

# It's Complicated

# Navigating Conflict, Hurt and Reconciliation

## “Power, Posture and the Way We Appeal”

South Sub Church | May 17, 2026 | Devotionals from Philemon 1:8-11

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### Day 1

### The Way of Appeal

“That is why I am boldly asking a favor of you. I could demand it in the name of Christ... But because of our love, I prefer simply to ask you.” (Philemon 8–9, NLT)

Paul makes something very clear—he has the authority to command Philemon. As an apostle, he could require obedience “in the name of Christ.” And yet, he chooses not to.

Instead, he appeals.

That choice is not weakness—it’s deeply theological.

Paul understands that the gospel produces transformation from the inside out. Obedience that is forced may produce outward compliance, but it does not produce a changed heart. Paul is after something deeper than behavior—he is after alignment with the gospel itself.

So he appeals “on the basis of love.” The same love already evident in Philemon’s life (v.5) becomes the foundation for what Paul is asking him to do next.

This reflects the heart of the gospel. God does not merely command us—He draws us, transforms us, and invites us into obedience shaped by love.

### Live It Out

Where are you tempted to control or pressure someone in a relationship? What would it look like to approach that situation with humility and trust instead?

### Prayer

Father, help me release control and trust You to work in others. Shape my heart to lead with love. Amen.

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### Day 2

### Love as the Motivation

“But because of our love, I prefer simply to ask you.” (Philemon 9, NLT)

Paul grounds his appeal in love—not just his personal affection, but their shared participation in the love of Christ.

This reveals what truly sustains reconciliation.

Rules can define what is right. Authority can enforce action. But only love restores what is broken at a relational level.

In Scripture, love is not just emotion—it is the expression of God’s character. It is patient, sacrificial, and oriented toward the good of others (1 Corinthians 13). It is the defining mark of those who follow Jesus (John 13:35).

So when Paul appeals “because of our love,” he is anchoring the entire situation in the gospel. Philemon’s response is not just about Onesimus—it is about whether his life will continue to reflect the love of Christ.

## Live It Out

In a difficult relationship, what has been driving your response—frustration, obligation, or love? What would it look like to let love reshape how you engage?

### Prayer

Jesus, let Your love shape how I respond to others. Teach me to act from grace, not obligation. Amen.

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## Day 3

## A New Identity

“I appeal to you to show kindness to my child, Onesimus. I became his father in the faith while here in prison.” (Philemon 10, NLT)

Paul introduces Onesimus with deeply personal language—“my child.”

This is not sentimental—it is theological.

Onesimus has been spiritually reborn. His identity is no longer rooted in his past, his failures, or his social status. He now belongs to the family of God.

This is one of the most radical implications of the gospel. In a world defined by hierarchy—free and slave, powerful and powerless—the gospel creates a new identity grounded in Christ.

Paul is preparing Philemon to see Onesimus differently—not as property, not as a problem, but as family.

Reconciliation requires this shift.

It is difficult to move toward someone when we define them only by what they have done. But the gospel insists that identity is no longer anchored in the past—it is anchored in Christ.

## Live It Out

Is there someone you struggle to see beyond their past? Ask God to help you begin seeing them as someone made new in Christ.

### Prayer

God, help me see others through Your grace, not their past. Remind me who they are in You. Amen.

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## Day 4

## Redemption Rewrites the Story

“Onesimus hasn’t been of much use to you in the past...” (Philemon 11, NLT)

Paul does not ignore the past—he names it.

Onesimus “hasn’t been of much use.” That’s a gentle but honest acknowledgment. Whatever happened—whether theft, abandonment, or both—it created real disruption in Philemon’s life. The gospel never requires us to pretend that wrong didn’t happen.

But Paul refuses to let the story end there.

“but now he is very useful...”

This is more than a clever contrast—it’s a theological claim. The gospel has intervened in Onesimus’ life, and that intervention changes how his story must now be understood.

In Scripture, this is the pattern of redemption. God does not erase the past—He redeems it. Think of Joseph,

who could say to his brothers, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good” (Genesis 50:20). The wrong was real, but it was not ultimate.

That is what Paul is inviting Philemon to see.

Onesimus is no longer defined solely by what he did. His identity and direction have been reshaped by Christ. What was once a source of harm is now becoming a source of good.

And this is where reconciliation becomes possible—not because the past is ignored, but because it is reframed under the greater work of God.

The question for Philemon—and for us—is whether we will allow God’s redemptive work to reshape how we interpret someone’s story.

### **Live It Out**

Where are you tempted to let someone’s past define how you see them today? What would it look like to acknowledge the wrong honestly, but also leave space for God to redeem their story?

### **Prayer**

Lord, help me trust Your power to redeem what is broken. Give me eyes to see beyond the past. Amen.

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## **Day 5**

## **The Evidence of Transformation**

“...but now he is very useful to both of us.” (Philemon 11, NLT)

Paul doesn’t just speak about change—he points to evidence.

Onesimus is now “useful... to both of us.” That means his transformation is not merely internal or private. It is visible, tangible, and already impacting others.

This is a consistent pattern in the New Testament. When the gospel takes root in someone’s life, it produces fruit. Not perfection, but observable change. As James writes, “faith that doesn’t show itself by good deeds is dead” (James 2:17, NLT).

Paul has seen this firsthand. Onesimus has served him, supported him, and proven himself faithful during Paul’s imprisonment. The man who once took or ran is now someone who gives and serves.

That matters for reconciliation.

Because one of the hardest questions in broken relationships is this: *Can I trust that anything is different?*

Paul is not asking Philemon to ignore wisdom or abandon discernment. Instead, he is pointing him to what God has already begun to do. He is saying, in effect, *Look closely—grace is already at work here.*

Reconciliation often requires us to recognize and respond to evidence of transformation, even when it is still incomplete.

Because growth in the Christian life is real, but it is also progressive.

### **Live It Out**

Where have you overlooked signs of growth in someone’s life because you’re focused on their past? Ask God to help you recognize even small evidence of His work and respond with grace.

### **Prayer**

Jesus, help me recognize the evidence of Your work in others. Give me wisdom to respond with both grace and discernment. Amen.