



Mended / Part 2

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INTRODUCTION

Forgiveness is a process that need not and should not begin with the person who has wronged you. Forgiveness that is conditional upon the person in the wrong saying sorry or paying a price is what has been termed as transactional forgiveness. That is not the kind of forgiveness that Paul seeks from Philemon on behalf of Onesimus.

DISCUSSION

1. Paul's letter to Philemon is littered with allusions to the fact that forgiveness (or in this context, the act of welcoming Onesimus back into the community) is difficult. Forgiveness is not easy, and it comes at a cost.

- a. Read Philemon. What are some examples on the text of how Paul knows it is difficult to forgive?

Consider: Paul wrote an entire letter about Onesimus, handwritten and not by a scribe (v 19), offers to bear the cost of Onesimus's debt (v 18-19), the great Paul knew this was a bold request even for him (v 8), etc.

- b. Forgiveness begins with acknowledging the wrong done to you or the debt owed to you. In our stoic Asian society, we are often told not to make a big deal out of something; instead, we are advised to suck it up and move on.

Is there a wrong you suffered that you have yet to address? How did you deal with it at the time?

- c. Perhaps you are already aware of a wrong against you that still affects you today. What is the price you have paid?

2. The language of a 'debt' is often used to illustrate forgiveness. This illustrates that something was taken from the victim, there was a cost borne by the victim.

In Philemon, Paul offered to pay Onesimus's debt, but he knew he could not do that, just as Philemon could never repay all Paul had done for him.

- a. Read Matthew 18:23-35, the parable of the unforgiving servant. What are some of the parallels between (a) how Paul appeals to Philemon in v19, (b) why the king rebuked the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18:32-33) and (c) why Jesus died on the cross (Matthew 26:26-28).
- b. Reflect on a time that you have been extended mercy and grace even though you did not deserve it. How did you respond?
- c. Discuss and consider if you might take the practical steps below together as a community.

WHAT WILL YOU DO

Practical steps to forgiveness:

1. How do you feel you have been wronged? What does the person owe you?
2. Accept the consequences. How have you been hurt? What have you lost?
3. Cancel the account. Write off the debt.
 - a. One exercise is to write out your responses to the two steps above and physically tear up the piece of paper.
 - b. Another exercise is to imagine yourself in that person's shoes to empathize with why they acted in the way that they did.
4. Choose not to bring it up.

MEMORY VERSE

Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love. It is as none other than Paul—an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus— that I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me. - *Philemon 1:8-11 NIV*

AN E1R1 REFLECTION

(Drawn from Psalm 96)

Psalm 96 is a call to worship. It is often said that we are created to worship God (1 Peter 2:9-10). Indeed, one of the hallmarks of any Christian service is a time of worship. Through worship we can give thanks, we praise God, we declare God's reality over our lives. The list goes on.

Worship is also our response to the goodness of God. If our lives were truly a living sacrifice, would we not be 'singing to the Lord, praising his name, proclaiming his salvation day after day'.

Yet those around us who do not know Christ might never have the opportunity to fulfil the very purpose for which they were made.

Let us not be afraid of proclaiming his salvation to those around us, day after day.