



# CAPITOL COMMISSION™

## Greatness – Restoring A Brother (Philemon 21)

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*Falling out of favor with others, losing friendships, and other kinds of separations can be life changing. This relatively common human experience can be softened, even reversed. Strength of character is needed both to **forgive** or to **ask forgiveness**. Which of these attributes have you had to practice?*

### INTRODUCTION

The Apostle Paul was imprisoned in Rome for preaching about the saving grace of Jesus. Paul was writing a letter to his friend, Philemon, a businessman in Colossae who, under Paul's leadership, became pastor of a home church there. The subject of the letter was Onesimus, a former slave in the Philemon household. Onesimus apparently stole from them and ran away. He may have been sent to the prison in Rome for another offense. He met Paul there. Both Onesimus and Philemon were followers of Jesus. Paul was the spiritual father of each. At the time of this letter, Onesimus was not a prisoner but was continuing to stay behind and serve as one of Paul's ministry assistants. Paul's goal was to bring forgiveness and reconcile these two servants of God. **Is there one in your life who you have not forgiven?**

### FORGIVING CHARACTER

*Philemon 7 I have indeed received much joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, my brother. (NRSV)*

Paul's letter has a powerful opening: "***I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers***". He writes to Philemon as a fellow servant in the faith. Paul commends this church leader and mentions names of his wife, Apphia, and son, Archippus. Paul reminds his friend of the hardships in leadership and the powerful message broadcasted in a leader's actions. He expected this letter to be read aloud in the church in Colossae when Onesimus delivered it in person. Paul counted on this leader and close friend to follow through with what might be a difficult request. **Can you recall taking an action which was a personal character stretch?**

### FORGIVING ACTIONS

*Philemon 14 I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become during my imprisonment.*

Paul gives a list of reasons to forgive: Verses 11-18.

- Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful both to you and to me.
- I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you. I wanted to keep him with me, so that he might be of service to me in your place during my imprisonment for the gospel.
- but I preferred to do nothing without your consent, in order that your good deed might be voluntary and not something forced.
- Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother—especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.
- So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me.
- If he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account.

**How have you added value to a family member, friend, or employee who earlier had disappointed you?**

### FORGIVING MOTIVES

*Philemon 21 Confident of your obedience, I am writing to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say. (NRSV)*

The focus of Paul's letter continues to be on Philemon and the need for him to forgive and accept Onesimus back as a brother. Paul closes by asking his friend to prepare a place for his return visit. Greetings are sent from several who are ministering with Paul. Two of the names would be familiar to many readers. Demas and Mark had each deserted Paul and were received back as brothers. **Have you fallen short of God's expectations and then later accepted His grace?**

### A Prayer

Almighty God: Thank you for showing me how to restore a brother and sister. Thank you for restoring me as a child needing grace and an invitation to come home. I pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen!