

# BREAKTHROUGH IN RELATIONSHIPS

## SMALL GROUP NOTES

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## SCRIPTURE

Philemon: 1-25 / 1 John 4: 11-12 / Romans 12: 10 / 1 Peter 2: 9-10 / Revelation 19: 6-10

## SCRIPTURE CONTEXT

The letter to Philemon was written by the apostle Paul around AD 62 when he was in prison in Rome. He wrote the letter after becoming close to Onesimus, we don't know how Paul and Onesimus met but we do know that through Paul's teaching Onesimus was converted to the Christian faith and had been serving Paul whilst he was in prison. However Onesimus had a back story that Paul couldn't ignore. Onesimus had lived in Colossae as a slave to someone called Philemon. One day Onesimus stole from his master and fled to Rome hoping he could hide in the busyness of the city. After meeting Paul and being saved he clearly shared his story with Paul who decided it was best for Onesimus to go back to Philemon and have their relationship reconciled. Paul wrote the letter to Philemon with Timothy to help smooth things over. Philemon seemed to be a well-respected man, it appears he hosted the Colossae church in his home with his wife and son and was well loved by the believers in that place. Yet Paul knew this needed to be resolved and so the letter is written to Philemon encouraging him to forgive Onesimus and receive him as a brother.

## DID YOU KNOW?

- The letter to Philemon is the shortest letter written by the apostle Paul and is the only letter that is purely about one individual - Onesimus.
- The normal punishment for a runaway slave in those days was crucifixion but if his master was kind he would instead brand him on the forehead with the letters 'FF' which mean fugitive and he'd carry that brand for the rest of his life.
- The name 'Onesimus' literally means *useful* and was often given to slaves.

## QUESTION FOR STUDY AND DISCUSSION

1. Why do you think Paul put such an importance on Onesimus and Philemon reconciling their relationship and what does that mean for us?
2. After reading all the scriptures laid out above what do you think the bible teaches us about our relationships?
3. How can we grow at loving one another as beloved brothers and sisters?

## DIGGING DEEPER

Think about why Paul wouldn't allow Onesimus and Philemon to go on with unresolved issues in their hearts. Are there any unresolved things you're carrying in your heart? How can you see

freedom? Read Matthew 18: 21-35 to help process the importance of repentance and forgiveness.

### **RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY/DISCUSSION**

- Total Forgiveness, by R.T. Kendall
- Paul for everyone, The Prison Letters, by N.T. Wright
- God Stories, by Andrew Wilson
- The Bait of Satan, by John Bevere