

4. Don't underestimate the power of koinonia.

The Greek word "koinonia" means fellowship/sharing/mutual submission/partnership. Paul says to Philemon that they share a special partnership but Onesimus is part of that partnership too. In fact, they are brothers in Christ and can no longer relate to a master/slave relationship. How do we become part of those who take down the barriers and only see the differences in each other and call for a new kind of humanity?

5. Embrace the Gospel in all of its fullness.

Re-read Philemon 1:21-25. Paul is assured that Philemon would do more than what was requested of him. He knows that the transformation taking place will not only change the way Philemon sees Onesimus but change the way he sees slavery and other systems of injustice. How have you seen an injustice differently because of the way in which you looked at it through the eyes of another person?

WHO in your world needs an advocate? Name the person.

How can you begin to advocate OR better advocate for him or her?

CLOSING PRAYER: Pray for those you have named who need an advocate.



Letters

"The Prison letters of Paul" Growth Group Study Guide Week 2: The Advocate Philemon 1

Series Overview: Philippians, Philemon, Colossians and Ephesians are collectively referred to as the "Prison Letters." The Apostle Paul wrote them while he was imprisoned in Rome. The prison was probably a house where Paul was kept under close guard at all times (probably chained to a soldier). But he was given a number of freedoms not offered to most prisoners. Among them was the freedom to write letters and receive visitors.

The letters Paul wrote were addressed to churches he had started. And even though they dealt with the kind of practical issues you might expect new churches to be dealing with, they are also bold declarations of theological truth. They are messages to the faithful about what God intended the church to be and to do. It is a clarification of the church's mission and identity. Paul is basically saying to the church, "THIS IS US. This is who we are." The church is not a perfect place and it's not always easy living out our faith. But it is possible. And when we do it, it changes the world.

Week 2: The Advocate

Text: Philemon 1

Overview:

Onesimus was a domestic slave who belonged to Philemon, a wealthy man and a member of the church in Colossae. Onesimus had run away from Philemon and had made his way to Rome, where he met Paul, who apparently led him to Christ. Paul convinced Onesimus that running from his problems wouldn't solve them, and he persuaded Onesimus to return to Philemon. Paul then writes a letter to Philemon, advocating for Onesimus and calling for reconciliation between the two based on mutual submission to each other and to Christ. All of us need an advocate and all of us need to be an advocate for others. In Christ, we are recipients of the former and we are empowered to live out the latter.

Discussion

Getting Warmed Up

Did you ever need someone to advocate for you?

What was the circumstance?

Tell the story.

Digging In

Read aloud Philemon 1:1-25

Why did Onesimus go to Paul?

What happened while he was with Paul?

Bringing It Home

We may not see ourselves in a position as an advocate for the Gospel but as followers of Christ, we will be placed in that position over and over again and we need to be ready. If you want to become an advocate for the Gospel, you need to consider five things:

1. Celebrate before you confront.

Why did Paul say to celebrate Philemon? Since this was a letter from prison, Paul only has the ability to use words. What are other ways to celebrate someone in a genuine way before speaking with them about the harder stuff? How can we keep it authentic?

2. Be willing to challenge cultural norms.

Remember what Paul asked Philemon to do was completely over the top, not just for then but also for today. He asked him to forgive, not punish him and take him back into his household. Have you been in a place where you have been challenged to do what was out of the norm but certainly was the best choice?

3. Re-enact the Gospel in your own life.

Just as Jesus paid the price for us and Paul paid the price for Onesimus, we are to pay the price for others and absorb the consequences of the wrongdoing so we can be reconciled. How can we demonstrate this through our actions? Can you think of a time when you were on either end of this circumstance?