

Gathering

GRACE

Philemon may have been a kind and gracious master, but for whatever reason, it was apparent that Onesimus, his slave, had done him wrong. As it was evident that he had stolen from his master, Onesimus was no longer a trusted servant, but now a fugitive. He fled to Rome hoping to escape any retribution for the wrong he had done, but there he came face to face with the living God through the Apostle Paul. Now it was on Paul to convince Philemon of the transformation in the life of his escaped slave. In Philemon verses 15–16, Paul writes, *“Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever— no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord.”*


Paul even goes so far in effort towards reconciliation to state in verse 18, *“If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me.”* He was convinced that the remarkable change in Onesimus was genuine and that he would now be of tremendous advantage in the spreading of the Gospel as a true beneficiary of God’s grace and mercy. To give added credence to the miraculous change in his life, it was essential that Onesimus return to Philemon seeking his forgiveness and that Philemon, being a man of faith, show grace granting forgiveness. Paul not only leads Onesimus to Christ, but he is God’s vehicle to spark his needed reconciliation with Philemon.

Onesimus’s story is the classic picture of one who tries to run from God, a good and gracious Master, but instead runs right into His arms. Through salvation, the fugitive sinner finds grace, forgiveness, and the freedom that is found only in Jesus Christ. The role of the Apostle Paul in the reconciliation to come between Onesimus and Philemon was essential. Onesimus would go on to be quite effective in the spreading of the Gospel. May we, like the Apostle Paul, be willing to encourage others in the ways of grace and forgiveness.

After reading scripture, consider these questions

- What kind of person was Philemon?
- Who is Onesimus? What is his relationship to Philemon?
- Why was Onesimus now so much more useful than before?
- What does this tell us about the nature of grace and forgiveness?


Philemon 1:15-16, 18



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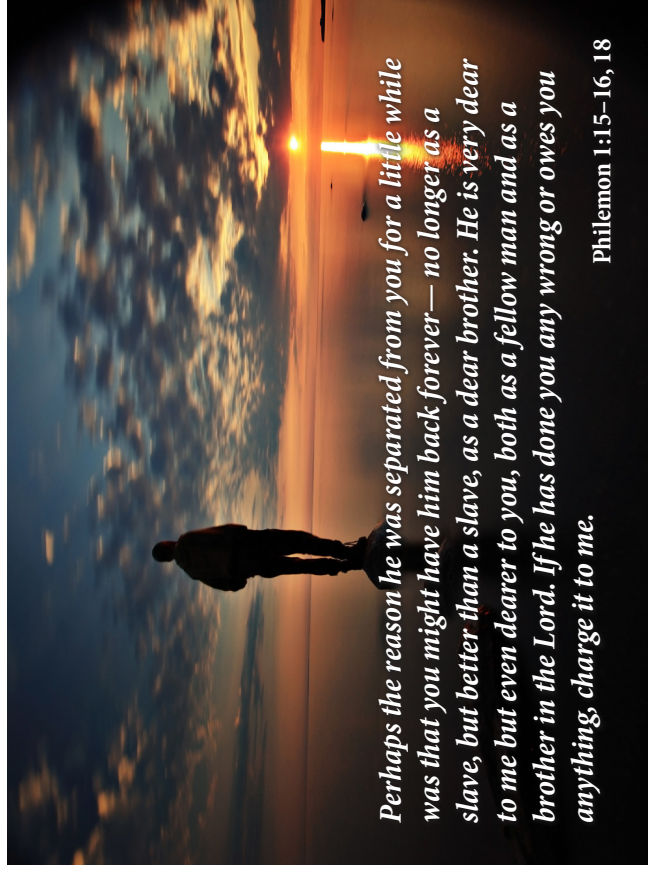
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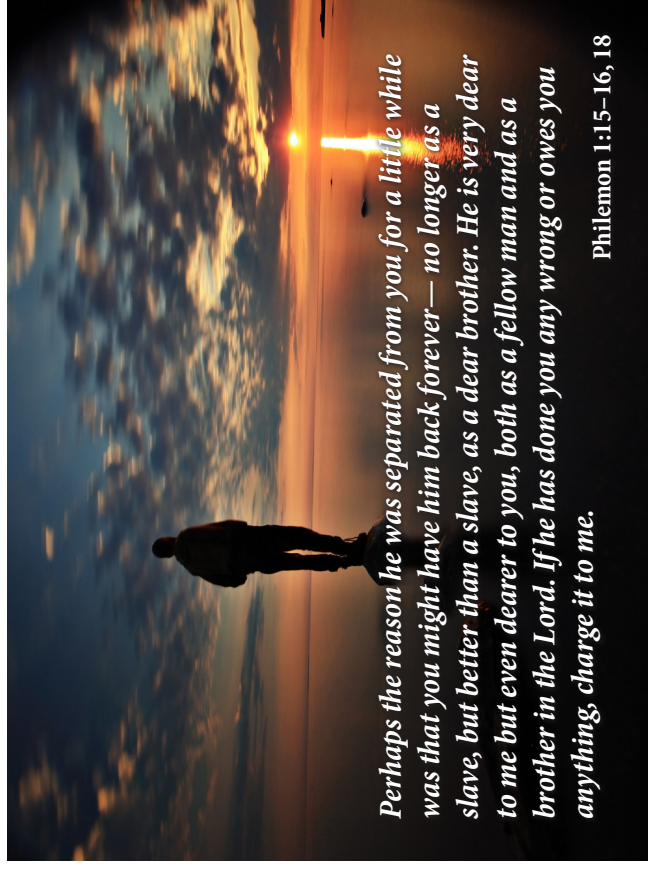
GRACE

What does this tell us about the nature
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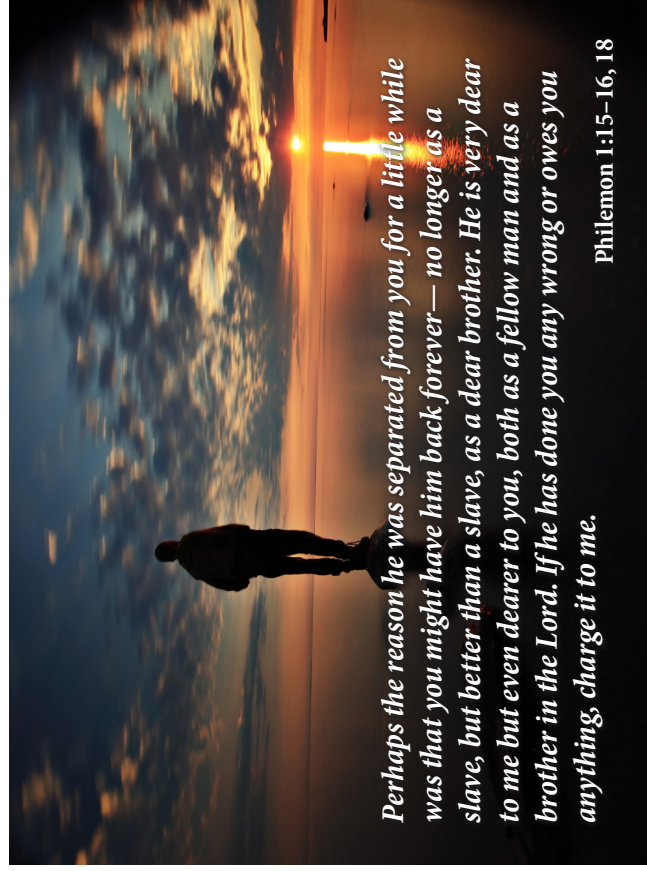
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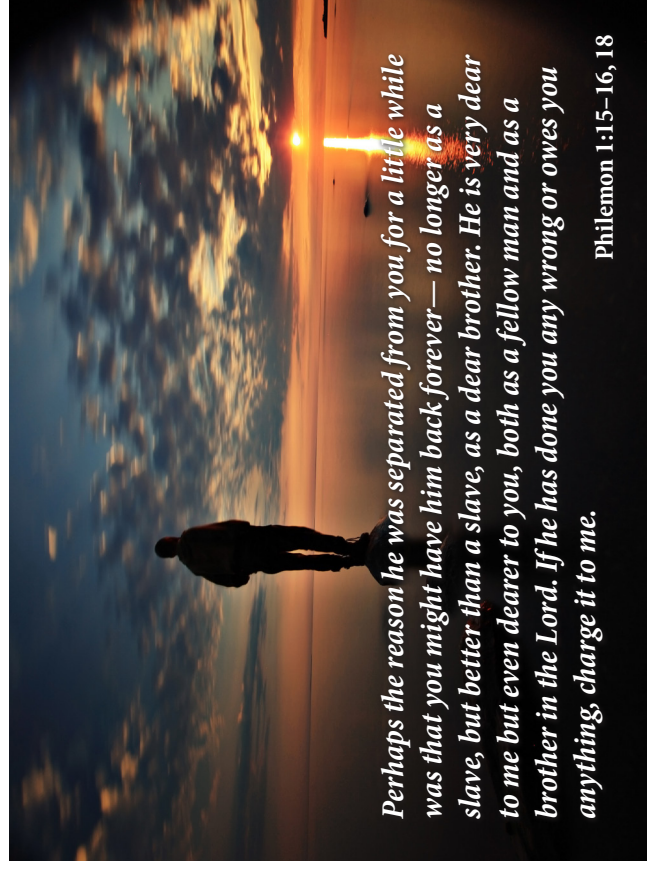
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Going Deeper

God's grace often comes to us through a third person to facilitate reconciliation of our differences with others in a God honoring way. Onesimus had come to know the saving grace of God through the Apostle Paul and now Paul directed him to seek the forgiveness of the one from whom he had stolen. Not only this, but Paul considered it essential to prepare the heart and mind of the one who had been wronged.

- Consider what your first reaction would be if someone who had stolen from you were to later come to you, claiming that their life had been changed, seeking your unconditional forgiveness.
- Would your reaction be different if someone you respected and trusted were to testify (as the Apostle Paul did in the case of Onesimus) to the change in the life of the one seeking forgiveness?
- Read Romans 3:23-24 and discuss how this scripture resolves the hesitancy we may feel to show grace and forgive others.



*Written by Major Philip Ferreira,
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