

Key:

Purple – Introduction, Conclusion, Main Points, and Sermon Thread

Blue – Explanation/Exposition

Red – Application

Green – Illustration

Brown – Quotation

Orange – Sermon Notes

Remember the Mission

- We've reached the last week of our series through the book of Philemon.
 - And I've had a blast going through this book with ya'll!
 - But we're not done yet.
- In this last section of Philemon
- Paul is going to remind Philemon of his work in the mission of the church.
- But before we get there I want to remind us all what the mission of the church is.
 - What is the church's full time job?
 - Why are we here?
 - What instructions did our Lord leave us with?
 - The answer to all those questions is found in Matthew 28:18–20.
 - These verse are also known as the great commission.
- Let's read those verses:

Matthew 28:18–20 (ESV)

¹⁸And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

²⁰teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

- That's why we're here.
 - That's why Messiah Bible Church exists.
- If you're familiar with our mission statement you'll notice that it echoes the great commission.
- Let's read our mission statement.
 - And if you want to I would encourage you to read this out loud.
 - We exist to make disciples who love God and each other, learn from his word, and long for his return.
 - This is our chief focus as a church.
 - Making disciples who love God and each other, learn from his word, and long for his return.
 - That's why we're here.
 - And each believer plays a part in this.
 - Nobody is left out.
 - We need everyone unified in the effort of making disciples.
 - Which can be hard.
 - It can be hard to maintain the peace with such a large group of sinner.
 - And it's all too common for us to get distracted from the mission of the church by disunity.
 - In our text today we're going to see three ways that disunity distracts from the mission of the church.
 - This morning we'll be looking at Philemon 17–25
 - Let's pick up in verse 17 and see Paul continue his appeal of Philemon.¹

¹ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008), 425. : “Paul finally comes out in the open and makes a direct request of Philemon: *welcome him as you would welcome me*. Paul told us that he had an appeal to make regarding Onesimus (v. 10), and we have suggested that he hints at the ultimate content

Philemon 17 (ESV)

¹⁷So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me.

- So Paul is again pointing Philemon back to the gospel work that he takes part in.
 - The apostle aligns himself with Philemon.
 - He calls himself the partner of Philemon.
 - A partner in what?
 - A partner in the work of the faith.
 - If you remember a couple weeks ago we looked at verse 6.²
 - We saw how that verse describes Philemon's work for the church.
 - We saw that he's engaged in hospitality that supports the mission of the church.
 - He's performing loving service — sacrificially.
 - And all throughout this letter Paul has been emphasizing not only Philemon's sacrifice in his service
 - But also his own sacrifices for the cause of the gospel.
 - Now here in verse 17 he brings those together.
 - He calls Philemon his partner.
 - Not an understudy - but an equal.
 - What an honor.
 - To be considered a partner with the apostle Paul.
 - I imagine Philemon held his head a little higher after hearing this sentence read aloud.
 - Paul is honoring Philemon.
 - But he's also trying to remind him of the mission.
 - He's reminding Philemon of their shared purpose.
 - Their shared labors.
 - Their shared work of ministry.
 - Paul's whole life is built around the work of ministry.
 - Paul writes about this in the letter to the Ephesians.
 - In chapter four he writes about his own role in the mission of the church.
 - He's explaining why God gave leaders to the church.
 - He writes this in Ephesians 4:11–12

Ephesians 4:11–12 (ESV)

¹¹And he (that's Jesus) gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,

¹²to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,

- He views his ultimate goal as enabling the saints to do the work of ministry.
 - And he views Philemon's ultimate goal as the work of ministry.
- The only difference is their order on the assembly line of gospel work.
 - Paul and Philemon concern themselves with the same work of ministry in different ways.

of that appeal in v. 16. Here, however, he states the content of his immediate appeal. This request is built on the argument of the letter to this point, as the *so (oun)* that introduces it indicates."

² Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008), 426. : "The use of the cognate noun *koinōnia* in v. 6 points strongly toward this sense of the word here. In setting the stage for his appeal, Paul refers to "the fellowship based in faith" that he and Philemon share."

- Paul plants churches, trains pastors, corrects doctrine.
- Philemon shows hospitality, he hosts a church,
- He loves Christ's bride, and he models the gospel.
 - Both men working towards the same goal.
- But Paul knows that it's easy to get distracted from the goal.
 - There are loads of things that distract us from the task that Jesus left us with.
- But one of the most effective distractions is conflict.
 - Because conflict breeds disunity.
- Disunity in the church distracts from the church's mission.
 - It's disheartening.
 - It slows momentum and creates factions.
 - Disunity in the church ruins relationships.
 - That's our first point.
 - Disunity **ruins relationships**.
- We can't afford disunity as make disciples.
 - We need one another as we make disciples.
- We've got to put away disunity.
- We've got to get right with our brothers and sisters.
 - Failing to do this can bring kingdom work to a halt.
 - Apart from your inability to work alongside someone that you're in conflict with;
 - Relational turmoil is just distracting.
- Have you ever experienced that kind of distraction?
 - The way that being at odds with someone can cause your day to come to a halt?
 - When you're fighting with someone and you just can't stop thinking about it.
 - Some of you are great at compartmentalizing that – I'm jealous.
- It can be hard for me to put conflict out of my mind.
 - Even when I have important things that I should be focusing on.
- I think Paul is trying to help Philemon get his focus back here in verse 17.
 - He's reminding Philemon "you and I have important work to do, partner!"
- So what does Paul tell Philemon to do?
 - Look at the second half of verse 17.
- "Receive him as you would receive me"
 - That greek word "receive" is προσλαμβάνω.
 - When Paul uses it in his other letters it has sense of treating someone warmly.
 - Or welcoming them.
 - How would Paul be welcomed into the home of Philemon?
 - He would be warmly welcomed.
 - Probably with a meal and hospitality.
 - There's affection between the host and the guest.
 - Philemon would probably put out the nice plates.
 - Paul would receive the kind of welcome that you would give to a close friend.
 - If Philemon is going to give this kind of welcome to Onesimus;
 - the runaway slave who wronged him;
 - he's going to have to forgive him.
 - He's going to have to reconcile with Onesimus.
 - He can't offer an apostle's welcome to someone he despises.

- If Philemon is going to welcome his brother Onesimus, it's only going to be by imitating that example of Christ.
- Paul shows of how our forgiven-ness enables us to welcome one another in his letter to the church in Rome.
 - The Roman church was having trouble getting along.
 - There was fighting and squabbling among them.
 - And Paul exhorts them to be patient and loving towards each other imitating Christ to one another.
- Listen to what he wrote in Romans 15:7

Romans 15:7 (ESV)

⁷Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

- What is Paul talking about here in Romans?
 - Jesus didn't receive people into his home.
 - He himself said that he didn't even have a home.
 - So what is this welcoming that Christ does?
 - Remember that word προσλαμβάνω?
 - Paul uses it here too.
- Paul here describing the way that Christ welcomes sinners into the family of God.
 - I want you to follow me here.
 - Paul is asking Philemon to display the spiritual reality of our adoption as God's children.
 - By welcoming Onesimus into the church family, Philemon will again be taking up the role of Christ.
 - Jesus showed warmth and affection toward people who had no hope.
 - He welcomes the weary, the broken, the downcast.
 - Those whose burdens are heavy.
 - He welcomes those who have no right to be part of his family.
 - He welcomes you into his family.
 - He doesn't ask for penance.
 - He doesn't ask for you to get it together before you approach him.
 - There isn't a checklist for you to complete before he shows grace.
 - He's not checking IDs at the door.
 - He's simply inviting you to trust him.
 - Listen to his words in Matthew chapter 11:

Matthew 11:28–30 (ESV)

²⁸Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

- Are you laboring to be good enough?
- Are you weary?
- Looking for rest from your striving to be okay?
- Come to Jesus.

- Rest in him.
- You don't have to earn his approval.
 - Or work off your debt.
- Your sins have been paid for by Jesus' death in your place.
- Believe in this and be welcomed into his family.
- This same warmth and affectionate welcome is what Paul is hoping Philemon would give Onesimus.
 - Paul is saying "The same warmth and love that you would show me whom you love and respect,
 - Show that love to your brother who doesn't have it all together."
 - "Your brother who has wronged you and is repentant."
- Before we move on from this verse I just want to draw your attention to another evidence of Paul's persuasion here.
 - Look at how verse 17 begins:
 - "IF you consider me your partner, welcome Onesimus."
- If Philemon wants to be identified with Paul, then he'll follow Paul's instructions.³
 - Paul is leveraging a holy desire inside of Philemon.
 - To be aligned with those doing the work of ministry.
 - It's an honorable desire inside of Philemon that Paul is appealing to.
 - There's nothing wrong with a desire to be among the ranks of those working for the Lord.
 - But if Philemon is going to be Paul's partner, he's got to act like Paul's partner.
 - Paul isn't going to partner up with someone who refuses to forgive.
 - Paul is subtly creating a fork in the road here.
 - And if Philemon refuses to forgive.
 - If he chooses disunity he'll not only ruin his relationship with Onesimus,
 - But he'll also do great harm to his relationship with Paul.
- Paul senses the damage that could be done by such a denial to reconciliation.
 - And in verses 18 and 19 he goes even further to overcome any offense that might be distracting Philemon.
- Let's read verses 18 and 19

Philemon 18–19 (ESV)

¹⁸If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account.

¹⁹I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it—to say nothing of your owing me even your own self.

- What's interesting in these verses is what Paul *doesn't* say.
- He doesn't actually say that Onesimus stole from Philemon.
 - Paul simply alludes to the possibility that something untoward might have occurred.
 - He leaves Onesimus's wrongs unspoken.
 - He's not denying that something happened.
 - He's just not dredging it up again.
- But it's obvious that Onesimus has done something wrong.

³ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008), 426. : "And if he acknowledges it, suggests Paul, Philemon will do what Paul asks and *welcome* Onesimus."

- Because Paul is offering to make restitution on behalf of Onesimus.
- He's trying to help Onesimus and Philemon **avoid a ruined relationship**.
- Paul is masterfully smoothing things over.
 - He's not stirring the pot — naming the ways that Onesimus has wronged Philemon.
 - But he's also not pretending that nothing happened.
 - He's being kind to both men here.
 - While also spurring them to get back to the mission.
 - He's balancing a love for the mission and love for the troops.⁴
- He's offering up his own resources in order to ease reconciliation.
- This is necessary because as I mentioned last week Onesimus had zero resources.
 - As a runaway slave, all he had was what he could carry.
 - He probably stole some money from Philemon to help his journey along to Rome.
 - And that money is probably gone now.
 - He's not bringing anything back.
 - It's not like he can say "let me make it up to you."
 - He's got nothing.
 - So Paul steps in - to make forgiveness as easy as possible for Philemon.
 - In a way Paul himself is taking on the role of Christ here.
 - He's offering to pay the debt that Onesimus owes.
- He doesn't want there to be any obstacle that prevents reconciliation between Philemon and Onesimus.
- And what he's doing here is interesting.
 - It's another little tactic.
- It reminds me a little bit of those families who go out to dinner and there's a friendly disagreement about who is going to pick up the check.
 - In some families it's almost like they're following a script:
 - Each uncle attempting to claim the check until grandpa finally swoops in and picks it up.
- Why do people do that?
 - Because there's a sense of honor that comes through providing for others.
 - It's honorable to be the one who expends resources for the good of others.
 - It's more blessed to give than receive.
 - I think this is a similar situation.
 - Paul is offering to pay off Onesimus's debts, knowing that if he does so Philemon would be sacrificing the honor of providing for others.
 - Philemon would be making the old imprisoned apostle pay the bill.
 - That would be a bad look for Philemon.
- Paul also brings up a debt that Philemon has in verse 19.
 - Look at what he says there.
 - "To say nothing of your owing me even your own self".
 - This is like saying "Not to mention the fact that you owe me your very being!"
 - I mentioned a few weeks ago that Paul had a hand in Philemon's conversion.
 - I think that's what this is.
 - Now I don't think Paul is really holding that over Philemon.
 - This might be a little bit of friendly ribbing meant to further diffuse tension.

⁴ Jonathan Leeman, Authority, 110.

- Sometimes moms use this line with their kids.
 - When their kid complains about unloading the dishwasher they'll say something like "you owe me your life".
 - And in a way they're right!
 - My mom certainly used that one on me.
- But joking aside it also reminds Philemon that he and Onesimus are not that different.
- Both of these men were saved through God's use of Paul.
 - While their station in life is very different, they actually have a lot in common.
 - The world would look at these two men and say that they couldn't be more different.
 - But we know that both of these men have equal need for a savior.
 - Both were hopelessly lost before Christ welcomed them into the family of God
 - He saved both of them for his name's sake.
 - Both of them are products of the great commission.
 - And both of them are equals in the eyes of God.
- "The ground is level at the foot of the cross."
- Should Philemon feel a sense of superiority over Onesimus because he is the offended party?
 - No!
 - That's Paul's point.
- What about us?
 - Are we better than the one who offended us?
 - Are we any less of a sinner?
 - Do we need less grace from God?
 - Are we any less upheld by the word of Christ's power?
- No.
 - Not at all.
- Our world elevates victims to a place of power.
 - It views hurt done to you as a trump card.
 - It says that the person who wronged you is now indebted to you.
 - You deserve payback.
 - Retribution.
- But friend, when you're tempted to mount the high horse of self-righteousness -
 - Remember that you need a savior as much as your adversary.
 - And letting that truth guide your behavior towards the one who has wronged you, prevents ruined relationships.
 - Quick forgiveness helps us to stay engaged with the mission.
- Our whole lives feed into our mission.
 - Even and especially our willingness to forgive one another.
 - Making disciples will require us to forgive.
- Paul is asking again Philemon to forgive.
 - But he ties forgiveness in with Philemon's work in the church.
- He links verse 20 back to verse 7.
- Look at verse 20.

Philemon 20 (ESV)

²⁰Yes, brother, I want some benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ.

- Remember back in verse 7?
 - How did Paul describe the effects of Philemon's sacrificial service?
- It **benefitted other believers**.
 - It brought joy and comfort to Paul, who was only hearing about Philemon's service.
 - He was enjoying the secondary effects of Philemon's service.
 - But those who were the primary recipients of Philemon's ministry — their hearts were being refreshed.
 - His sacrificial service was benefitting other believers.
 - That was his ministry.
- Now Paul is saying "Philemon, continue your work by refreshing my heart in this way".
 - This is actually the third time that Paul refers to the heart.
 - In verse 7 he refers to Philemon's heart-refreshing service to the saints.
 - In verse 12 he refers to Onesimus as his very heart.
 - And now in verse 20 he's asking for Philemon to refresh his own heart.
 - I want you to see what Paul is doing here in these verses.
 - He's creating this beautiful through-line with his word choice.
 - It's like he's saying
 - "Philemon I know that you refresh the hearts of the saints, I am in need of that heart refreshment so I'm sending my heart, Onesimus, to you."
 - Paul is doing a lot of work while also being gentle and discreet.
 - He's appealing to Philemon to **put aside any disunity** and get back to his gospel work *by forgiving Onesimus*.
 - This is like the capstone of Paul's persuasion.
 - He's tying his whole appeal together with this verse.
 - *Philemon's service to the church includes his forgiveness of Philemon*.
 - The refreshment that Paul is seeking comes through Philemon's *forgiveness* — in Christ.
 - This phrase is a favorite of Paul's.
 - It's all over the letters that he wrote.
 - That little phrase communicates so much.
 - Paul uses this phrase to describe things that are really only possible through Christ's involvement.
 - This refreshment that Paul is seeking doesn't ultimately come from Philemon.
 - It comes from Christ.
 - Because Jesus Christ is the one that Philemon is imitating by welcoming Onesimus.
 - When Philemon acts like Jesus he's refreshing the heart of his brother Paul.
 - His love and service and ability to forgive all find their source in Christ.
 - And Paul is asking him to let that truth be seen.
 - To let the world, the church, and Onesimus see what it means to be "in Christ".
 - Paul wants Philemon to show what happens when a person who is "in Christ" is wronged?
 - He's telling Philemon "don't wound your witness to the world by letting disunity distract."
 - After this final appeal Paul transitions to some more practical matters.
 - Similar to other letters he talks about some future travel plans.
 - But he's got one more persuasive trick up his sleeve.
 - Let's read verse 21–22

Philemon 21–22 (ESV)

²¹Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.

²²At the same time, prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping that through your prayers I will be graciously given to you.

- As we've seen from the beginning, Paul is trying to get Philemon to do something hard, something costly.
- We've seen that he wants Philemon to forgive (and potentially free) Onesimus.
- But Paul didn't command Philemon.
 - He could have.
 - If you remember back in verse 8 he tells Philemon that he would have been justified in issuing a command.
 - Why?
 - In part because of his authority as an apostle.
 - But more importantly because forgiveness is required as someone who has faith in Christ.⁵
 - Last week we said that Forgiveness is fitting.
- And we see an echo of that here in verse 21
- Paul frames Philemon's forgiveness as obedience.
 - The apostle tips his hand a little bit to help Philemon understand that he's not kidding around.
 - In saying "I'm confident of your obedience", he's implicitly telling Philemon that if he does not forgive he is acting in disobedience.
 - This is another reminder reconciliation is not optional for believers.
 - Forgiveness or reconciliation enables the work of ministry.
- In these two verses Paul gives Philemon some tasks.
- Paul nudges Philemon a bit here.
 - Philemon needs to get back to work.
 - Paul needs Philemon to get busy.
 - Paul is planning to come and strengthen the church like he commonly did.
 - And he wants to come and stay with Philemon.
 - But he probably wouldn't be welcome unless Philemon preserved the unity of the church
 - Disunity in the church distracts from the mission by hindering hospitality.
 - That's our second point.
 - Disunity in the church **Hinders Hospitality**.
 - This one is kind of obvious right?
 - If you are at odds with someone, they're not going to be readily welcome into your home.
 - If Philemon refuses to forgive, Paul won't have anywhere to stay!
 - He might be able to find somewhere else to stay.

⁵ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008), 434–435. : "But perhaps it is better to think of this obedience as directed not to Paul personally but to what we might call the "gospel imperative." Paul does not use the word "obedience" often, but when he does he often speaks about the general demand that accompanies the gospel: what Paul calls "the obedience of faith" (Rom. 1:5; 16:26; cf. also 15:18)."

- But if the church meets in Philemon's home, and Philemon decides he's tired of the apostle's attempts to persuade him, Paul isn't going to have any access to that church.
- But there's a larger connection to the mission of the church.
- The church accomplishes the great commission through many means.
- But one big one is hospitality and caring for people.
 - This is especially true in the early church.
- Last year in our study through the book of Acts we saw disunity threatening hospitality.
- Let me read you Acts 6:1–4

Acts 6:1–4 (ESV)

¹Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.

²And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.

³Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.

⁴But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

- They had some serious unity issues.
 - The hellenists felt like they weren't being taken care of.
 - Factions could have easily formed.
 - So what did the twelve do?
- They picked out seven men to make sure that equal hospitality was being shown to the hellenists and the hebrews.
- Why did they do that?
 - So that they could keep preaching the word.
- And verse 7 shows the outcome of their preservation of unity.

Acts 6:7 (ESV)

⁷And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.

- So rather than running around and trying to maintain unity through an equal show of hospitality, the disciples were able to preach the gospel.
 - And the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem.
- A church split into factions is just going to be less effective at caring for people and reaching the lost.
- It's like Paul is saying "Let's not get distracted by disunity, we've got work to do in Colossae, Philemon - are you with me?"
- We also see another indication that he might be hinting at the freedom of Onesimus here in verse 21.⁶
 - Look at what he says
 - "knowing that you will do even more than I say"

⁶ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008), 436. : "v. 16 has already hinted at just such a hope and that it is probable, therefore, that Paul does so here again."

- So Paul expects that Philemon will go beyond forgiveness to do....something!
- I wish that Paul was more explicit, but he's not.
 - So we're left to speculate.
 - We don't know exactly what Paul is asking.
 - And we don't know whether Philemon obeys Paul.
- But he puts a little bit of pressure on Philemon in verse 22.
 - Paul intends to visit Philemon.
- During the Cold War Ronald Reagan made the phrase "Trust but verify" popular.
 - It means to enter a negotiation situation in good faith - while also taking measures to ensure compliance of the other side.
- It's almost like Paul is taking a trust but verify approach with Philemon.
 - He says he's confident in Philemon's obedience, but he'll be around to make sure everything's on the up and up.
- Also keep in mind that the whole church has been hearing everything he has asked of Philemon so far.
 - And Paul begins to address them directly in this letter.
- We lose this in our English translation, but that "your" there in v22 is a "ya'll" in greek.
 - And same with the "you" at the end of the verse.
 - Let me read it to you that way -
 - It's a little folksier than Paul.
- Paul is shifting from addressing Philemon individually to addressing the whole church.
 - He's asking for them all to pray for him.
 - Something he also asked them to do in the book of Colossians.
 - He wants them to get busy.
- I'll paraphrase Pastor Tony here and say "the Christian life is a team sport".
 - Everyone must participate.
 - Paul is rousing the troops to get in the fight.
 - Nobody gets to sit on the sidelines.
 - Somehow this idea has crept into many churches that the pastors do the ministry.
 - And the congregation receives the ministry.
 - In some ways that's true.
 - Pastors and leaders certainly do ministry.
 - But not to the exclusion of the congregation.
- Remember Ephesians 4:12?
 - Why did God give pastors and leaders the church?
 - To equip the saints for the work of ministry.
 - Let me give you an example.
- Anthony Alcorta is our director of missions and outreach.
 - And he's killing it by the way.
 - There is probably nobody better suited to lead that ministry than him.
 - I see him as fitting into that slot of the evangelist in Ephesians 4:12.
 - But listen to me here.
 - As Anthony leads our evangelistic efforts his primary job is *not* to evangelize.
- His primary job is to equip all of us for the work of evangelism.
 - Of course he models evangelism by actually evangelizing.
 - And it's something that he loves to do.

- But Paul in Ephesians 4 sees Anthony's role as almost a support role for the church.
- And so here in Philemon 22 Paul is marshaling the church here to participate in the work of ministry.
- He's reminding Philemon of his ministry of hospitality.
 - And he's reminding the church of their work in praying for him and his fellow workers.
- That's where he turns his attention next.
- Let's read verses 23–24

Philemon 23–24 (ESV)

²³Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you,

²⁴and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.

- So in addition to Philemon and the church in Colossae, these are some of Paul's other team members.
- Paul calls them "fellow workers" which is how he referred to Philemon in the opening of this letter.
 - These are Paul's partners.
 - His helpers.
 - It's good for us to take a moment and dwell on the fact that Paul needed help.
- I find the verses like this at the end of Paul's letters to be helpful because sometimes I feel like Paul was a machine.
- I can just assume that he didn't need friends.
 - He didn't need help.
 - He didn't need fellow workers.
 - He was untouchable.
- But then I see these verses and I'm reminded that Paul needed help.
 - These guys were *with* Paul - some of them may have literally been imprisoned with him.
- Paul wasn't afraid to get help!
 - Are you willing to ask for help?
 - Nobody can do the work of the church alone.
 - You're going to need to ask for help if you're going to be effective for the mission of the church.
 - In some ways, asking for help *IS* the mission of the church.
 - Inviting people into the work is part of making disciples.
- So who is helping Paul?
 - Good old Epaphras is listed first.
 - Paul offers greetings to Epaphras's home church on his behalf.
 - He is mentioned a few different times in Colossians.
 - In the beginning of Colossians Paul calls him "our beloved fellow servant".
 - Here Paul calls him "my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus".
 - It's unclear whether he was actually imprisoned or if Paul is using the term metaphorically.
 - But what Paul *does* make clear is that their friend Epaphras is struggling in prayer for the church.
 - The very thing he just implicitly asked them to do for him.

- He separates Epaphras from the rest of his coworkers in this list because they know him.
- This is a personal touch.
- Then he moves on to Mark.
 - This Mark, or John Mark is the same man whom Paul identifies as the cousin of Barnabas in Colossians 4
 - And he did not always have a harmonious relationship with Paul.
- Their relationship is especially interesting in light of this whole letter.
 - Mark had deserted Paul during the course of some rough ministry.
 - He hurt Paul by fleeing from him.
 - Kind of like how Onesimus hurt Philemon in fleeing from him.
 - Paul may have spent some time distracted by Mark's desertion.
 - His relationship with Barnabas was certainly strained.
 - But now we see that Mark is back, and he's with Paul.
 - Laboring alongside him as a fellow worker.
 - Paul has reconciled with Mark.
 - And after this reconciliation, he writes in 2 Timothy 4 that Mark is "very useful for ministry."
 - If they hadn't reconciled, Paul *and Mark* would have been less effective for the Lord.
 - Mark makes for a very warm inclusion in this list.
- Next is Aristarchus who as Tony mentioned a few weeks ago was Paul's ride or die.
 - He was beside Paul for beatings, imprisonments, shipwrecks.
 - I kinda wonder if after their shipwreck on Malta the snake that bit Paul also bit Aristarchus.
 - This guy is a faithful helper to Paul.
 - We all need an Aristarchus as we work toward the mission of the church.
- And then Demas appears in the list.
 - You'll remember that Demas deserted Paul.
 - This is a sad reminder that not all who start the race will finish the race.
 - As Tony mentioned in the last sermon through Colossians, Paul writes to Timothy that Demas fell in love with the world.
 - Something that could easily happen to a wealthy man like Philemon.
 - The sad story of Demas is contrasted with the faithful example of Luke who is mentioned next.
 - Along with Aristarchus, Luke was another one of Paul's faithful companions.
 - He records Paul's movements, tends to Paul's wounds, and stuck with Paul to the end.
 - Again, at the end of 2 Timothy, Paul is listing his beloved fellow workers and the places they have gone to do ministry.
 - You get this sense that Paul is alone in prison.
 - But then he tells Timothy that Luke has stuck by his side.
 - Praise God for friends like Luke.
- Paul comes to the end of his letter and revisits where he started.
- Verse 25

Philemon 25 (ESV)

²⁵The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

- It makes sense that Paul is praying for grace for the church in Colossae.
- The situation surrounding Philemon and Onesimus is very complex.
 - It's fraught with opportunities for offense.
 - There might be people in the Colossian church who think that Onesimus needs to be punished.
 - Maybe they feel like Paul is trying to sweep his sin under the rug.
 - They don't want Onesimus's public desertion to stain the reputation of the church.
 - Or maybe there are people who think that Paul should have more explicitly called for Onesimus's freedom.
 - They might be clamoring for Onesimus's freedom.
 - That's what Christ came to do! Free the captives!
 - He's probably in a tough spot after hearing this letter read aloud with the church.
 - His actions are about to be scrutinized by those around him.
- I imagine that after hearing this letter read aloud Philemon had a pretty hard couple of weeks.
- And for that reason Paul prays that grace would with be with the church's spirit.
- We see another plural "your" at the end there.
 - If the church divides over the issue of Onesimus, their ministry will be greatly minimized.
 - That's our last point for this morning.
 - Disunity in the church minimizes ministry.
- So Paul wishes for the entire church to abide in the grace which saves.
 - When the tensions rise, when opinions are expressed as law
 - Or conflict tests the bond of peace
 - Or disunity threatens ministry
 - Paul prays for grace that would carry the church through such trials.
- The same grace that Jesus shows towards the messy and broken people he saves.
- Paul prays that such grace would saturate the believers of the church of Colossae.
 - This grace is necessary to the church in carrying out its mission.
 - I pray that this same grace would be with us.
- I pray that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ would with our spirits here at Messiah Bible Church.
- Let's pray together.