

Philemon and Forgiveness: A Five-Part Series -- by Ted Lewis

(Note: This series was first written in 2015 and posted on the original Restorative Trainer website. It can be used with study groups who may choose a five-session framework for covering this material.)

Philemon and Forgiveness Part 1



Paul's letter to Philemon may be short, but it is a great example of a personal communication that addresses a specific conflict. Perhaps Paul wrote other such letters that never resurfaced for possible canonization. Nearly all Pauline letters that survived had multiple agendas, offering instruction and encouragement in lots of areas. As they were written to entire communities, the odds of preservation were higher. But Philemon, uniquely, is about the separation and prospective reconciliation between two people: Philemon, a leader of a house church leader in Colossae, and Onesimus, a servant who once worked under Philemon and who ended up serving Paul in a Roman prison far away.

My hope in this series on Philemon is to draw out several learning-points about methods of restorative conflict resolution as well as to show a broader understanding of forgiveness. Specifically, I want to show how Paul models a way of being a third-party intervener in relational conflicts to promote forgiveness. (As

I use the words ‘mediator’ and ‘facilitator’ in this series, please understand them to be interchangeable in this context.)

Some people in the mediation world would cringe at the way Paul is anything but a “third-party neutral,” considering how he appears to almost leverage Philemon into reconciling with Onesimus whom Paul was sending back to Colossae. In fact, Paul even writes that if there was any financial restitution left to be made, that he himself would absorb that responsibility to make things right. That’s hardly being a neutral mediator!

Nevertheless, a mediator Paul was in this story of reconciliation. We will come to see how Paul, within a Roman-Greco culture that allowed certain people to ‘pull rank’ in order to get things done, was actually going out of his way to be *non-coercive*. Instead, he goes to great lengths to empower both parties to *lean into* a constructive resolution with each other. In this light, we will unpack how Paul had set the stage for potential reconciliation with invitational language more than directive language. It’s about empowering others to have internal motivation to make things right.

When was the last time you read the whole letter of Philemon in the New Testament? I recommend that you pause here and read the entire letter, all 25 verses, before reading further into this series. And even if you sense that you know the content well, please read it again and focus on Paul’s word-choices. Does he sound overly directive or does he sound more invitational? What sort of tone or mood does he set?



The word mediator comes from the Latin word ‘mediatus’ which simply means “to place in the middle.” ‘Medius’ means middle, and thus we have the word ‘medium’ and ‘median’ that imply an in-

between element. In Paul’s case, he actively inserted himself in the middle of a situation of relational strife. He serves as an initial bridge-builder. Not everyone can do that, nor should everyone try to do that. But there are times when a third-party helper is essential to start and support a reconciliation process.

We do not know if Onesimus left by his own choice or if he was told to leave by Philemon’s choice. But whatever the case, the conditions of the time of leaving had left an emotional strain that alienated the two men from each other. Paul was burdened by this alienation and he would not accept that state as the final word on the relationship. Even so, what was he stepping into? One can imagine that neither Philemon nor Onesimus would have wanted to accidentally bump into each other in the aisle of the local agora, that is, the outdoor marketplace of Colossae.

Is there a person in your life that you would not wish to meet in the middle of a supermarket aisle? Reflect a bit on why that would be an undesirable or awkward situation for you. What does it say about the terms or conditions of your departure-moment from that person? What does it say about the current state of the relationship? Upcoming segments of this series will address the ‘charged’

dynamics of that relational state. How do you feel now about the remaining 'charge' that resides in your feelings?

In this piece we are mostly thinking about Paul as a third character in this scenario. Can you imagine a third-party person (who knows you and the estranged party) who might take the initiative to get the two of you back together on good speaking terms? How would that feel to you to have someone intervene on your behalf? And mind you, in the case we are considering, the intervener was stationed 800 miles away from where both parties might be seeing each other face-to-face after months of separation.

Such was the context for the letter to Philemon, written in Rome and carried by Onesimus who walked *and* sailed over 800 miles back to his old master, Philemon. Sometimes our distance between ourselves and another is just that: geographical distance. Sometimes it has to do with inner emotional barriers. Sometimes we keep distance from another in the head zone and literally write down all the justifications for how we are in the right and the other person is in the wrong, as if preparing for a court case. Before you read then next section, I invite you to think about how this scenario might look in today's world and imagine yourself being one of the main characters. In short, how might you find your story in this Bible story of separation?

Philemon and Forgiveness Part 2

Over my years in restorative justice I have tracked the way certain words draw much attention as to whether they should be used or not. Take, for example, the word 'reconciliation'. In the early days of the movement many programs within the Mennonite church network were called *Victim Offender Reconciliation Programs* or VORPs. The word 'reconciliation' became problematic for many in the field, especially for victim advocates, as it could set up an expectation that was not always realistic or possible. Out of sensitivity, program names adopted more neutral-sounding words about the process, such as 'mediation' or 'dialogue' or 'conference'.

In more recent years 'forgiveness' has become something of an 'f-word' in certain circles for similar reasons. The language of forgiveness can trigger sensitive matters. But this is by no means an approach that disrespects the meaning of the word. What I have observed is that practitioners still hold a high regard for the place of reconciliation and forgiveness, but they also fully recognize how the *prescribing* of such outcomes can thwart a deep resolution. Conversely (and paradoxically), by not shining explicit light on these relational goals, they tend to happen more often between people who voluntarily open up to each other. The best that third-party helpers can do is to create and 'hold' space in which parties can meet each other face to face, eye to eye, heart to heart, and thus be in a space where the free gifts of apology and forgiveness can unfold slowly and be deeply experienced.



Imagine Paul in his Roman prison, talking late into the evening with his new servant Onesimus. Paul learns about the rift in the relationship between Onesimus and Philemon, the latter being a household master and church leader back in Colossae.

By virtue of sharing his story with Paul, Onesimus has already stepped into the Zone of Openness, a place, by degrees, where parties in conflict must traverse if they are to get unstuck from the past. Whenever a person expresses any amount of openness, perhaps just by being a bit vulnerable to disclose real feelings, a third-party facilitator will recognize that as a window of opportunity for relational reconciliation.

But don't both parties in conflict need to be open if they are to come together? Ideally, 'yes'. This is foundational and necessary for all win-win outcomes. Conflict resolution can never be forced on someone. True mediation is antithetical to external or coercive means. It requires internal commitment and internal realizations. For these reasons it has to be internally voluntary on the part of both parties. Routinely, support people are invited to be part of such processes.

Considering the social setting of servant-slavery in the Roman-Greco world, it is astonishing to see how Paul elevated the significance of mutuality and free choice over the hierarchical and honor-based values of aristocratic society. And so Paul, 800 miles away from Philemon's home, maps out a strategy to draw Philemon into the Zone of Openness without any coercion. "I preferred to do nothing

without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own free will" (vs. 14).

The Zone of Openness

How does Paul invite Philemon into being open about healing a strained relationship? The overall picture is that Paul majors on the positives and not the negatives. The relational conflict is certainly there, running like an electric current under the entire letter. But the focus is on the positive strengths within each party and the positive connections between both parties. These positive human qualities are also framed within the positive spiritual support of God's involvement. One way to understand this emphasis is that mediators aim to create a surplus of positive mood so parties can draw on this bank account as they choose. This helps people to move from a debit of trust to a credit of trust.

Seasoned mediators do not emphasize the positive side as a sort of technique or gimmick. This is not merely about the power of positive thinking. What is at work here is new bridge-building to offset previous wall-building. Mediators understand that the overcoming of a negative conflict can only be done when the center of gravity shifts into a positive realm. This doesn't mean that tough issues or feelings don't come up. They actually need to come up in order to put the past to rest. What it does mean is that a good process helps all participants to *lean into* the positives lest a person remains mentally overcome by the negatives; in this way the positives will overcome the negatives. This is the essence of the wisdom

we find in Romans 12:21. “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”



In the letter, Paul affirms Philemon’s faith, Philemon’s love, and reinforces Philemon’s good role within the web of his communal relationships. “You, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints.” This is not flattery; Paul is affirming Philemon’s inherent strengths that can be tapped for mending his relationship with Onesimus. One can also read how Paul is re-establishing his rapport with Philemon as a way to warm up Philemon’s heart toward Onesimus. The letter has the bookends of intimate connection. Philemon is Paul’s “dear friend and fellow worker” and Paul always remembers him in prayer. At the letter’s end Paul writes: “Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers.” Talk about optimism! At any rate, Paul, “an old man and a prisoner of Christ,” is expressing a deep personal bond. The letter spills with affection.

Take a moment now and call to mind someone you admire who has a way of spilling forth a positive focus in the midst of difficult situations. What do you admire the most about them in such settings? Is their positivity contagious to others?

What we will see more throughout this letter is how Paul’s own capacity to connect deeply to the humanity of Philemon is tied into the prospect of Philemon

connecting deeply to the humanity of Onesimus. Can you see how this helps people to move out of the Head Zone, where we tend to stay defensive, and into the Heart Zone, where we tend to let down our guard and open up? In the third section we will map the emotional energy of conflict and see how Paul works with it to shift things from a negative center of gravity to a positive one.

Philemon and Forgiveness Part 3



We all know of situations where two family members reach a state of not being on good speaking terms with each other. Maybe they don't even speak to each other anymore. This is not only something we see in drama movies from France; it can happen within any extended family system. Due to the escalation of an interpersonal conflict, one or both parties choose to not speak or communicate to the other. Why is this? It may be a natural way to avoid further tension and pain; it may also be a way to deny the truth of past tension and pain. Whatever the reason, the result is like having an electric force field between two people that prevents them from connecting well with each other. And nobody likes to get an electrical shock!

We don't fully know the source of tension between Philemon and Onesimus, but we do know that it was significant enough for Paul to pull out all the stops in his short letter to jump-start a process of relational reconciliation. We also know that

it may have involved monetary loss for Philemon (verse 18 and 19). In my last section I emphasized how Paul highlighted the positives in both parties as a way to soften Philemon's heart toward Onesimus. Paul had set the stage by writing about the positive strengths in each person and about the positive points of connection between them, both past and future. What I want to write about now is how Paul was actually able to *absorb* some of the negative charge of the situation, to use an electrical metaphor, as a way to make it easier for both parties to move forward and to come together.



Whenever there is a lightning storm with huge cloud banks rubbing against each other, there ends up being a discharge of negative electrons that all gather somewhere in excess. Eventually, this charge has to jump somewhere to balance the ionic differential in the air; that is why lightning aims for the ground where it gets absorbed. In brief, excess negative charge is 'grounded out' in the ground. The same applies to a ground wire for appliances. This third-wire system is designed to safely carry an escaped charge to a grounded place. Is it possible that third-party mediators and facilitators can also ground out the excess of negative emotional charge and direct it toward safe outlets? I think so.

Paul serves as a great example of one who is helping to ground the excess charge that has built up from the relational 'rubs' between Philemon and Onesimus. For one thing, he is fully aware of 'connection versus separation' dynamics in the

strained relationship between the two men. Paul places himself into the gap-zone of that strained relationship; he serves like a conducting element to help re-establish a positive connection. Speaking to Philemon, he writes, "I am sending him -- who is my very heart -- back to you. I would have kept him with me so that he could take your place in helping me..." (vs.12 & 13). From all of this we get a sense of how Paul has inserted himself into the equation as if to say, "If you are well connected to me (which you are), then you can become re-connected to each other." Verse 17 reinforces this: "If you consider me a partner, accept him as you would accept me."

This is all about building trust. Paul is building up a credit of trust where there was a debit of trust. Most interpersonal conflicts boil down to the loss of trust between people, and with the loss of trust comes the loss of good communication. Thereafter, people with mistrust sustain exaggerated narratives that justify their perception of the other person. This is often a blame-narrative that makes it hard for one to name their own behaviors as a contributing factor to the rubbings that caused friction in the first place.

To reverse this downward spiral of mistrust and poor communication, positive communication is needed to regenerate positive trust. One reason mediators and facilitators meet separately with parties before bringing them together is that they are establishing new lines of trust. In this context mediators are helping to build up a new bank account of trust from which parties can later draw upon to re-establish their own trust in each other. There is a reason why we use monetary metaphors for trust such as 'earning trust' or 'raising trust'. This is because trust

truly operates on a credit/debit basis, and mediators play a key role in restoring lost trust at the front end of formal processes.



One of the most powerful symbols of restored trust that I have witnessed countless times in mediation meetings is the proverbial handshake at the close of the meeting. When appropriate, people might also hug each other. These gestures communicate a host of things regarding the transition from the old to the new. Specifically, this is a shift from a relationship previously defined by the negatives of the past to a relationship newly defined by the positives of the future. Something has been released; something has been grounded out. No more shocks can happen when people come in closer proximity to each other. The gestures of physical touch represent a new beginning for safer coexistence.

The simplest way to understand the thrust of Paul's letter is how it facilitates 'shift'. It is interesting that 'facile' in French means 'to make easy'. In other words, facilitators make hard conversations easier for those most involved. Good facilitators, therefore, are keenly aware when 'shift happens'. This is an energetic transition when people affected by harms and conflicts begin to relax inside toward each other. What we have learned so far is that Paul assists this process by accentuating positive elements and by diffusing negative charges, acting as a ground wire, so that eventually a normal, safe current of conversation can operate between the other two parties.

Can you think of a situation, either past or present, where you have experienced highly charged emotions that seem to fill the space between you and another person? What contributed to the rubbing? What do you need the most for the charge to be grounded out and for things to relax?

Paul's role as mediator is in full concert with his broader theological and eschatological orientation. Paul is helping to bring a new future into the present situation in order to redeem the difficulties rooted in the past. In this light, the terms 'conflict transformation' and 'restorative justice' are well-named terms! Real rubs can be transformed into stronger relationships; real hurts, when addressed openly, can restore peace of mind and relational peace. In our next section we will consider how Paul helps both parties to re-narrate their conflict as a way to help them re-unite.

Philemon and Forgiveness Part 4



Interpersonal conflicts often weigh people down with a sense of heaviness or intensity, leaving little room for levity or humor. Paul's letter to Philemon, however, does have a lighthearted tone to it. At one point he makes a playful pun out of Onesimus' name, which in Greek means

'useful'. "Formerly he was *useless* to you, but now he has become *useful* both to you and to me." Paul also shows his optimism that Onesimus can be useful once again to Philemon. It is as if he speaks *from* the future. This positive outlook is one way mediators can help parties to shift away from being stuck in the past. They also know that people who struggle with being stuck to the past often carry within themselves deeper and older sources of trauma that reverberate with present-day rubs with people.

Let me now recap some of the main points previously made. We have seen how Paul has...

- Used an invitational, non-coercive style that respects the free will of both parties
- Highlighted common ground between the humanity of the parties and himself
- Created 'zones of openness' that allow parties to move toward reconciliation
- Absorbed 'loose' negative energy by naming the conflict in a non-threatening way

We have also seen how Paul appealed to the relational dimensions between Philemon and Onesimus, noting how the resolution of conflict is not merely a matter of settling external matters that divide people, but transforming the very quality of relational interaction between them. Without this internal dimension of peacemaking it is very difficult for people to resolve practical matters through

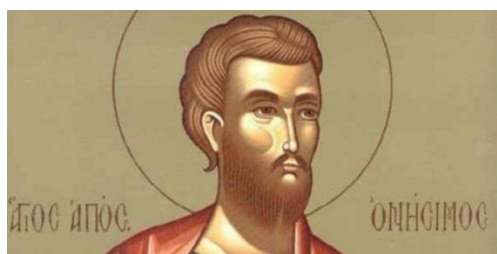
settlements or compromises. Mistrust can run deep, and good resolution has to deeply match this with the rebuilding of new trust.

Another thing that Paul does which aligns well with mediated dialogue is that he promotes a balancing of power dynamics. Philemon, as a household master, clearly has higher privilege and power above what Onesimus has. But as we read the letter sent to Philemon, we can recognize language that frames both men as being on more equal terms. For the sake of healthy processes, mediators strengthen connective communication processes by leveling the field with respect to conventional measures of power. This often is done by making sure parties who experientially have been in lower zones of social power are elevated in their roles of storytelling and response-based listening.

I want to return to the concept of parties shifting away from being stuck in the past. We might think that people stay stuck in the past because of strong emotions which they cannot shake. Anger or resentment seem to be just as 'alive' in the present as in days past. This fits well with the electric 'live wire' analogy discussed in the last segment. But the deeper reason for sustaining emotions has to do with mental narratives that replay over and over. "I deserved better than how he treated me; he should have shown me more respect." Such narratives underlie feelings of resentment or mistrust, and until they are modified, it is unlikely that accompanying feelings will go away. "He's useless to me. I'm glad he is gone."

A re-narration process, however, can change everything.

Paul, very subtly, is helping Philemon to start a re-narration process that will literally change the way he thinks about Onesimus. He highlights his usefulness, his trustworthiness, and even his status as an equal spiritual brother. All of this amounts to a humanization of the other party which is essential in most re-narrations. In my facilitation work regarding victim offender dialogue, re-narration can also happen for victims when offenders describe their broken or dysfunctional family backgrounds. This creates a sense of empathy or compassion that dissolves former narratives that view offenders as being evil or less than human. This also helps to redress imbalances of social power.



Just as preparation meetings are a best-practice standard before joint-dialogue meetings for parties of crimes or conflicts, Paul's letter serves as a preparation aid that ensures safe, constructive dialogue between parties. The last thing a third-party helper should do is to bring parties together where the 'electricity' will bolt out in unpredictable directions and do more harm. Stuck in prison, Paul acts as a remote mediator, doing all he can to 'ground out' the excess charge, and to prepare Philemon for a predictably safe reunion. Similar to the practice of acupuncture, Paul is opening up the blockages within the human soul and heart so that Philemon's own God-given energies can flow more easily to bring about the needed healing.

A mediator's ultimate aim is not to intervene but to *get out of the way*. Once good preparation has been done with both parties, once they have been brought

to places of greater trust and openness, then it is their turn to face each other and go as deep as they choose to go. Mediators ensure safe spaces for resolution; parties do the real work of resolution. The beauty in this work is that as one party willingly chooses to be vulnerable enough to disclose a deeper truth, this helps to alleviate some pain or mistrust in the other party. In turn, that other party is prompted to share more deeply; this reciprocating, heart-to-heart conversation ultimately leads to a sense of relief and completion. Rarely is this sort of *shift* experienced in courtroom settings where we normally anticipate win-lose outcomes.

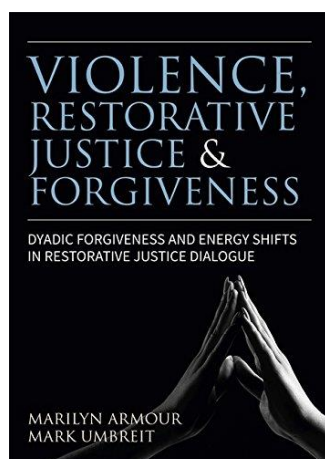
Up until now in this series, questions posed to you, the reader, have focused on your own experiences of being in conflictual zones with others. But perhaps you have some natural gifting to be a third-party facilitator to help others in tough situations. What experiences have you had that affirm your ability to assist others in conflict? What are some skill-areas you hope to strengthen so that you can more intentionally be available to others as a facilitator?

In closing, you also may be asking, “Why is this series called ‘Philemon and Forgiveness’? After four sections, the theme of forgiveness has barely come up yet.” I will take this up in the fifth and final entry to come. For now I will simply say that there is a paradoxical truth about forgiveness: the more people try to forgive with the language of forgiveness, the more it can thwart a deeper experience of inner and relational peace. Perhaps Paul knew this, too. Stay tuned as we consider what really might have happened when Onesimus made it back to Colossae and stood before Philemon.

Philemon and Forgiveness: Part 5

I mentioned last time that this final section on 'Philemon and Forgiveness' would address the topic of forgiveness. One reason the word did not come into the first four parts is that the Greek word for forgiveness, which Paul most often used in his letters (*charizomai*), is not found in Philemon. This word is related to the Greek word *charis* which means grace; implied in this term is kindness and mercy (as also implied in the Hebrew word '*hesed*').

Nevertheless, the Philemon text is itself a persuasive appeal for graciousness and mercy to win the day, and in this sense, it contains what I call 'implicit forgiveness.' This means that while there is no language of forgiveness, there still can be the experience of forgiveness. The reason I gave the word 'forgiveness' such prominence in the series title is because it is an essential umbrella term that unifies the emotional and relational peace resulting from good resolution work between people.



In 2015 I had the opportunity to help with a research project on the dynamics of forgiveness between victims and offenders of severe crimes. Most of the victims I interviewed in this project had lost loved ones due to a tragic murder. Years later these family members found the impetus and courage to meet with their respective offenders in prison for healing dialogue with the presence of a facilitator. Months of preparation were routine.

In the joint sessions, some people found it necessary to use the language of forgiveness; most found it impossible to resort to such language. But in all cases, these victims described an experiential shift whereby heavy negative emotions of the past were lifted off their shoulders and they walked out feeling lighter. “I could breathe again,” they would narrate. “I could finally sleep well.” Also consistent was their recognition of the true humanity of the offender, who in most cases exhibited great remorse.

In other words, these victims and offenders connected with each other on a deep ‘heart’ level and experienced a newness of life that was often too profound to put into words. Perceptions and emotions that once divided both parties were no longer in the way. The pain and shame – that respectively keeps harming and harmed people weighted down – were transformed into a *positive regard* for the other. The lightning storm, with all of its loose energy of negative ionic charge, was over. Past pain was grounded out.

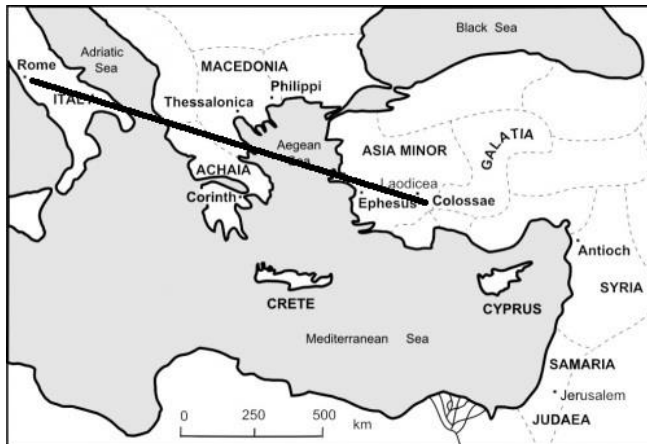
Forgiveness is the unburdening of the load of unforgiveness.

Whether or not the words “I forgive you” are explicitly spoken, the reality of relational forgiveness can truly happen when two sides collectively (the research term is ‘dyadically’) form a positive connection with each other that transcends all of the past pain. Forgiveness is experienced as a release from negative emotions stemming from real relational harms that improves the quality of inner life of the forgiver and improves the quality of the relationship with the forgiven.

What if there is no chance for a relationship to continue? What if one party is closed to any sort of reconciling dialogue? What does one do when negative thoughts and feelings persist like a leaky faucet that won’t stop dripping? Can time heal? What if one person’s trauma from their past is so deep that they are not able to see another person in a new light? Perhaps you can add a question that speaks well to your own story.

Forgiveness in this context becomes more of an individual’s journey to reach a point where their thoughts toward another can shift from toxic negativity to wishing that person well. Empathy for the other is often a pivot point. Even so, Paul knew that a face-to-face encounter with the other person is the best remedy to ground out the loose energy of unresolved matters and to wash away exaggerated feelings and speculations. (This, by the way, is why emailing is not a suitable venue for dealing with emotionally-charged issues. Words unattended by physical presence tend to raise more anxiety and thus intensify the residual charge.) Altogether, this matter of people shifting is more than people just

“moving on” in life. It is about touching the past in dignifying ways so that all involved can truly be released from the past.



We don't know what happened when Onesimus and Philemon met each other, but since the letter was preserved we can assume that Onesimus returned to Colossae. Hopefully, Philemon was ready to reunite with Onesimus, following

Paul's advice in verse 17: "Welcome him as you would welcome me." The literal Greek for 'welcome' is best translated as 'receive'. By receiving another person in a heart-felt way, forgiveness is implied. Receiving means that the relationship is no longer determined by past hurts as if one were to keep a ledger of another's shortcomings. Receiving means living into the newness of the present moment.

Are there ever times when asking for forgiveness is the best thing to do? Or should the one most impacted by a harm be the first to offer forgiveness? When should forgiveness language be used? And what about situations where both parties have been hurt, yet both parties also bear some responsibility for the built up tensions? How does forgiveness play out in those scenarios?

This is truly a complicated matter, and my intention is not to discuss the nuances of forgiveness. My main point is that because forgiveness is not explicit in Philemon (but certainly implicit throughout), we can know that the *experience* of

relational forgiveness need not trip over the use of forgiveness language. All we need to know is that people can profoundly reconnect with each other when they are open toward each other and are open about their own responsibilities. This perspective matches well with the resolution text of Matthew 18 “where two or three are gathered.” Resolving rubs and hurts in a church context also involves “forgiveness from the heart” as we read at the end of that chapter, and yet the three stages of listening-based resolution do not use the word ‘forgiveness.’ The main verbs are going, listening, and agreeing: proactive words that point toward restoration of relationships.

Logistically, it might have been an awkward moment if Philemon met Onesimus and hand-delivered the letter him face-to-face. I wonder what either of them said to each other in the first moments of their encounter. A better circumstance would have been the delivery of the letter weeks or at least days prior to Onesimus’ arrival, perhaps by the hand of Tychicus, an associate of Paul who helped to carry his letters. In this way Philemon would have had some time to think about Paul’s appeal and to soften his heart ahead of meeting Onesimus directly.

In the end, relational reconciliation (‘at-one-ment’ in Old English) is a means or pathway to the transformation of difficult things into better things. All decaying matter in the compost heap can end up as nutrient soil. Paul even suggests that the unforeseeable good that could come out of the whole situation is that Onesimus would now return “no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother” (vs. 16). Imagine that: a slave becoming a spiritual brother! That’s a

pretty startling thing, considering how Philemon's past relationship was not only one based on authority but also marred by mistrust. But then God's entire redemptive/restorative work is itself quite startling where true identity transcends both "slave and free."

How have you found your story in the hearing of this biblical story? Of the three main characters, have you identified strongly with one of them? Have your reflections throughout this whole series led you to a place of new consideration? What is a next step for you in your journey with addressing harm and conflict?

All of us have relational situations where mistrust and tension pull us into zones of hardship and protectiveness. It happens in a fallen world. From a biblical perspective, these situations don't have to be barriers to our life in the kingdom. They are in fact the very context in which we *can* experience the living power of God's kingdom. What matters most is that we allow ourselves to enter zones of openness to see how redemption can happen through heart-felt conversations. And sometimes, not always, the support of third-party helpers can facilitate a needed process where old things can die away and new things can come to life.

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Fragment of Philemon