Session 1: One Part Repentance

NOTE TO LEADER

We intentionally created this study guide with more than enough material so that you can pick the questions that work best for your group. Before your meeting, watch the video, read the study guide's corresponding session, and decide which questions you'd like to discuss. For more information on using this guide in your group, click the three lines in the menu bar and select How to Use This Guide. Thank you for choosing this study and for faithfully leading your group.

SESSION GOALS

Every session has a point—what we want to walk away from the discussion knowing, feeling, and doing.

Main Idea: God wants us to be people of reconciliation who seek to forgive and be forgiven because God, through Christ, reconciled us to himself and each other.

Head Change: To know that repentance is a necessary part of reconciliation.

Heart Change: To feel grief for our sins.

Life Change: To seek forgiveness from those we have wronged.

OPEN

What is the silliest argument you've ever had? How long did it last? Did it feel foolish at the time?

Sometimes we have a simple misunderstanding that we take too far and later realize how overblown it was. Other times we are legitimately hurt and need time to rebuild trust and restore the relationship.

Using the book of Philemon as his guide, author and pastor Dr. Bryan Loritts will present us with a framework for reconciliation. We need repentance, grace, and truth. In this session, Bryan will focus on the need for repentance.

READ

Due to the brevity of the book, we will read the entire letter of Philemon each week. Consider reading it from a different translation each time.

Philemon 1–25

*[To support your reading of Philemon, go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.]*

WATCH

Before viewing the session, here are a few important things to look for in Bryan Loritts's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions.

What is one word that sums up the book of Philemon?

How does Bryan define reconciliation?

What are the three components of a "reconciliation framework"?

Show session 1: *One Part Repentance* (11 minutes).

DISCUSS

Bryan shared that in the early years of their marriage, his wife, Korie, worked hard to reconcile the bank statement with their checkbook. He commented that often we put more work into reconciling our bank statements than our relationships. **Do you agree with his statement? In what areas of your life, if any, do you work harder to maintain than your relationships?**

Bryan explained that Philemon is a letter about reconciliation. He's going to show us three aspects of reconciliation on display in this book. First, let's look at this letter through the lens of repentance. Read Philemon 1–7.

In verses 4–7, Paul gives thanks for Philemon's love for God and the saints. He remarks that Christians have been *refreshed* by Philemon's hospitality, which means Philemon has encouraged both Paul and the Christians in Colossae. In your interactions with believers, you may have experienced similar hospitality. Whether it's the warm welcome from the greeter at church or an invitation to share a meal, simple acts of hospitality can refresh us. **When have you experienced hospitality that lifted a burden or encouraged your heart? How might hospitality lay the groundwork for reconciliation?**

*[Note: For a Peek at the Greek on hospitality, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.]*

Read Philemon 8–11.

Bryan said we treat family members differently than we would a co-worker or a neighbor. When Paul calls Philemon his brother and Onesimus his child, Paul is highlighting the familial nature of the Christian relationship. Although Onesimus is a runaway slave whom Philemon owned, he is now a part of God's family because he is a Christian. In the same way, neighbors, coworkers, and enemies who are Christians have also been brought under the umbrella of God's family. **Have you found the way you treat family members to be different from the way you treat people outside your home? What would change if you looked at members within your church body as brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers?**

When we see other Christians as part of the family of God, we will be quicker to repent of our wrongdoings and seek their forgiveness. **In what ways does seeing Christians as family members affect how you approach repentance when you've wronged someone?**

Read Philemon 12–25.

Paul sent Onesimus back to Philemon. Onesimus may have personally handed this letter over to Philemon (see Col 4:7–9). Though this is not explained in Scripture, it must have been a difficult decision for Onesimus. He was forgiven in Christ but still had to repent to the people he hurt. As Christians, it can be tempting to repent

to God but not the people we've harmed through our sin. **Why do you think it's easier to repent to God than the people we've hurt through our sin? What would it look like to seek forgiveness from those we've hurt? How could we as a group create time and space for reconciliation?**

*[Note: To learn more about Greco-Roman slavery, go to **Go Deeper Section 3** at the end of this study.]*

Bryan defined repentance as "a change in direction." Instead of repenting, we often ignore wrong attitudes, pride, arrogance, and stubbornness and explain our sins away as "just the way I am." Or we expect the person we've hurt to tolerate our behavior. But we need to repent from these attitudes and actions—they're sinful as well. **Are you open to seeing your sins as what they are—sin? What does it take to own up to your sin and "change direction"?**

Bryan said, "We will never do the work of reconciliation while looking at the scoreboard of the other person's offenses against us." In other words, focusing on the sins of others will prevent us from seeing ourselves and our sins accurately. **What does it look like to feel the weight of your sin instead of "looking at the scoreboard" of others?**

In verse 12, Paul says he is sending Onesimus home to Philemon. Even though this is the right thing to do, to return is risky for Onesimus—Philemon could still choose to punish him. As Christians, we know that repentance is the right thing to do, but we can also feel uncertain about how someone will respond to our repentance. Facing the unknown can feel uncomfortable. **In**

what areas of your life would taking a step toward reconciliation feel like a risk? Who in your life could you ask to help you take the first step?

Bryan defined reconciliation as the process of turning "enemies into friends." While the goal is never to place a person in an abusive or dangerous situation, Christianity does put some unlikely people in the same room together. **Can you think of a time when your faith put you in a room with people you would not normally associate with? How has the work of the Holy Spirit turned "enemies into friends" in your own circumstances?**

Bryan said, "If we refuse to go the way of vengeance or silence, but instead attempt to reconcile, we are going the way of Jesus." Just as Philemon was indebted to Paul, we owe our lives to Christ. And his forgiveness is greater than any offense we may hold against another person. Remembering how much Christ forgave us changes our perspective. **From whom do you need to seek forgiveness? Is there anyone you need to forgive? What could you do to seek reconciliation?**

Bryan closed this session with a story about two stubborn captains whose refusal to change directions cost the lives of many innocent people. In the same way, our refusal to repent of our sins negatively impacts the people in our lives. **What relationships in your life are affected by your sins? In what area of your life do you need to stop sinning and change direction?**

LAST WORD

Bryan explained that reconciliation requires repentance, grace, and truth. Just as Paul sent Onesimus back to Philemon so he could repent of his wrongdoing, God wants us to return to those we've hurt as well. While it's easy to focus on someone's scoreboard of offenses, if we want restored relationships, we need to look inward. When we change direction and repent of our sin, we are taking steps toward reconciliation.

As you reflect on the need for reconciliation, consider to whom you may need to repent of your wrongdoing. Consider anyone who may need you to take the first step and choose the path of reconciliation.

GO DEEPER

Go Deeper

This section has two potential functions:

1. It can supplement your small group discussion with topics your group may be interested in. We've highlighted where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide. As the leader, it would be good to familiarize yourself with this section just in case your conversation turns to one of these topics.
2. These sections can also function as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting. Consider using these sections to deepen your group's study of the book of Philemon.

1. Weekly Reading Plan

Philemon is a short book, which makes it easy to read in one sitting. This reading plan will help you internalize the contents of the book by repeated exposure.

At least one day this week, set aside time to reflect on the letter to Philemon. Read the book of Philemon in your favorite translation or listen to the book in audio form. Consider both the explicit and implicit ways that repentance is present.

2. Peek at the Greek: Hospitality

Bryan noted that, in verse 17, when Paul instructs Philemon to receive Onesimus back as a brother, he is using a word ("welcome" in the CSB) that carries a sense of hospitality. The Greek word is *proslambanó*, meaning to receive into one's home or circle of acquaintance. The practice of hospitality was highly valued in Greco-Roman culture among peers. But Paul is asking Philemon to welcome his runaway slave in the same way he would receive Paul. Paul isn't asking Philemon to tolerate Onesimus but to welcome him into his circle as he would other Christians. While receiving Onesimus would include practical hospitality, Paul is also asking for a complete shift in perspective—to think of Onesimus in the same hospitable way that he thinks of Paul.

Paul uses the same word, *proslambanó*, when he encourages the Roman Christians to be unified despite their differences. Read Romans 15:5–7. Paul writes that they should *welcome* others with the same hospitality they received from Christ. **How can you rely on the Holy Spirit to help you welcome others as Christ has welcomed you? How does Jesus's hospitality to you change the way you treat others who have wronged you?**

Perhaps you've heard the phrase, "I know God says I have to love them but that doesn't mean I

have to like them." With this mindset, it is easy to tolerate other believers but not embrace them as brothers and sisters in Christ. But Paul in Romans 15 is saying that reconciliation is more than tolerance. We are to welcome fellow Christians. **How does understanding that Paul is seeking more than tolerance change the way you think about reconciliation? Who in your life needs you to welcome him or her as Christ has welcomed you?**

3. Roman Slavery

Paul wrote to Philemon who was a slave owner during the Greco-Roman era. Though we do not know the specific conditions or circumstances surrounding Onesimus's enslavement, we can gain perspective from the history of Greco-Roman slavery and examples in the Bible.

The Reality of Greco-Roman Slavery:

- Slavery in Rome was not ethnically driven.
- A person of any race, ethnicity, or gender could be or become a slave.
- Sometimes individuals would enter service as slaves to pay off a debt.
- Becoming a slave could be used to improve social status, as high as Roman citizenship, when a slave was emancipated.
- Slavery was often temporary.
- Depending on the master, slaves could live in more comfortable circumstances than the freed poor man or woman.
- Regardless of how they were treated, slaves had no rights.
- Slaves were the property of their master.
- Being a slave could be a dangerous or demeaning situation—especially for women and the children of slaves.

In what ways does this information shape your understanding of Onesimus's situation?

Read Matthew 8:5–13 and Acts 16:16–21 for examples of slavery in the New Testament. **What observations can you make about how the slave owners regarded their slaves?**

Two different slaves in the same span of time and location were treated differently by their masters. One cared deeply for his servant, while the others were angry that she was healed. Based on these two examples, it seems the conditions of slaves during the Greco-Roman period were varied. **How does considering the inconsistency of the treatment of slaves impact your reading of Philemon?**

Read Philemon 15–16.

The consequences for runaway slaves were substantial. A caught slave was subject to imprisonment, beating, branding, and punishment by death. By returning to his master, Onesimus could have experienced any of these consequences. **When you consider the potential consequences Onesimus faced, how does that change how you view the weight of his repentance? In what ways can this background information on Roman slavery impact how you read and interpret Philemon?**

RightNow Presents
The Book of Philemon STUDY GUIDE

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