

# Bonus Week: Phoebe

## When You Carry the Story

### **Main Idea**

God uses faithful people not only to serve the church—but to carry its message into the world.

### **Icebreaker**

Have you ever been trusted with delivering something important for someone else?

(An important message, package, assignment, secret, family responsibility, etc.)

### **The Moment**

Paul closes his letter to the Romans by introducing Phoebe. She appears in only a few verses, making it easy to miss her significance

We discover Phoebe was not simply helping in the background—she was entrusted with leadership, service, and likely the delivery of one of the most important letters in Christian history.

### **Scripture Readings + Questions**

Romans 16:1-2

What words does Paul use to describe Phoebe?

Why do you think Paul commends her so strongly?

What responsibilities might have come with carrying Paul's letter?

Matthew 20:26-28

How does Jesus redefine leadership and service?

1 Peter 4:10

How are believers called to use their gifts?

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### Take It Further (Discussion)

Why do we sometimes assume “service” is less important than “leadership”?

What responsibilities do you think Phoebe carried beyond delivering the letter?

Who has helped carry faith to you?

### Phoebe and the Letter to Rome

Many scholars believe Phoebe likely carried Paul’s letter to the church in Rome.

In the ancient world, the person carrying a letter often:

- delivered it
- explained it
- answered questions
- represented the sender

If true, Phoebe may have helped introduce and interpret Romans—one of Christianity’s most influential writings. The woman we meet in two verses may have helped carry the theological foundation of the church.

### Deacon: What Did It Mean?

Paul calls Phoebe a “deacon” (διάκονος / diakonos) of the church at Cenchreae (Romans 16:1).

The word literally means:

servant, minister, helper, messenger

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In the early church, diakonos was used broadly and could refer to:

- practical service
- ministry leadership
- recognized ministry roles

Paul uses the same word elsewhere for:

- himself (Ephesians 3:7)
- Apollos (1 Corinthians 3:5)
- Timothy (1 Timothy 4:6)

The later distinction between Elder and Deacon in the United Methodist Church had not yet developed in the same formal way.

Today in the UMC:

Elders

- Word, Sacrament, Order, Service
- preaching, teaching, sacraments, leadership

Deacons

- Word, Service, Compassion, Justice
- bridge church and world through ministry

Phoebe's ministry reflects this early vision of service and leadership working together.

Benefactor: More Than Generous

Paul also says Phoebe was a "benefactor" (prostatis) to many (Romans 16:2).

This term can mean:

- patron
- protector
- supporter
- leader
- advocate

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In Roman culture, benefactors often:

- used resources to support communities
- sponsored projects and missions
- provided protection and influence

Paul says Phoebe had done this for many people—including him.

### **Why This Matters**

The church moves forward because people carry the story:

- teachers
- servants
- encouragers
- organizers
- givers
- leaders

Many of them never stand center stage.

Yet without them, the story does not move.

What part of carrying God's story might God be inviting you into?

This week:

- encourage someone
- serve quietly
- help move something forward
- support someone else's ministry

Ask: "How can I help carry the story?"

### **Closing Prayer**

God who sends, thank you for the people who quietly carry faith, hope, and love. Help us serve faithfully, lead humbly, and carry your story into the world.

Amen.