

Philemon Devotionals

Read Philemon (Feel free to count it as a chapter or a book...you win either way!)

Accordingly, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, yet for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you Philemon 1:8-9

Counseling couples requires an important yet steady transition from commanding to caring. In order to help a spouse care better for the other, there are important actions that essentially begin as commands: commit to conversation, take time out to date, refuse to blame the other person before blaming yourself. If a person lives out these commands faithfully, they begin to see the purpose for them and each one becomes less a matter of "have to" and more becomes "want to." There's no great secret to it, and some couples may hope for some magical word from their counselor to have a better marriage. The truth is this: you have to take the commands of marriage and allow them to become points of care.

This letter points to a believer, Philemon, moving through this struggle with one of his slaves named Onesimus. Likely Onesimus had sold himself into slavery due to debts or poverty, but eventually he stole some money and ran away from his master. After meeting Paul, Onesimus was saved and returns to his master (and now brother in Christ) with this letter from the apostle. Philemon was not only a believer, but a leader in the local church and had likely been led to Christ by Paul himself. Paul says he could command Philemon to do the right thing in forgiving his former slave and new brother in Christ, but Paul appeals to the older and more mature believer to prove his walk with Christ by caring. Not only do the two apparently reconcile, but Onesimus later becomes a bishop to the Ephesian church. **You have a hard relationship in your life...everyone does. When you struggle to be Christ-like in that relationship, sometimes we have to start with the commands of scripture (Matt 6:12, Eph 4:32) remembering that our walk with Christ isn't just for our life, but for our interactions with the lives around us. Who do you need to pray that God will move you from command to care regarding? It's ok to admit to God that you need to and that maybe you don't really even want to. This brief letter reminds us forgiveness is commanded of believers, but that when we make the right choice to care we can truly restore in the same way Jesus did for us.**