

Day 1

July 22



Pray | Tell God you will obey him out of love and unity

HOW DO you mend a broken relationship?

Relationships with people can be difficult. Pride, selfishness, or guilt can easily destroy a relationship. Maintaining a relationship with Jesus Christ can prove to be just as difficult with pride, selfishness, and guilt as your focus instead of love.

Good feelings, physical possessions, or personal accomplishments have often disguised themselves or are mistaken for love. The only true love is derived from the blood and body of Jesus Christ. We are closest to God when we choose to put love at the forefront of our relationship with Jesus Christ.



Read | Philemon 1-7, 1 Corinthians 13:13



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:

How do you answer when you are asked the big questions, “Why do you believe in Jesus?” “Why do you go to church?” “Why do you read the Bible?” Sometimes Christians focus so much on intellectual reasoning that they forget the greatest, best, and first reason: love. If this is true of you, reset yourself this week. Make it a habit to focus on the love of Jesus in all your prayers and deeds.

In the opening greeting of all of Paul’s letters in the New Testament, he identifies himself as who he is in Jesus Christ along with prayer and a message of love for the intended reader. Let’s face it: it might be awkward to introduce yourself as a follower of Christ the first time you meet someone, but what are some ways in which you can make Christ more prominent in how you identify to others?

Step out in faith today. Invite someone in your life who is far from God to a church service, small group, or social event at Five Oaks. Encourage those Christians closest to you in making that person feel accepted and welcomed to the love of Jesus Christ.

Day 2

July 23



Pray | For peace and unity for all Christians

In this age of social media and technology, it is easy to post things without considering the implications or ripple effect. A post or comment that may seem innocuous can be hurtful if not made from a heart filled with love and a desire to unify the body of Christ.

It would be interesting to ask Satan if he would prefer Christians to be loving and unified, or unloving and divided.



Read | Philemon 8-14, Titus 3:9



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:

In team sports, one of the most effective ways to defeat your opponent is to get them to play as individuals instead of a team. It's probably even easier if the opponent doesn't play much like a team in the first place. In much the same way, Satan delights when Christ's people fight among themselves. Why do you think Satan strongest when Christ's people are divided?

How can we make it a habit to have loving, unified relationships with Christians? How might you balance having concurrent, unified, loving relationships with non-Christians?

In Philemon 8-14, Paul made an appeal to Philemon in a tactful, loving, and Christ-centered way. It's very possible Paul was quite upset with Philemon during this time. Instead of appealing to Philemon in anger or aggression, he appealed to the most powerful commonality he and Philemon shared, Jesus Christ. How can you apply Paul's tactics in your relationships with others?

Day 3

July 24



Pray | Thank God for loving all his children

GOD IS relational. That is why he created people to cohabitate, encourage, and support one another.

God's power is so awesome! If it is his will, he can mend any conflict or fix any broken relationship. The Bible contains many, many examples of God doing these things and using brokenness and conflict for the good of his mission. Oftentimes, his mission was accomplished through people that were very ordinary.



Read | Philemon 15-17, Galatians 3:28



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:

It is not a guilt trip to remind people of all of God's provisions, love, grace, and all God has done and continues to do for his people. These reminders should be done in love. Paul appealed to Philemon's heart for Jesus, not his sense of guilt. When have you been led to remind someone in your life of God's deeds or is there someone who might need these reminders now? With today's verses in mind, how might you approach that person?

When have you been reminded by another person of all that God has done for you? Reflect on the circumstances that may have led the other person to approach you and reflect on the circumstances that led you to receive their words. Were their reminders effective? If so, how have you grown from that experience?

No one person or group of people is forbidden from hearing the Gospels. What does Galatians 3:28 reveal to you about your role in God's mission?

Day 4
July 25



Pray | Ask God what his will is for you

ONE OF the themes of Paul's letter to Philemon is whether to perform deeds or favors out of obligation or love.

If you choose love, what once may have felt like obligation in the past can now be considered genuine rejoicing in Christ. If you have volunteered at Vacation Bible School, or run for Team World Vision for the past several years, it may have at first been out of obligation, but as your relationship with Christ has grown, it has transformed from obligation to love and joy.



Read | Philemon 18-22



Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:

We do not know all the facts and circumstances surrounding how Onesimus wronged Philemon. How do you think Paul's kind gesture of offering to pay for the damages caused by Onesimus might have changed Philemon's heart?

Are there any good deeds that you may have done out of obligation in the past, that you now do in joy as a response to your salvation in Christ?

If you are not yet a follower of Jesus Christ, know that you can choose to transform and open your heart to his love. God gives everyone a choice in having or not having a relationship with him. Talk to God today and ask him into your heart.

Day 5

July 26



Pray | For the poor, meek, and weary people of this world.

SEEKING WEALTHY people over the poor in a Christian Church is definitive of the sin of partiality.

The overarching themes of Paul's letter to Philemon is unity and love within the church. It is difficult for a church to be unified and loving if its assembly does not come around and encourage people that might be members of a marginalized group in our society.

What would please God more; several people gathering around a prominent and wealthy member of church after a service, maybe a local celebrity or NFL player, as they walk past and ignore a person who is not so well-dressed that no one in the church has met before? Or people gathering around that not so well-dressed person in a welcoming and loving way?



Read | James 1:26-27, 2:1-13



Reflect | Spend some time reflecting on one or more of the following:

What are the consequences of the sin of partiality in today's Christian churches?

Spend time in prayer in your small group, with neighbors, or in your family setting. Ask God how you can be more intentional and unified in seeking out people to disciple into his kingdom. Ask God how to make you into a disciple that seeks out the person sitting alone in the back row.

Reflect on the personality and rhythms of your church community. Does your church community excel in inclusion of marginalized people? If not, how will you work to transform your church community into one that is lovingly and joyfully inclusive of marginalized people?

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