

One of You

COLOSSIANS 4:7-9 (WEB) · SMALL-GROUP LESSON · DIGDEEPER.AI

The Big Idea

The gospel took a runaway slave the whole world ranked as property and sent him home called beloved brother, and it does the exact same thing to you and to the person you've been quietly ranking below yourself.

Opening Lines

There's a name hiding in these travel arrangements that ought to stop us cold. Paul is wrapping up his letter, sending two men to carry it home, and one of them is a wanted man. Watch what Paul calls him.

Before You Teach

- Goal: Get the room to feel the earthquake in one phrase: 'the faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you' — said over a runaway slave. Then get them to name one real person their own world ranks below them.
- If you're short on time, cut: Cut the full Tychicus background and the courier-system history if time is tight; keep Onesimus front and center. The whole lesson turns on what 'one of you' does to a fugitive, not on how mail moved through Asia Minor.
- Where the moment lives: It lives when someone in the room quietly admits who they've been treating as furniture and commits to learning that person's name. Not in the history, in the mirror.
- Your prep: Read Philemon 10-16 out loud to yourself first so you feel the weight behind 'one of you.' Come in able to say Onesimus's story from memory, not off the page.

Run It In Your Setting

The same lesson, sequenced three ways. Pick the one that fits your group and your clock.

CLASSROOM · ~20 PEOPLE · 45 MINUTES

Classroom opening (3 min) — read the name, let the room recalibrate. Onesimus's story from Philemon (8 min). Teach 'brother' with the clasped-hands image (6 min). Write-then-speak on handout items 1-3 (8 min). Discussion questions 2-4 (15 min). Landing and out-loud commitments (5 min). Transformation happens in the write-then-speak plus question 4 — protect it. If short, cut Tychicus background first.

SMALL GROUP · ~8 PEOPLE · 60 MINUTES

Small-group opening about skimming (4 min). Onesimus and Tychicus story (10 min). Teach 'brother' (7 min). All five discussion questions, with you going first and real on 4 (28 min). Handout items 4-5 written silently (6 min). Landing, commitments out loud, prayer

over actual names (5 min). Transformation lives in questions 4 and 5 — give them the room. If short, trim question 1.

COFFEE · 2-3 FRIENDS · 30 MINUTES

Coffee opening — the wanted man walking home (2 min). Tell Onesimus's story plainly (6 min). One line on 'brother' and the clasped hands (3 min). Straight to questions 3 and 5, you going first and real (15 min). Name one first step each, out loud (4 min).

Transformation is in the honest answer to question 5 — everything else serves it. If short, skip question 3 and go straight to the forgiveness step.

Go First, Go Real

This is a habit for every lesson you'll ever teach — this week we drill it deliberately, and at level five we push it harder than any week before. Remember week 1, when you simply went first with a real answer instead of a polished one? This week the rep is this: your going-first story must cost you something in THIS room. The table question asks who people have found it genuinely hard to forgive. Don't tell a safe old story about someone long gone and reconciled. Name — without gory detail — a person you're still working on forgiving right now, or someone you know you've quietly ranked beneath you. If your example is tidy and finished, the room will match you and stay tidy. Go first, go unfinished. That's the rep.

Why This Passage Matters

Most people skip these verses. They read like the address label on a package — names, travel plans, a courier or two. But buried in the middle of the logistics is a man named Onesimus, and he is one of the quietest bombshells in the New Testament. He's a runaway slave. Under Roman law he could be branded, chained, even killed for what he did. And Paul, in the same breath he uses for a trusted free minister, calls him 'the faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you.' Not property coming back to be reclaimed. Family coming home. This matters because everyone in your room quietly ranks people. The cashier, the janitor, the coworker nobody sits with, the person they've decided is beneath a real relationship. The gospel walks straight into that ranking and blows it up. It says the thing that reaches down to the outcast and calls him beloved is the same thing that reached down and got you. You teach this passage and you get to watch people realize they are Onesimus, and so is the person they've been looking past. That's not a throwaway ending to a letter. That's a new humanity, and you get to hand it to real people this week.

Catch the Fire First

Before you teach a word of it, do the exercise yourself. Sit down this week and actually name the person your own world ranks below you — the one whose name you've never bothered to learn, the one you look through. Write the name if you know it. If you don't know it, sit in that discomfort. Then do the harder half from the table question: name the

person you've genuinely found it hard to forgive, and ask yourself honestly what the first step would cost you. If you walk into that room having only thought about it in the abstract, they'll feel it. If you walk in having already done the thing you're about to ask them to do, the whole session changes temperature.

Bring Your Own Story

- A time someone treated YOU as beneath notice, and what it did to you to be looked through.
- The moment you learned the name of someone you'd been ignoring, and how it changed the exchange.
- A person you're genuinely still working on forgiving right now — named, not finished, not tidy.
- SAMPLE (polished vs real): Polished — 'God taught me to value every person equally.' Real — 'I've walked past the same guy restocking shelves at my store for two years and I still don't know his name, and reading this made me ashamed.'
- Guardrail: keep it unfinished and honest, not a raw dump — a story you're still living beats a lesson you've already closed.

Three Ways to Open

CLASSROOM: "I'm going to read you a name and I want you to guess what kind of man he was. Onesimus. Faithful. Beloved brother. One of you. Sounds like a pillar of the church, doesn't he? Now let me tell you who Paul is actually describing, and watch the whole room recalibrate."

Withhold the payoff to create tension before you resolve it.

SMALL GROUP: "Be honest at this table — when you hit a stretch of Bible that's just names and travel plans, do you slow down or do you skim? Tonight there's a name in the skim-zone that changes everything, and I want us to catch what we'd normally sail right past."

Start with the reader's own instinct so the passage exposes it.

COFFEE: "Picture a wanted man walking back into the exact town he ran from, no chains, carrying a letter he's about to read out loud to a whole church. That actually happened. His name was Onesimus, and Paul calls him 'beloved brother.' Let me show you why that's stunning."

One concrete image that hooks before any explanation.

Teaching the Word

Teach the word 'brother' — in Greek adelphos. Paul stacks it with 'beloved' and drops it on a runaway slave, and here's the physical picture: in that world, a slave and a free man did not eat at the same table, did not touch, did not stand shoulder to shoulder as equals.

Now put Tychicus the trusted minister and Onesimus the fugitive side by side on the same road, carrying the same letter, and reach out your two hands and clasp them together in front of the room — that's what 'brother' does. It puts the two hands together where Rome kept them a thousand miles apart. Paul refuses to rank them. Both faithful. Both beloved. Both brother. Rome saw a runaway; Christ saw a brother. [let that sit in silence]

Discussion Questions

1. When you read a stretch of Scripture that's just names and travel arrangements, what do you usually do with it — and what did we almost miss here?

Coaching note: Keep this light and honest; you're lowering defenses. Let people admit they skim. The point is to make them curious about what hides in the 'boring' parts.

If it stalls: Simple yes or no: do you skip the greetings-and-names sections of the letters? Show of hands.

2. Paul uses the exact same words — faithful, beloved, brother — for a trusted free minister and a runaway slave. Why does that refusal to rank them matter so much?

Coaching note: Don't let it stay theoretical. Push them to feel the scandal of it in Roman terms before they smooth it over into a nice principle.

If it stalls: Ask: if your church's biggest donor and someone just out of prison both showed up, would we honestly treat them the same? Why not?

3. Onesimus's name means 'useful,' and Paul admits he'd been useless. Grace didn't make him useful again — it made him beloved. What's the difference, and why does it matter which one you're valued for?

Coaching note: This is the heart of it. If someone says 'they're the same thing,' gently press — being wanted for what you produce is not the same as being wanted because you're loved. Let the room sit with which one they secretly believe about themselves.

If it stalls: Ask: have you ever felt valued only for what you could do, and what happened the day you couldn't do it anymore?

4. Who is one person your own world quietly ranks below you — the one whose name you've never bothered to learn, the one you look through? Say it as concretely as you can.

Coaching note: You go first here, per this week's drill, and go real. Then give it silence. Names or roles are fine; the honesty is what matters. Don't rescue the awkwardness too fast.

If it stalls: Make it a category: is it someone who cleans, serves, delivers, or checks you out? Just name the setting where it happens.

5. The table question this week asks who you've genuinely found it hard to forgive, and what a first step would take. Paul is sending a fugitive back to the man he wronged, trusting grace to carry it. Where's the hard thing for you, and what would the first step cost?

Coaching note: This is the deepest and most personal — protect the room. No fixing, no advice-giving across the table. Let people name the cost without anyone solving it. Silence is the goal here, not resolution.

If it stalls: Ask only for a first step, not the whole thing: what's one small, real move you could make this week — a text, a name spoken, a door left open?

Questions You May Hear

"Who was Onesimus, and how do we know he was a slave?"

He was a runaway slave from Colossae who fled his master, Philemon, and ended up with Paul in Rome. We know because Paul wrote a whole separate letter — Philemon — begging Philemon to take him back 'no longer as a bondservant, but a beloved brother.'

"Who was Tychicus and why does Paul trust him so much?"

He was Paul's dependable courier who carried this letter, likely Ephesians on the same trip, and turns up again near the end of Paul's life in 2 Timothy. In that world a courier read the letter aloud and answered questions, so Paul had to vouch for the man behind the ink.

"Why send a runaway slave back — wasn't that dangerous for Onesimus?"

Under Roman law, yes, he could have been branded or worse. Paul sends him anyway, alongside the letter to Philemon appealing that he be received as family, trusting the gospel to change the whole relationship rather than Roman law to protect him.

"What did it actually mean to 'comfort your hearts' here?"

Paul sends Tychicus specifically so the Colossians would know Paul's situation and not feel alone. The comfort is presence and real news carried by a trusted face — someone showing up, telling the truth, and asking how they are.

For Experienced Leaders

- If you're running on empty this week, cut ruthlessly to Onesimus alone and lean on write-then-speak — let the room do the talking. A small honest word like 'it's been a heavy week, I'm leaning on you all today' is a gift to them, not a weakness; they'll rise to it.
- When you clasp your hands together for the 'brother' image, actually do it slowly and hold it. Physical images die when you rush them.
- The forgiveness question can go somewhere heavy fast. Have a clear boundary ready: no one fixes anyone tonight, we just name it and pray it. Say that before you ask it.

Landing the Lesson

Commitments: Before we close, say it out loud, not just think it: name the one person whose name you're going to learn this week, and one first step toward the harder forgiveness you named. Out loud, at this table.

Close by praying out loud over the actual names and steps people just said — the person someone's going to learn to name, the forgiveness someone admitted is hard.

Don't reach for a written prayer; saying their real words back to God is the whole point.

If you run out of time: If the room only gets to question 3 or 4, stay there. Someone honestly wrestling with being valued for use versus being loved is worth more than checking every box. Don't rush to the last question just to finish.

Midweek follow-up: Midweek, send one line to the group: 'Did you learn the name yet? Did you take the first step?' No lecture — just the question.

Free at digdeeper.ai/devotionals/colossians/4-7-9/lesson

Handout

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During the lesson:

- Onesimus means 'useful.' Write one word for how you most want to be valued — and one word for how you're afraid you actually are:
- One person your world quietly ranks below you (a role is fine if you don't know the name):
- Rome saw a runaway; Christ saw a _____. Fill in what changes when you're seen the way Christ sees you:
- One person you've genuinely found it hard to forgive, and one first step that would cost you something:
- Write the name you commit to learning this week — and when you'll do it:

Take-home actions:

- Learn the name of someone your world ranks below you — the one cleaning, serving, checking you out — say it back to them, and treat them as family.
- Call the friend you've been meaning to check on, ask a real question about their week, then stay quiet long enough to actually hear the answer, and tell them honestly how you're doing too.
- Take the one first step toward the forgiveness you named — a text, a door left open, a name spoken to God.

Someone near you is waiting to be treated like a brother today.