

1)
0.00 We have many local trails that allow us to enjoy our Redwoods. If you have been on these trails, you may have occasionally discovered a group of relatively large Redwoods pretty evenly spaced on a large 12 to 20 foot circle. When you encounter one of these, you may wonder whether this circular group of Redwoods is a random thing or a special planting.

Actually, this is the result of an older Redwood tree dying and a new generation of trees growing up around the perimeter of the original tree's roots. These circular arrangements of trees are called cathedral circles. As you step inside one of these cathedral tree circles, your eyes are drawn to look up, just like in a cathedral. Beneath the surface, these cathedral trees are connected to each other by the older tree's root stalk. So the trees you see are **part of a larger story**.

What is the connection to today's sermon? I have found something similar with the books in the Bible. At first, they may seem very independent of each other, and on the surface, many are. But as you read them, you are going to find explicit connections between many of the books. With more time, you begin to discover many connections that are beneath the surface.

And together they are all directing us to look up toward our creator God and **appreciate His larger story**. Some books, such as Paul's letter to Philemon, are rarely quoted and may seem to be less important to the Gospel message, but the contributions they make are not less important. There are no second-class books in our Bibles. If you are wondering, you can find it by going towards the back of the New Testament, finding a fascinating, larger letter to the "Hebrews," and then, just before it, you can find "Philemon."

We are going to discover that the letter to Philemon reads like part of a short story. In your worship folder, you will find a storyboard that can help you keep track of some of the backstories that lead up to the letter to Philemon. Within the storyboard are also some scriptural references to the events, you can notice, that in the letter to Philemon, that the letter is not organized chronologically. But I am going present most of the material in a more Chronological order and I am not going to cite every Bible reference as I go through Philemon, but they are there in the storyboard for your future reference. Some references and information from outside of Philemon help fill out the story. I would encourage you to enjoy the story and not get too caught up with the storyboard and references.

2:30

In the book of Philemon, the story centers on three Individuals: **Paul**; **Philemon**, and **Onesimus**. You can find these individuals listed on the left side of the storyboard, and some significant events in their stories are identified as you move from left to right. In this short story we will see God calling them to do very hard things under difficult circumstances. The gospel is not for lightweights.

Do you ever anticipate having to do very hard things under difficult circumstances? Well the Letter to Philemon can help and encourage us through the examples that others provide.

The predominant thinking among scholars is that Paul wrote Colossians along with a couple other “prison” letters, during Paul’s first Roman imprisonment. Also, the letter to Philemon was written at about the same time as the letter to the Colossians sent with the letter to the Colossians.

In the letter to Philemon, we are going to discover a very personal letter where Paul submits to Philemon a decision about **Onesimus’s** future. The letter is an illustration of the gospel in action. I hope that some of the illustrations will resonate with you and lead you to make similar applications in your own lives.

5:00 Philemon Sermon Outline (this is in the upper right hand corner)

Philemon Letter Presentation Flow

As part of the introduction to Philemon, we will review brief backstories of the main people in the story, starting with Paul and then working our way down the storyboard. Understanding the backstories can help us to better process this very short letter.

We will then pray as was the custom at Colossae, and then read the letter to Philemon.

We will then spend some time exploring the Colossians' story and then work our way back up on the storyboard to the Apostle Paul. And then we will discuss some ideas about what Philemon might mean to us. Let's get started with Paul's backstory.

Paul's Upbringing

Paul's Introduction On the storyboard, Paul's timeline starts with him in Ephesus. But there is a backstory before Ephesus.

Paul's Backstory

As Nick shared a couple of weeks ago, Paul was born in Tarsus but raised in Jerusalem. And Paul was raised with some of the best schooling, training, and mentoring available during his youth. As a young man, Paul was very zealous in his pursuit of Judaism.

Paul was so zealous about his Judaism that he was a persecutor of the church. All of Paul's training and mentoring still left him blind to what God was doing in Paul's time.

Have you ever, like Paul, been convinced you were doing the right thing, only to discover one day that you were doing the wrong thing? I have done this more than a couple of times in my life.

Unusual Conversion

While Paul was on the road to Damascus in his continuing persecution of the church, he was confronted by Jesus, and as a result, he became a follower of Jesus. At the time of Paul's conversion, God placed something like scales over his eyes (representing his blindness), which did not fall off until he met Ananias, was instructed by him, and was baptized.

Paul

7:15

Paul

Note Paul's repentance and surrender to Jesus preceded having a full understanding of the gospel; he was converted with only a basic understanding. I think it often works that way, but we often try to turn it around and want the full understanding of the gospel first. But you can be fully convinced of something without fully understanding it.

Like when you choose to fly on an airplane.

Paul was even more zealous as one who was called to be a minister to the Gentiles than he had been as a persecutor of the church.

9:00

Philemon's Conversion

Philemon

Through Phm 1:19 we understand that Philemon came to Christ through Paul's evangelism. **Philemon's Introduction/Backstory**

Philemon was a wealthy businessman in the city of Colossae. At the time of the writing of the letter to Philemon, the Colossian church was meeting at Philemon's home, where Onesimus lived prior to his running away.

Onesimus

And who is Onesimus's (Introduction backstory? **Onesimus Backstory** is that he was a slave of Philemon; he had run away from Philemon to Rome. Traveling to Rome would be a long trip, From Paul's comments about repayment, It appears Onesimus probably stole some things to finance his running away to Rome. *[This the conclusion after considering Onesimus's probable economic situation, the cost of his voyage to Rome and reading between the lines in Phm 1:18 & 19.] not presented as part of the sermon.*

Conversion

Somehow, while in Rome, Onesimus meets up with Paul and converts to being a follower of Jesus through Paul, and then becomes involved in Paul's ministry in Rome *[Phm 1:11 & 1:13]*. Over time, Paul becomes very close to Onesimus, regarding him as his spiritual son *(Phm 1:10, 12)*.

And what about the Colossian Church and the city of Colossae? **The Colossae Backstory is:** Unfortunately, Colossae was an area in economic decline. The preferred trade route had moved north to pass through the city of Laodicea. In a century or two, Colossae would become largely uninhabited. Remember Radiator Springs in the original “Cars” movie? Colossae was suffering a similar fate.

So why mention this? I think again, God does something unexpected and unimagined. God, in His sovereignty and wisdom, chooses to have Paul write not one, but at least two letters to people in an area that people would not consider strategic, and then preserves two letters for us. And what is significant about this? This supports the instructions in the New Testament – that there are no second-class believers. **I hope and pray that you do not consider yourself a 2nd-class believer for any reason.** The Bible teaches that the church is one body, with Christ as its head, and that we all have an important and valuable calling within God’s church.

2) **Let's pray.**

~~12:30~~

Prayer

Father God, you are the only true and wise God. You have written that you inspired mere men to write what you have ordained in Your sovereignty.

Father, I pray that You would use the words we are reading today to shine Your light into our lives. Open our eyes to see Paul's words as more than part of a curious historical document, but they are words and stories that you want us to explore and discover how they might invade and illuminate our lives.

Father, help us to keep our attention on You this morning. Help us to set our own situations aside for a time so we might focus on You and hear from You.

Father God, You are the One who has committed to do more than we ask, and You promise to do even more than we can imagine. Thank you Father & Amen

3)

~~13:30~~

11:00 Let's listen to the reading of the Letter to Philemon as if we were the Colossian Church

Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and

Timothy our brother,

To Philemon, **our beloved** fellow worker, and Apphia, our sister, and Archippus, our fellow soldier, and the church in your house:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints, and I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ. For I have derived much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, **because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you.**

Accordingly, though I am **bold** enough in Christ **to command you** to do what is required, yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you - I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus - **I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment.** (Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.) I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart. I would have been glad to keep him with me, in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel, **but** I preferred to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord. For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, no longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as 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, receive him as you would receive me. If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. **I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it,** to say nothing of your owing me even your own self. Yes, brother, I want some benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ.

Confident of your obedience, I write to you, **knowing that you will do even more than I say.** At the same time, prepare a guest room for me, for I am hoping that through your prayers I will be graciously given to you.

Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers.

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

The text

4)

16:45

The Colossian Church

Now get **to the Story**, starting with **the Colossian Church**

Now, starting to work our way back up the storyboard, the **Colossian Church** - Since the reconciliation of Philemon and Onesimus would involve more than just them, others are also addressed in the letter - Apphia (Probably Philemon’s wife), Archippus (Probably the Pastor of the church at Colossae), and the Colossian Church Congregation.

Our Colonial Slavery

So in the reading of Philemon, did your mind drift, did you start to evaluate the letter through today's culture?

If Paul had written the letter in 2026, what would you think? Is Paul in the wrong for returning Philemon as a slave to his owner? Our American slave history would probably teach you that slavery is a brutal, violent system of controlling and oppressing people. And if you evaluate Paul with this mindset, **Paul sending someone back into this would be wrong.**

But this evaluation, based on knowledge of American history, is wrong, because the story takes place in Roman times. not in early American history. If **some of the initial assumptions are wrong, the conclusions are likely to be wrong as well.** There is always a potential problem in applying our current culture to past historical events. The farther back in history the event is, the more precarious the application becomes.

Modern Day Illustration

Let me illustrate: One of my grandmothers was married to my grandfather when she was about 14. By today’s standards, something like that probably warrants a call to child protective services. But about 100 years ago, adolescence was generally considered to be over at about 14. The idea of a woman waiting until she was maybe in her mid to late twenties to marry would be considered preposterous. You can see there are problems with blindly applying today’s cultural norms to earlier times.

There is no Letter to Philemon in the Slave Bible

The Slave Bible

Another interesting side note. During the times of Western slave trading, the slave traders created what is called “the slave bible”. This is a heavily redacted version of our Bible. One of the books that was redacted out was ... Philemon. I think the slave traders rightly saw the letter to Philemon as planting seeds that would threaten their slavery enterprise.

~~20:00~~

Roman Slavery

Okay, back to Slavery in Roman times, the culture that was part of the Colossian Church. I don't want to sugarcoat it too much, because as an enslaved person you were still someone's property. But Roman slavery was different than slavery in America.

Their slavery was not based on race. And there were opportunities for some to earn their way out of slavery.

An individual might sell themselves into slavery as a way to pay off debts and avoid being imprisoned for their debts.

Some enslaved people served in what we would call professional positions today.

And some slaves would choose to commit to continue to serve a benevolent master after they had finished their servitude commitment. So I hope you can see Roman slavery was different.

Have you ever considered yourself to be a slave? Some might have the attitude that they are slaves to their work. Bound by financial obligations, they feel they have no choice but to go in and labor at a job they do not want. In practice, some may live like slaves, living a life of sacrifice and service to some hobby or other interest with a hope that it will return some recognition or an emotional reward. You may think that is not you, but the bible says that at one time we were all slaves or servants to something that was not our God. As evidenced in the following passages:

Titus 3 3 states For we ourselves were once ... slaves to various passions and pleasures

1 Corinthians 6: ... You are not your own, for you were bought with a price...

So what we can see here is that as believers God bought us out of slavery
and in a way into being His slaves.

Change in Our Slavery

But our God does not stop here. He does not just move us from being the slaves of a brutal, deceptive taskmaster to being the slaves of a benevolent one. No, He does much more:

In John 15 15 Jesus states: “No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, because all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. And in

Galatians 4 7 Therefore, you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.

God purchased us with the goal of making us part of His family!

Paul’s Unimaginable Submission

And now back to the Philemon and Onesimus story. How would the Congregation respond to Philemon’s letter?

I think they would have never imagined that a bold Paul, would defer to Philemon for Onesimus’s future. They would also not have imagined that Paul would ask for a runaway slave to be freed. So the tone and “the ask” about Onesimus are unimaginable to the Colossians. They, like us, are probably left wondering how all these unimaginable requests are going to work out. They had never experienced a letter like this before...

Onesimus While **Onesimus** is not a decision-maker in the text we have read, he is obviously not a passive participant and made decisions. We don't know how Onesimus became a slave of Philemon, nor the circumstances where he chose to run away. **Whatever the disagreement or falling out was, I am sure Onesimus felt justified, in running away from his obligations as a slave, even though, by running away, he would become guilty of a capital offense that could result in a death sentence.** He probably also felt justified in stealing what he needed to finance his running away to Rome.

But Onesimus's situation was probably not as one-sided as we might assume. Philemon was probably at least partially at fault here. It is not uncommon for those in authority, or the rule-makers, to create situations in which their subjects are forced into untenable circumstances. But Onesimus certainly wronged Philemon in stealing property to finance his trip to Rome, and Onesimus probably had more than his fair share of blame in the situation ...

Conversion

Onesimus somehow made it to Rome. He may have imagined Rome as being a land of milk, honey and opportunity for himself. But I don't think Rome met his expectations. While in Rome, he somehow met up with Paul, maybe out of desperation and **the result of that meeting was that Onesimus surrendered his life to Jesus. Rather than living his life according to what he thought was right, he would live it out according to what God knows is right.** And perhaps out of gratitude for being forgiven by God of his sins and of his capital offenses before God, he pursued his Christian life with zeal.

We don't know the circumstances where Paul discovers that Onesimus is a runaway slave of Philemon. Maybe it was when Paul was visited by Ephesus, that it became apparent that Onesimus had an unresolved situation with Philemon. At first, Paul probably explored Onesimus's relationship with Philemon.

Paul probably counseled Onesimus to forgive Philemon from his heart for Philemon's part in the circumstances that led to his running away. To be right or content before God, Onesimus needed to forgive Philemon in his own heart, even before knowing how Philemon would respond. This is in part because forgiveness is about forgiveness, it's not a negotiation. Onesimus probably needed a heart renovation to be able to do this. As God shows us how much we have been forgiven, we become equipped to extend forgiveness to others. Our Jesus is a master of heart renovations. Onesimus needed to forgive Philemon from his heart for any later reconciliation to be genuine. Otherwise, it's not a reconciliation, it's just a truce.

Eventually Paul asks Onesimus to return to Colossae and to seek forgiveness and reconciliation with Philemon. This is an unimaginable ask to Onesimus. Even in Roman times, in many situations, it might have been sending a slave to a death sentence.

But somehow Onesimus decides to surrender what he wanted to do and instead trusted God with the situation and submitted to Paul's counsel. Onesimus was rightfully very fearful about how he would be received by Philemon after his running away and taking Philemon's property to finance his trip to Rome. As Onesimus made the journey back to Colossae, I wonder whether those decisions had to be made again and again, often needing our Lord to encourage and sustain him. Some decisions are one and done, but many are not. Eventually, Onesimus is before Philemon at Philemon's home in Colossae.

And how would Philemon receive Paul's letter? **Philemon** After Onesimus ran away, I doubt Philemon was ever expecting to see Onesimus return to Colossae, and more so with two letters from the Apostle Paul. I am also sure that Philemon would not have anticipated the requests that were in the letter. If you were Philemon, what would you do?

Would you return Onesimus to serve Paul?– How many hands?

How many would choose to have Onesimus serve out his obligations?

But have you thought this through? How would Philemon's other slaves react to Philemon freeing Onesimus, if that is what you chose? It probably would have been seen as rewarding a runaway slave.

And if you retain Philemon as a slave, what would your church family think? They might think you are willing to follow Jesus and Paul up to a point, but at a point you pull the plug because it is just getting too costly.

Philemon was facing quite a dilemma, and I am sure that as Philemon prayerfully navigated what to decide, he needed our Lord to encourage and sustain him. I think open-ended stories in the Bible are invitations for us to finish the story. How would you finish the Philemon/Onesimus story? We will come back to this.

Philemon had probably built his family's business through wise investments. Maybe for some time, Philemon's Rome was building his financial empire. How could he just free Onesimus and sacrifice all the expenditures he had made?

For Philemon to free Onesimus would require a paradigm shift. Let me explain:

There's a game called Monopoly. This game can be played for a specific agreed-upon amount of time, say 45 to 90 minutes. And after this time, the winner is determined by seeing who has the most money after cashing everything in. You can play aggressively, maybe even dirty, and perhaps win the game. But when the game is over, you cannot take your monopoly winnings to the bank and deposit them into your checking account.

But maybe you can exercise kindness during the game, a kindness remembered well beyond the game. As a young elementary school kid, **I remember playing the game with my cousins, buying everything I could, and after landing on a few properties I didn't own, I was in Monopoly debt over my eyes. And in a Monopoly financial crisis, I remember my cousin giving me a financial bailout. I still remember this some sixty years after the game.**

To choose to do a God-sized thing, Philemon must have seen his assets, in some ways, as monopoly money. You can use them to influence a future gratitude, but you certainly can't take them with you when God says the game is over.

It is interesting that we have all of these events going down, leading up to a decision by Philemon, and then whatever Philemon decides is not recorded. Since the letter is preserved, I think Philemon chose to do something that glorified God.

While we have been navigating the issues that tested Onesimus and Philemon's faith, **Paul also faces issues that test his faith.** When Paul writes about Onesimus, he uses very enduring terms; he states that, as he is sending Onesimus, he is sending his own heart. **Why is Paul so close to Onesimus?**

Maybe Paul, in some ways, sees some of himself in Onesimus. Someone who had started out thinking they were doing the right things, only to discover one day that God's standard of what is "right" is so much higher than anything they had thought. Paul has written in Romans that we are all guilty. And God also states the grace he bestows on us is due to unmerited favor – we don't earn it. And maybe Onesimus's tarnished past, led to a zeal similar to Paul's. I could then see how Paul might have a special bond from these common experiences and responses.

And **what was Paul's test of faith?** He was sending Onesimus, guilty of one or more capital offenses, into a situation where Onesimus could be judged and convicted. And Paul had no real legal control over what would happen and deferred what control he might have had to Philemon. It would be months before Paul would know how it all turned out. I am sure, as Paul prayerfully anticipated what might happen at Colossae, he needed our Lord to encourage and sustain him.

5) ~~33:15~~

So you might be wondering, well Bob, what is **the rest of the story?**

The rest of the Story

Let me start with there are a few intriguing phrases in the letter to Philemon, and, using my imagination with these verses, I have a creative ending. First let's bring up the verses

One is verse 16, where Paul writes ... more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

"In the flesh" is often used to identify some sort of blood relative in the Bible, so there is at least a possibility that Philemon and Onesimus are related. Well, that's interesting.

Another phrase from verse 21 is: Confident of your obedience, I write to you, **knowing that you will do even more than I say.**

Before we get too creative, let's try to understand Paul's intent. I think the command is to look at Onesimus not as a piece of property, but as a brother in the Lord, one who was bought with Christ's blood and has an equal standing before our Lord. And Paul, seeing this as a command from the Lord, is anticipating Philemon's obedience to the Lord. And the "more" is that Philemon will not do this with only an outward obedience that might appear to check the boxes, but he will do it from his heart. An obedience from the heart would require Jesus to do a renovation in Philemon's heart. And we know that our **Jesus is a master of heart renovations.** But there may be even more to this. Maybe Jesus wants even more ...

So my way to finish the story is:

Onesimus is a younger brother to Philemon, who at some time made some bad financial decisions and ended up needing to sell himself into slavery or go to prison. At some point, Philemon makes a charitable decision and steps in and either buys him out of slavery from another slave owner or agrees to take Onesimus on as an enslaved person, while Onesimus works off his debt. To some degree, their disagreement or falling out was probably a two-way affair and may have been about their financial expectations. As mentioned earlier, these sorts of conflicts are rarely completely one-sided. **And the being related part makes the whole thing, not just business, but personal.**

But this backstory does make "the ask" of Philemon even bigger, maybe unimaginably big. To forgive someone who stole from you, while you were being charitable. How could Philemon have this unimaginable amount of forgiveness? Well, **our God is also in the business of providing the unimaginable**, like the sacrifice of His Son on the Cross.

The rest of the story?

Some more backstory/background

My imaginative finishing of the story

As Philemon grew in grasping the forgiveness he had received at the cross, that our God willingly suffered a totally undeserved, cruel death as part of His plan for salvation for Philemon and anyone who chooses to believe and follow Jesus. **Jesus was able to do this because Satan did not believe Jesus crucifixion could be a part of God's plan, so Satan pursued Christ's crucifixion on the cross. Don't be like Satan and not believe that God is willing to do and accomplish the unimaginable.**

And what about that maybe Jesus had an idea for the “more” in the “doing even more than I say”? **The only equitable way out of Philemon's predicament I see is to offer freedom to all of his slaves.** Would it be costly? – Yes. Would it be fair? No, it would be at a great, undeserved cost to Philemon. And Philemon's slaves would receive a gift they didn't earn. And then a freed Onesimus chooses to willingly serve out what he owed to Philemon, that would be showing a Christ-like love from Onesimus to Philemon.

This story ending sounds a lot like the generous, gracious gospel that I enjoy.

I am thankful that our Lord's gospel is not fair to me, but it is generous to me.

I hope and pray that you take advantage of the Lord's gospel, which is not fair, but it is generous. I also hope and pray that as we face tests of our faith, we seek the Lord and make choices that honor and bring glory to God.

Maybe, if your gospel is too safe and too reasonable, it is not the gospel that Jesus preached. While the gospel calls us to come as we are, the gospel that Jesus preached is not for lightweights. Much of the New Testament makes much more sense if you are seeking to get as much of God as you can,, – maybe another way to say it is “seeking a supersized serving of God”. Paul did this, and at the end of his life, he had no regrets.

If the Onesimus story ended up playing out something like this, Paul, **Philemon, and Onesimus** will have some great stories to share with us in heaven.

6)

39:00

Another question you may have is: How do I apply the story to my life?

How do I apply the story?

If we only increase our head knowledge and the scriptures don't affect our hands and feet, we are in danger of building our house, or our empire on shifting sand.

Now, I ask you to please do something with this story. Try to put yourself into one of the main Characters in the story. This is a good way to discover applications in a story.

Maybe you are a young Onesimus – Right now you are running to Rome. Rome, for you, may be a place, or anything other than a super-sized serving of God to bring you contentment and security. Let me encourage you to learn from Onesimus – no contentment compares to knowing your creator accepts you entirely. **Turning and seeking to follow Christ can transform you and your life in unimaginable ways.**

Maybe you are a slightly older Onesimus who has recently discovered Jesus and are learning what it means to live "all in" for Jesus. You have abandoned your running after Rome. And you have had your own returning to Philemon experiences. Sometimes the Bible only makes sense if you read it with an attitude of "I am all in." This is great, continue to be all in, and pray to be open to whatever God may be calling you to.

Maybe you are more like Philemon. You have a track record with Jesus that people can see. Through right choices, you have enjoyed some success. You might be thinking you have lived a good life, and what more could Jesus ask of you? Well, there are always ways to take another step towards Jesus, another adventure to learn more about His love and faithfulness towards you and others. Pray that you would have eyes open to see what He might be calling you to do next. Also, pray that you would have the courage to follow His leadings.

If you are more like Paul, well, if you are like Paul, you are in a situation where you have little or no control and are being asked trust and lean on God through prayer and through who you know our God to be.

How to apply the story?

Put Yourself into the story - who or where am I in the story?

7)

0:00

Closing Remarks

One more thing, in the lower right corner of the storyboard do you see that circle with a squiggly line in it? The exact timing is unclear, but another factor contributing to Colossae's demise were earthquakes. A major earthquake occurred in the area of Colossae sometime near the time of the reading of the letter to Philemon – I think sometime after the reading of the letter. But at some future date or time, just like with a timed Monopoly game, Philemon's time was up, maybe his time was up at the earthquake. So with the letter, Philemon may have been offered an opportunity to give away what he might not have been able to hold onto anyway.

Earthquake

Before you attempt to dismiss these radical calls as only being part of what was happening in the days of the Apostles, a modern-day missionary "Jim Elliot" wrote: **"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose". Jim Elliot understood that some parts of our lives are sort of like a Monopoly game. He played the game to maximize the eternal currency that he would have after this life was "game over".** He was martyred while trying to reach a primitive tribe in Ecuador. **While his life ended without the primitive tribe being reached, Jim Elliot's life is part of a story that still goes on.**

Jim Elliot

And the primitive tribe in Ecuador was reached by ... a widower, a widower named Elizabeth Eliot, his widower. As I stated near the beginning, the Christian gospel is not for lightweights. I am sure she also needed God's help to forgive those who murdered her husband. As part of reaching and discipling the tribe, about 2 years after her husband was murdered, she went and lived with the tribe for a time with their 3-year-old daughter. **This is unimaginable to me.**

Elizabeth Elliot

I want to close with the benediction from the larger, fascinating book of Hebrews:

Please hold your hands out with your palms up as a gesture indicating you desire God's equipping to live out the gospel in your life.

Now may the God of peace, who brought up from the dead our Lord Jesus — the great Shepherd of the sheep — through the blood of the everlasting covenant, **equip you with everything good to do his will,** working in us what is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. **Amen.**

2:30