

Main Idea: As we finish our study of Philemon we learn about the importance of three things in verses 22-25.

A Look Back: What have we learned about Philemon?

1. We have learned about forgiveness.
 2. We have learned how Christ can make useless people into useful people.
 3. We have learned about the difference Christ makes in our relationships.
 4. We have learned how to be a peacemaker.
- I. We learn about the importance of prayer (22).
- A. What did Paul pray for others?
 1. Paul prayed that Christians would know God better.
 2. Paul prayed that Christians would live a life that pleases God.
 3. Paul prayed that Christians would be fruitful.
 - B. What did Paul ask others to pray for him?
 1. He needed prayer for boldness in spreading the gospel.
 2. He needed prayer for opportunities to minister.
- II. We learn about the importance of people (23-24).
- A. People mattered to Paul.
 - B. People should matter to us too.
- III. We learn about the importance of grace (25).
- The Bottom Line: Because of the difference He makes, Jesus deserves glory.

Scripture Reading: Philemon 12-25

Tomorrow, December 7, is Pearl Harbor Day. As we prepare to turn to God’s Word, I’d like to begin today’s message by reading the words of the lead Japanese bomber, Mitsuo Fuchida.

I must admit I was more excited than usual as I awoke that morning at 3:00 a.m., Hawaii time, four days past my thirty-ninth birthday. Our six aircraft carriers were positioned 230 miles north of Oahu Island. As general commander of the air squadron, I made last-minute checks on the intelligence information reports in the operations room before going to warm up my single-engine, three-seater "97-type" plane used for level bombing and torpedo flying.

The sunrise in the east was magnificent above the white clouds as I led 360 planes towards Hawaii at an altitude of 3,000 meters. I knew my objective: to surprise and cripple the American naval force in the Pacific...

As we neared the Hawaiian Islands that bright Sunday morning, I made a preliminary check of the harbor, nearby Hickam Field and the other installations surrounding Honolulu. Viewing the entire American Pacific Fleet peacefully at anchor in the inlet below, I smiled as I reached for the mike and ordered, "All squadrons, plunge in to attack!" The time was 7:49 a.m.

Like a hurricane out of nowhere, my torpedo planes, dive bombers and fighters struck suddenly with indescribable fury. As smoke began to billow and the proud battleships, one by one, started tilting, my heart was almost ablaze with joy. During the next three hours, I directly commanded the fifty level bombers as they pelted not only Pearl Harbor, but the airfields, barracks and dry docks nearby. Then I circled at a higher altitude to accurately assess the damage and report it to my superiors.

Of the eight battleships in the harbor, five were mauled into total inactivity for the time being. The Arizona was scrapped for good; the Oklahoma, California and West Virginia were sunk. The Nevada was beached in a sinking condition; only the Pennsylvania, Maryland and Tennessee were able to be repaired. Of the

** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous development, see the Philemon series at WBC on Sunday evenings in 2003.

eight, the California, West Virginia and Nevada were salvaged much later, but the Oklahoma, after being raised, was resunk as worthless. Other smaller ships were damaged, but the sting of 3,077 U.S. Navy personnel killed or missing and 876 wounded, plus 226 Army killed and 396 wounded, was something which could never be repaired...

During the next four years, I was determined to improve upon my Pearl Harbor feat. I saw action in the Solomon Islands, Java, the Indian Ocean; just before the Battle of Midway on June 4, 1942, I came down with an attack of appendicitis and was unable to fly. Lying in my bed, I grimaced at the sounds of the firing all about me. By the end of that day, we had suffered our first major defeat, losing ten warships altogether.

From that time on, things got worse. I did not want to surrender. I would rather have fought to the last man. However, when the Emperor announced that we would surrender, I acquiesced.

I was in Hiroshima the day before the atom bomb was dropped, attending a week long military conference with the Army. Fortunately, I received a long distance call from my Navy Headquarters, asking me to return to Tokyo. With the end of the war, my military career was over, since all Japanese forces were disbanded. I returned to my home village near Osaka and began farming, but it was a discouraging life. I became more and more unhappy, especially when the war crime trials opened in Tokyo. Though I was never accused, Gen. Douglas MacArthur summoned me to testify on several occasions.

As I got off the train one day in Tokyo's Shibuya Station, I saw an American distributing literature. When I passed him, he handed me a pamphlet entitled *I Was a Prisoner of Japan* (published by Bible Literature International, known then as the Bible Meditation League). Involved right then with the trials on atrocities committed against war prisoners, I took it.

What I read was the fascinating episode which eventually changed my life.²

What Fuchida read was the story of Jake DeShazer, an American soldier who was shot down by the Japanese and then cruelly treated for forty months as a war prisoner. DeShazer was filled with hatred towards his Japanese oppressors. Until two years into his captivity when the U.S. prisoners obtained a Bible, which he was permitted to read for three weeks. And that's when DeShazer came to know the power of Jesus Christ, who became his Savior, and turned his hatred into love. DeShazer resolved that should his country win the war and he be liberated, he would someday return to Japan to introduce others to this life-changing book.

As Fuchida read DeShazer's story, he was gripped and decided, in spite of his Buddhist heritage, to get a Bible and start reading. Fuchida tells what happened:

I came to the climactic drama -- the Crucifixion. I read in Luke 23:34 the prayer of Jesus Christ at His death: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." I was impressed that I was certainly one of those for whom He had prayed. The many men I had killed had been slaughtered in the name of patriotism, for I did not understand the love which Christ wishes to implant within every heart.

² *From Pearl Harbor to Calvary*, by Mitsuo Fuchida; Originally entitled, "From Pearl Harbor to Golgotha" (1953)

Right at that moment, I seemed to meet Jesus for the first time. I understood the meaning of His death as a substitute for my wickedness, and so in prayer, I requested Him to forgive my sins and change me from a bitter, disillusioned ex-pilot into a well-balanced Christian with purpose in living.

That date, April 14, 1950 -- became the second "day to remember" of my life. On that day, I became a new person. My complete view on life was changed by the intervention of the Christ I had always hated and ignored before.³

Fuchida faithfully served Jesus Christ as an evangelist until his death in 1976. A few years before he died he said, "I would give anything to retract my actions of twenty-nine years ago at Pearl Harbor, but it is impossible. Instead, I now work at striking the death-blow to the basic hatred which infests the human heart and causes such tragedies. And that hatred cannot be uprooted without assistance from Jesus Christ."⁴

It's amazing to ponder the difference Jesus makes. He truly changes people, like Jake DeShazer, like Mitsuo Fuchida, like those of us in this room who know Him.

And like Onesimus, as we've been seeing firsthand in our current series which we'll wrap up today.

Philemon is a great book. We began our study in October, and in our first message, I told you where we were going. Now in our last, to wrap it up, let's take a look back at where we've been, and then zero in on the closing four verses.

The Characters in Philemon:

Paul—author of letter (along with Timothy)

Onesimus—runaway slave

Philemon—the owner of the slave

Apphia—perhaps the wife of Philemon

Archippus—perhaps the son of Philemon, or the pastor of church

Tychicus—the one who delivered this letter and Colossians

Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke—Paul's ministry associates (23-24)

A Look Back: What have we learned from Philemon?

Sharing: What truths have you learned from our study of Philemon?

Here are four subjects I'd like to highlight.

1. We have learned about forgiveness.

Why did Paul write this letter? Obviously the issue at hand was how to treat a fugitive slave, Onesimus.

Remember, Philemon had a dilemma. In his day, Roman law permitted slave owners to execute a rebellious slave. In fact, owners were encouraged to do so. There were 60,000,000 slaves in the Roman empire, and slave holders constantly guarded against the danger of revolt. So if a slave ran away, at best he was branded with a red-hot iron on his forehead with the letter "F" (for "fugitivus" or runaway). At worst, he was crucified.

But Philemon was a Christian. What should he do with Onesimus? Should he punish his slave? Or put him on probation? Or just forget the whole thing?

That was the intent of Paul's letter, to instruct Philemon how to handle this situation in a way that would honor the Lord Jesus Christ.

And what did Paul appeal Philemon to do? *Forgive Onesimus.*

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

And why? Not because he felt like it, for he undoubtedly felt burnt. And certainly not because it would be a popular thing to do, for Philemon would not be too popular with other slave owners if he forgave this wayward slave.

Rather he was to forgive because he belonged to Christ, for whose sake God forgave him.

Verse 17 “So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me.”

Philemon teaches us about forgiveness. When a person has been forgiven by God, what must he be willing to do? Forgive those who wrong him. This isn't easy, neither is it optional. But the Lord enables us to treat others as we have been treated by Him.

The cover story for the November 23, 2015 issue of *Time* magazine is entitled, “What It Takes to Forgive a Killer.” As you'll recall, on June 17 a gunman entered a church service in Charleston, SC, and killed nine people, and wounded five others. Inside *Time* devotes a 26 page article that tells the responses of family and church family members who lost loved ones.

Forgiveness demonstrated by Christ's followers is one of the things that God has used throughout history to get the attention of the unbelieving world. Forgiveness is a strange concept to the world. It's tit for tat in the world. It's payback time in the world. But when we choose to forgive those who have wronged us, it says to the world, “We have something you don't have, something you desperately need, the capacity to forgive.”

2. *We have learned how Christ can make useless people into useful people.*

In verse 11 Paul says, “Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.” The letter to Philemon reminds us not to look at people for what they are, but what they could be, in Christ.

Who could ever have imagined that Mitsuo Fuchida would become an evangelist for the gospel? Useless into useful. That's what Christ can do.

3. *We have learned about the difference Christ makes in our relationships.*

Verses 15-16 “Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good— no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord.”

Paul's counsel to Philemon shows us how we can influence our pagan culture, how we can do something about social injustice. How? Here's one powerful way. By modeling. By showing the world an alternative.

Slavery was an accepted practice in Paul's day. But Paul did not organize a campaign against slavery which would have branded the early church as a political threat. Rather, his approach was a grassroots one. Let the world see the difference Christ makes in the relationship between masters who know Christ (like Philemon) and slaves who know Christ (like Onesimus). In this letter he exhorted Philemon and Onesimus to *model* the reality of Christ for all to see.

This is our assignment too. Let the world see Christ in your life, especially in the way you treat those who have wronged you.

4. *We have learned how to be a peacemaker.*

Verse 18 “If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me.” A peacemaker is a person who, like Paul, demonstrates five valuable traits. He is willing to get involved (17), to take risks (18), has labored to gain personal respect (19), has the proper motivation (20), and is filled with the optimism that God is at work (21).

The church needs peacemakers. We can make a difference by His help and for His glory.

We might be inclined to close our Bibles at this point and say, “Well, we’re done. All that’s left are a few incidental closing comments.”

But we’re not done, not quite. These are not “incidental” comments in verses 22-25, for God didn’t put any “filler” in His Word. So if there are more verses in this letter, then there’s more the One who inspired these verses has for us to consider.

We learn about the importance of three more subjects in verses 22-25.

I. We learn about the importance of prayer (22).

We concluded last time by noting Paul's optimism in verse 21, “Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask.” Remember, Paul is in prison. Prisoners don’t call the shots. They’re not in control. But Paul was confident that Philemon would take to heart the counsel of this letter.

His confidence also spilled over into verse 22. Watch the request he made to Philemon. “And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me.”

Now that’s an interesting request. Why would Paul need lodging in Colosse if he was in prison in Rome? Apparently, he didn’t expect to be in prison much longer. What did he expect to happen soon? Verse 22 continues, “Because I hope to be restored to you.” He anticipated being released.

It doesn’t seem to be a “hope so” statement either. It seems like Paul really expected to be out soon, so much so that he said, “Please get a room ready for me.”

The question is *why*? Why was the apostle so confident that he would be set free? Did he have inside connections? Well, sort of.

Notice the end of verse 22. “I hope to be restored to you *in answer to your prayers*.” The KJV says, “For I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you.”

Do things really happen when people pray?

I want us to spend a few moments thinking about what prayer meant to Paul. Paul prayed a lot. And he was indebted to the prayers of others. Let’s scan his other letters with a couple of questions in mind.

One, what did Paul pray for others?

Two, what did Paul ask others to pray for him?

A. What did Paul pray for others?

I find very little mention of prayer requests for physical needs, for money, for jobs, and the things for which we usually pray. But three requests appear again and again.

1. Paul prayed that Christians would know God better.

We see this in Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 1. Look first at Ephesians 1:17, “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you *may know him better*.”

Wait. Don’t Christians already know God? Yes. But often we shortchange ourselves. We know *about* God, and settle for that. We can spout off a few facts about God to impress others. But we really don’t know God intimately, not as we should. He’s not real in our lives. We don’t practice His presence.

If we really know God, what will we grasp? In his Ephesians 1 prayer, Paul mentions three realities. We will know:

v 18 The hope of His calling

v 18 The riches of the glory of His inheritance

v 19 The exceeding greatness of His power

We need to follow this example, beloved. As we pray for our children, let’s pray that they would know God personally and practically, not just academically. As we pray for our church family, let’s ask God to give each of us a growing knowledge of Himself.

2. *Paul prayed that Christians would live a life that pleases God.*

His prayer in Colossians 1 illustrates this. Listen to Colossians 1:9-12, “For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may *please him in every way*: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.”

What does it mean to *walk worthy of the Lord*? Once we get to know God properly, we'll want to please Him. If a person says, "I know God," yet disobeys God's commandments, he is not walking worthy. Our walk must match our talk.

Paul prayed specifically for people. "Lord, help the Christians living in Colosse to walk worthy of you."

We see a related example in 2 Thessalonians 1:12, “We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus *may be glorified in you*, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.” What drove Paul in prayer was to see the name of Christ glorified in His people.

There's a vital lesson here for those who handle the Word. Sunday School teachers, youth leaders, children's workers. Let's pray this prayer, “Lord, help those You have entrusted to me to walk worthy of your name today.”

3. *Paul prayed that Christians would be fruitful.*

We see this in Philippians 1:9-11, “And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, *filled with the fruit of righteousness* that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.”

If we are in Christ, we have great potential. But we must tap into that potential. We must get a handle on what we are and have in Christ. We must cooperate with the Holy Spirit so that He can produce the Fruit of Christ likeness in us.

Paul prayed in those terms for believers. "Lord, help them to become the people You want them to be in Christ."

Another example is Ephesians 3:16-17, “I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith....”

So these are the kinds of things for which Paul prayed, and we should too.

B. What did Paul ask others to pray for him?

We can certainly learn from him in this area, too. Paul did not view pray as a good luck charm or a Genie in a bottle. Yet he was convinced of the power of prayer and requested others to pray for him. For what? He mentions a couple of things.

1. *He needed prayer for boldness in spreading the gospel.*

He says in Ephesians 6:19-20, “Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will *fearlessly make known* the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.”

That encourages me. There were times when even Paul felt intimidated. Do you think he ever clammed up when he had an opportunity to share Christ?

He says he needed prayer. "Pray that I'll be bold, that I won't waste an opportunity to speak up for Christ." If he needed prayer, how much more do we!

2. *He needed prayer for opportunities to minister.*

We see this in Romans 1:9-10, “God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his Son, is my witness how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times; and I pray that now at last by God’s will the way may be opened for me to come to you.”

Paul says he wanted to go to Rome and minister. His practice was to go to the large urban centers of the world, and evangelize there. He’d been to Ephesus, Thessalonica, Corinth, Athens, and Philippi. But he wanted to go to Rome.

So he asked for prayer. Did he ever make it to Rome? Yes, in chains.

Paul didn't ask people to pray for his convenience or his comfort. What mattered to him was knowing Christ, and making Christ known. That's what he prayed for others. That's what he wanted people to pray for him.

And people did pray for him, people like Philemon and Apphia (the "you" in verse 22 is plural, in answer to “your prayers”; KJV "that through your prayers I shall be given to you").

“Lord, please move the Emperor’s heart. Let him release Paul. And let him come to our city so he can minister here and we can minister to him.”

God will answer your prayer, says Paul. So get the guest room ready!

Now, that's confidence.

So how does your prayer life compare to Paul’s? Do you pray for the things for which he prayed? And do you request prayer for the things for which he requested prayer? We all need to fine tune our prayer lives from time to time, to make sure we are praying in a manner that pleases God. But above all, let’s be a praying church.

Notice the next subject.

II. We learn about the importance of people (23-25).

Five of Paul's ministry associates sent their greetings to Philemon. We see their names in verses 23-24, “Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings. And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers.”

Perhaps it goes without saying, but in light of how easy it is to get ourselves out of focus in this area, we must say it.

A. People mattered to Paul.

B. People should matter to us too,

And for this reason. People matter to Jesus Christ. There's more to life than getting a nice house, and cars, and other things. You can't take any of this with you to heaven. But you can take people.

Notice the people Paul mentioned (it’s a similar list as in Colossians 4):

1. *Epaphras*--"my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus"

He was possibly the pastor of the church in Colosse. He was a faithful minister there (Col 1:7). He was a prayer warrior (Col 4:12). Apparently he left Colosse to go to Rome and assist Paul. How he became imprisoned with Paul in Rome, we don't know. But he sent greetings to Philemon and the other believers that comprised the church that met in his home.

Paul refers to the next four individuals as “my fellow workers.”

2. *Mark*--that's John Mark.

What do you remember about him? He was Barnabas's cousin (or nephew, depending on the translation). He was the young man, of course, who failed Paul on his first missionary journey. Apparently he got homesick or disillusioned. But for whatever reason, he let Paul down.

But what happened later? The man who was once unprofitable Mark became profitable Mark! God used Barnabas to restore him. Paul then forgave Mark and allowed him back into his life and ministry team.

Why would Mark's name be significant in this letter to Philemon? Because what Paul is asking Philemon to do with Onesimus, he had personally done with Mark. Forgive. Restore. Embrace for the sake of gospel ministry.

3. *Aristarchus*

He's mentioned in Colossians 4:10, there referred to by Paul as "my fellow prisoner." He was a Macedonian who is mentioned three times in Acts. First, he was with Paul during the Ephesian riot (Acts 19:29). Next he was with Paul doing ministry in Greece (Acts 20:4). Finally, he accompanied Paul on his trip to Rome (Acts 27:2). And how he sends greetings to Philemon and the house church.

As does...

4. *Demas*

Does that name ring a bell? His name appears three times in the New Testament. Here, also in Colossians 4:14, and one other time. Sadly, it's hard to forget that final mention in 2 Timothy 4:10, "Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world."

Just think. John Mark failed, but was restored, by God's grace. Demas seemed to be doing well, but then he fell and forsook the ministry. And to each of us this says simply, take heed lest you fall.

And then fifthly there's Luke.

5. *Luke*

Luke was a faithful servant. He seems to have been a great second man. He's constantly there, at Paul's side, helping when needed, supporting, encouraging, contributing to the ministry. He was the beloved physician. He wrote the Gospel of Luke, and the Book of Acts.

As you look at this list you can't help but conclude that, yes, people truly mattered to Paul.

How about you? Do you love people? Are you investing your life into people? Then finally...

III. We learn about the importance of grace (25).

Notice Paul's benediction in verse 25, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit." *Your* spirit is plural. This benediction is for Philemon, yes, but also Apphia, Archippus, the church members that met in their house, and for us too.

Paul ended his letter where he began it (verse 3), as he often did, magnifying the grace of God. After all, salvation is impossible apart from God's grace. But so is every part of living. Life is impossible without grace. But with God's grace we can do anything our God desires. For Philemon, that included restoring a broken relationship with Onesimus. For us, it includes everything God asks us to do.

Everything. "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit."

What challenges are you facing today? Be assured that in Christ you have what you need. You have prayer. You have people. And you have the unmerited help, the *grace* of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Bottom Line: Because of the difference He makes, Jesus deserves glory.

Let's give Him the glory.

To do: Provide opportunities for people to pray with our prayer partners and their wives after the service.