

It's Complicated

Navigating Conflict, Hurt and Reconciliation

“Receive, Forgive and Restore”

South Sub Church | May 31, 2026 | Devotionals from Philemon 1:17-25

Day 1

Receive Him as Me

“So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me.” (Philemon 17, NLT)

Paul makes a bold request.

He asks Philemon to receive Onesimus *as he would receive Paul himself*. That is a staggering shift. Paul is not asking for tolerance or minimal acceptance—he is asking for full identification.

In effect, Paul is saying: *treat him as if he were me*.

This is more than relational advice—it reflects the heart of the gospel.

In Christ, we are received by God not as we are in our brokenness, but as we are in Him. We are welcomed as if we carried Christ’s own righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21). What is true of Jesus is credited to us.

Paul mirrors that reality here.

He places Onesimus under his own standing and invites Philemon to respond accordingly. This is substitution, representation, and grace all in one.

Reconciliation at this level requires more than forgiveness—it requires a reorientation of how we see and receive one another.

Live It Out

Is there someone you’ve only been willing to tolerate rather than fully receive? What would it look like to move toward them with genuine welcome instead of distance?

Prayer

Jesus, thank You for receiving me with grace. Help me to extend that same welcome to others. Amen.

Day 2

Charge It to Me

“If he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge it to me.” (Philemon 18, NLT)

Paul steps directly into the cost.

He does not deny the wrong. He does not minimize the debt. Instead, he offers to absorb it himself: *charge it to me*.

This is one of the clearest pictures of the gospel in this letter.

Our sin created a real debt—one we could not repay. And yet, in Christ, God does not ignore that debt. He satisfies it. Jesus steps in and says, in effect, *charge it to me*.

This is substitutionary grace.

Paul is not just explaining the gospel—he is embodying it. He willingly takes on the cost so that reconciliation can happen.

And this reveals something essential: reconciliation always involves cost. Someone must absorb the weight of what has been done.

The gospel frees us to do that—not because it’s easy, but because it’s what has been done for us.

Live It Out

Where are you holding onto what someone “owes” you—emotionally, relationally, or even practically? What would it look like to release that debt to God?

Prayer

Father, thank You for covering my debt through Jesus. Help me to release what others owe me and trust You with it. Amen.

Day 3

A Willing Sacrifice

“I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it...” (Philemon 19, NLT)

Paul emphasizes his commitment—“I will repay it.”

This is not symbolic. It is personal and binding. Paul takes full responsibility for the cost of reconciliation between Philemon and Onesimus.

Then he adds a subtle reminder: “and I won’t mention that you owe me your very soul!”

There is both grace and truth here.

Paul gently reminds Philemon that he, too, has received something he could never repay—his own spiritual life through the gospel. This is not manipulation; it is perspective.

When we understand what we have received, it reshapes what we are willing to give.

Paul’s willingness to sacrifice is rooted in the larger reality of grace. He knows that what he offers, while costly, is still small compared to what Christ has done.

And that changes how we approach reconciliation.

Live It Out

Where is God inviting you to let go of what feels “fair” in order to pursue what is gracious? How might remembering what you’ve received in Christ reshape your response?

Prayer

Lord, remind me of the grace I have received. Help me to extend that grace, even when it costs me. Amen.

Day 4

A Refreshing Response

“Yes, my brother, please do me this favor for the Lord’s sake. Give me this encouragement in Christ. Refresh my heart.” (Philemon 20, NLT)

Paul returns to a familiar theme—refreshment.

Earlier in the letter, Philemon was known for refreshing the hearts of others (v.7). Now Paul invites him to live that out again in a specific and costly way.

“Refresh my heart.”

This is more than a personal request—it’s a call to consistency. Paul is essentially saying: *be who you already are.*

Reconciliation often reveals whether our character is situational or deeply formed.

It's easier to be encouraging when relationships are smooth. It's harder when there is tension, history, or hurt. But the gospel forms something deeper—a steady posture of grace that is not dependent on circumstances.

Paul believes that Philemon's response to Onesimus will not just resolve a situation—it will reflect the authenticity of his faith.

And in doing so, it will bring encouragement not only to Paul, but to the wider community watching.

Live It Out

Where is God inviting you to “refresh” someone through a difficult or costly response? What would it look like to be consistent in grace, even when it's hard?

Prayer

Jesus, make me someone who brings encouragement and grace in every situation. Help me reflect You, even when it's costly. Amen.

Day 5

Confidence in Transformation

“I am confident as I write this letter that you will do what I ask and even more!” (Philemon 21, NLT)

Paul expresses confidence—not just in the request, but in Philemon.

He believes Philemon will do “even more” than what has been asked.

That confidence is not rooted in personality or willpower. It is rooted in the transforming power of the gospel at work in Philemon's life.

Paul has seen the evidence—his love, his faith, his consistency. And because of that, Paul expects a response that goes beyond obligation.

This is what the gospel produces.

Not minimal obedience, but willing generosity. Not reluctant reconciliation, but a readiness to go further than expected.

The Christian life is not about doing the bare minimum—it is about being shaped so deeply by grace that our response overflows.

Paul's confidence invites us to consider the same question: what would it look like to respond not just adequately, but abundantly?

Live It Out

Where are you tempted to do the minimum in a relationship? What would it look like to go beyond that—toward generosity, grace, and restoration?

Prayer

Father, grow in me a heart that reflects Your grace fully. Help me to respond with generosity, not hesitation. Amen.