appointment. Paul introduced him to Grace. He turned from his sin and self, and received the gift of grace from God - and peace flooded his fugitive soul**

**You have the same invitation. Your fugitive days are over – no more running – you have been found - peace can be yours.**

**Three main characters - Paul / Philemon / Onesimus - each at one time were running from God, but God in grace intervened in their life.**

**This letter has tremendous value for us today because, in a certain sense, it is the story of our lives as well.**

**Next week - the shoe drops - Philemon - the man who robbed you and ran - will you receive him as a brother?**