One of You: The Named and Ordinary

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

The Big Idea

The gospel moves through regular people who show up for each other, and it re-labels the runaway as family, so if Christ can write "one of you" over Onesimus, he can write it over anybody you're tempted to keep at arm's length.

Opening Lines

Two names most people skip right over. Tonight we're going to slow down on exactly the verses everyone treats as the boring goodbye at the end of the letter, because Paul buried something enormous in them.

Before You Teach

- Goal: Get the room to feel the shock a Colossian felt reading "Onesimus... one of you" — the runaway seated at the family table by grace. They should leave seeing one real person they've been keeping outside the door.
- If you're short on time, cut: If time's tight, cut the Tychicus background and the cross-reference tour. Keep Onesimus and the phrase "one of you" — that's the beating heart.
- Where the moment lives: In the moment someone names a real person out loud that grace could re-label "family" — not in the history of first-century mail delivery.
- Your prep: Read Philemon start to finish before you teach — you can't tell Onesimus' story with power if you only know these three verses. Then pick the ONE line you'll land on and shut up after.

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 / curiosity gap (3 min). Read the passage aloud, then set up Onesimus and Tychicus with the Philemon backstory (10 min). Teach the word adelphos with the two-hands image (7 min). Questions 1-3 as write-then-speak so everyone thinks first (13 min). Question 5 for the whole room (7 min). Out-loud commitments and spontaneous prayer (5 min). Transformation happens in question 5. Cut the cross-reference tour first if you're behind.

SMALL GROUP · ~8 PEOPLE · 60 MINUTES

Small-group opening / personal stakes — hold a name (4 min). Read passage, tell Onesimus' full story from Philemon (12 min). Teach adelphos with the physical image (8 min). Work all five questions, you go first on question 4 (the drill) (25 min). Out-loud

commitments (6 min). Spontaneous prayer over the actual names spoken (5 min). Transformation happens at question 4 into 5 — protect that time. Cut the Tychicus detail first if needed.

COFFEE · 2-3 FRIENDS · 30 MINUTES

Coffee opening / story hook — 'what do you do with someone who wronged you and came back?' (3 min). Tell Onesimus' story and read verses 7-9 (7 min). Land the one word: brother, one of you (3 min). Straight to questions 4 and 5, you name your person first (12 min). Each name one real step and pray briefly over what was said (5 min). Transformation happens the moment someone says a real name. Cut question 1-3 entirely — go straight to the personal.

Go First, Go Real

This is a habit for every lesson you'll ever teach — this week we drill it deliberately. Before you ask your room to name a person they've kept at arm's length, you name yours first, out loud, to them. Not a hypothetical, not "someone might feel like this." A real name or a real face you had to un-write "outsider" over. Level 5 rep: don't tell the tidy resolved version where you already came out the hero. Tell it at the point where you were still resisting — where you didn't want to fold that person in. Show them the wrestling, then stop. That honesty is what unlocks the room; they will not go anywhere you refuse to go first.

Why This Passage Matters

Most people read Colossians 4:7-9 the way they read the credits after a movie — heads already down, coat halfway on. Two unfamiliar names, some travel logistics, nothing to see. And that is exactly why teaching it well is a gift. Buried in what looks like Paul's routine sign-off is one of the most staggering sentences in the New Testament: a runaway slave, a man who may well have wronged or owed his master (Philemon 18) and by Roman law could have been branded or worse, is named "our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you." Not smuggled back with a note begging mercy. Sent as an ambassador, walking shoulder to shoulder with Paul's most trusted courier, carrying the letter itself. That is the doctrine of adoption pressing into a shipping manifest. Grace didn't just pardon Onesimus; it re-classified him. Your room needs this because everyone in it is keeping someone outside the door — a person they've quietly labeled wrong, useless, not-one-of-us. And everyone in it, at some level, fears they themselves are that person. When you teach these verses, you get to hand people the astonishing news that the God who ran to meet the prodigal writes "beloved" over fugitives. You are not teaching filler. You are teaching the address heaven puts on people the world crossed off.

Catch the Fire First

Do the central exercise on yourself before the room ever sees it. Sit down this week and actually name the person you've mentally filed under "not one of us" — the relative

you've written off, the coworker you keep cool with, the neighbor you nod at and nothing more. Don't rush past the resistance you feel. Sit in it. Then ask the honest question: what would it cost me to write "one of you" over that name? If you haven't felt the sting of that yourself, you'll teach these verses as a nice idea about ancient mail. Feel it first, and you'll teach them as a door swinging open.

Bring Your Own Story

- Prompt: a person you were slow to accept — someone the room would understand you keeping at a distance — and what changed.
- Prompt: a time you were the outsider, and one person's decision to call you "one of us" undid you.
- Prompt: a small, ordinary faithfulness someone showed you — a text, a shown-up, a follow-through — that carried more weight than they knew.
- SAMPLE (polished vs real): Polished — "I learned that grace transforms how we see the marginalized." Real — "There's a guy at work I still don't fully trust, and when I imagine calling him a brother my stomach tightens. I'm not going to pretend that's easy."
- Guardrail: raw, not resolved — tell it from inside the resistance, not from the mountaintop where you already won. Full storytelling coaching lives in the Go First, Go Real drill.

Three Ways to Open

CLASSROOM: ""Show of hands: who has ever read the last few verses of a Bible letter word for word?" Wait. Few or no hands. "Right. Tonight we're camping in the part everyone skips — and I'm going to show you Paul hid something scandalous in the goodbye.""

Curiosity gap — make them lean toward the verses they'd normally skip.

SMALL GROUP: ""Before we open anything — think of one person you'd honestly describe as 'not really one of us.' Don't say it yet, just hold the name. We're going to meet a man Paul had every reason to file that way.""

Personal stakes before content — start with them, not the text.

COFFEE: ""What do you do with someone who wronged you, ran off, and then shows up at your door again? There's a guy in the Bible that happened to. His name's Onesimus, and Paul's answer will surprise you.""

Story hook — one human question opens the whole passage.

Teaching the Word

Teach the word Paul chooses for Onesimus: adelphos — brother. Not "servant," not "reformed offender," not "the man we're willing to overlook." Brother. Same family, same table, same blood-claim as anyone born into the house. Here's the physical image: hold

up two hands, far apart — "master here, runaway slave there, and the whole social ledger of Rome keeping them apart." Then bring your hands together, palms clasped, shoulder to shoulder. "Paul names Tychicus and Onesimus with the exact same tender words and sends them down the same road, side by side." That's what adelphos does — it collapses the distance the world built. Grace didn't move Onesimus up a rung. It sat him at the family table. Say the line, then stop and let it sit: "Our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you."

Discussion Questions

1. When you first read these three verses, what did you feel — honestly? Skip-worthy? Curious? Something else?

Coaching note: Low-stakes on-ramp. Let people admit they'd normally skim it; that honesty earns the payoff later. Don't correct anyone.

If it stalls: "Yes or no — would you normally read a passage like this slowly, or breeze past it?"

2. Paul calls Onesimus 'our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you.' Knowing he's a runaway slave who wronged his master, what's shocking about that sentence?

Coaching note: This is the hinge. If the room doesn't feel the shock, the passage stays flat. Fill in the Philemon backstory if needed, then re-read the phrase slowly.

If it stalls: "If a coworker who stole from the company came back — would 'beloved brother' be the first words out of your mouth?"

3. Notice the two men are named with identical words and sent together. What is Paul quietly saying by refusing to introduce Onesimus as a problem?

Coaching note: Draw out that grace re-labels people before they even reach the door. Push gently past 'he's forgiven' to 'he's re-classified — same standing as Paul's trusted courier.'

If it stalls: "If you were the master he ran from — how would you want him introduced? How did Paul actually introduce him?"

4. Who is someone in your life you've quietly filed as 'not really one of us'? You don't have to say the name — just, what makes it hard to write 'one of you' over them?

Coaching note: You go first here (the drill). Give real silence after. Don't fix people's answers or rush to grace — let the difficulty stand before the gospel lands.

If it stalls: "Simpler: is there anyone you'd rather NOT see walk back through your door? What did they do?"

5. The line was, 'If Christ can write one of you over Onesimus, he can write it over you.' What changes if that's actually true about you — and about the person you just thought of?

Coaching note: This is where transformation lives. Let it get personal and quiet. Resist a tidy wrap-up. If someone tears up, sit with it — don't rescue the moment with a joke.

If it stalls: "Which is harder to believe: that God calls you beloved, or that He calls that person beloved?"

Questions You May Hear

"Who was Onesimus, exactly?"

He was a slave in a Colossian household who ran away, likely stealing on the way out, and crossed paths with the imprisoned Paul. He's the man Paul's whole letter to Philemon is about — now sent back home, not in chains, but as a brother.

"Who was Tychicus and why does he matter?"

He was Paul's trusted courier from the province of Asia who carried more than one prison letter — probably this one and Ephesians. In a world with no postal service for private citizens, letters moved by a reliable person who could vouch for the sender and answer questions.

"Wait — did Paul just send an escaped slave back into slavery?"

Read alongside Philemon, Paul is appealing to the master to receive Onesimus 'no longer as a slave, but... as a beloved brother.' Paul is rewriting the whole master-slave relationship by grace, not endorsing it.

"Why does Paul spend the end of an important letter on two guys and some travel news?"

Because the gospel travels through named, ordinary people. Just verses earlier Paul asked for an 'open door' for the word — and now that word walks the road in the persons of Tychicus and Onesimus. Their faithfulness is part of how the kingdom moves.

For Experienced Leaders

- The whole lesson lives or dies on the room feeling the shock of 'one of you.' If you rush past the Philemon backstory, the payoff evaporates — spend the time there, cut elsewhere.
- Resist the urge to tie a bow on question 5. Some people will need to sit uncomfortably with a name they can't yet call 'brother.' That discomfort is the Spirit's work, not your failure.
- If it's been a heavy week and you're depleted, say so plainly: 'I'll be straight, it's been a heavy week, so I'm leaning on you all more than usual today.' Then run this lesson as pair-share — let THEM do the talking. Showing up tired and honest beats performing fine.

Landing the Lesson

Commitments: Go around and have each person say out loud one specific thing: either a name they'll reach out to this week, or one 'one of you' person their household could fold in. Out loud makes it real.

Close by praying out loud over the actual names and people they just spoke — the coworker, the relative, the neighbor someone mentioned. 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 4 — where someone names the person they've kept outside — stop there. That's further than most groups get. Don't force question 5 just to finish the plan.

Midweek follow-up: Next week, open by asking: 'Did anyone send that message, or take one step toward the person you named?' Let the accountability be gentle but real.

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

Handout

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During the lesson:

- One person you'd honestly describe as 'not really one of us' (a word, initials — just for you): ____
- What makes it hard to write 'one of you' over them?
- One friend whose 'circumstances' you genuinely don't know anymore right now: ____
- The real question you'll actually ask them (not 'how are you' — something specific): ____
- One small thing you said you'd handle at home but haven't — write it, then do it: ____
- Finish this out loud: 'If Christ can write one of you over Onesimus, then over me it means...' ____

Take-home actions:

- Before you sleep tonight, send that specific message to the friend you named — ask the real question, then read their answer slowly. Knowing takes attention.
- Finish the one small thing at home this week — the leaking tap, the form, the call to a relative — so your people see your word can be counted on.
- Around your table this week, name one person your household could quietly fold in, and name one thing you'll actually do for them.

Comfort travels person to person. Be the one who carries it to someone waiting for word today.