

**Text: Philemon 22 (Pew Bible, pg.1183)**

**Title: “Resolution”**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Let’s open our Bibles one more time to the little book of Philemon in the NT. I’m concluding a series of messages today I’ve entitled “Redeeming Relationships.” There are three important people in this story. Philemon was a leading man in the church in the ancient city of Colossae. Onesimus was Philemon’s household slave, who ran away to Rome where he met the third important person in the story ... the Apostle Paul. Paul, who is in prison in Rome, leads Onesimus to Christ and now writes this letter to Philemon asking him to forgive Onesimus and taking him back as a new brother in Christ. And in this little first-century letter we find the principles for redeeming relationships, whether they are at home, at church or anywhere we relate to other people. Let’s just read the last three verses of Philemon.

I mentioned that Philemon was a leading man in the church in Colossae. In fact, the church actually met in his home. And here we get a fascinating look into how the early church was structured. They didn’t have church buildings like we have today. Instead, they met in homes, or sometimes outdoors or in a rented hall. They often ate meals together and shared more than just an hour worship service together. They went deeper in Christ-centered relationships.

And this is important for us today as well. In our Blueprint for Spiritual Formation we talk about our mission of joining God in developing passionate followers of Jesus Christ. We list seven attributes of a Christ-follower, and the last one is that they build Christ-centered relationships.

We try to accomplish this in the structure of our church through Sunday Morning Bible Study. But we know there’s a limit as to what we can accomplish at that time, so we also have A2C Groups ... Acts 2 Community Groups. You read in Acts 2 of how these Christ-centered relationships look in the early church and we want to replicate that. Our A2C groups will be starting back in a few weeks and we want you to pray about becoming part of one. There are brochures at the end of each pew, or you can check it out online.

Now look at v.22. Paul is working toward resolution in this whole matter with himself, Philemon and Onesimus, and he makes an interesting request.

**Philemon 22 - And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers.**

So they’re all looking forward to the day when all three men in this story would be together. But there’s one big obstacle: Paul is in prison. How could he be released and travel to Colossae? It would take a miracle. But Paul was confident that he would come to Philemon because he believed in the power of prayer. And he believed in the power of prayer because he believed in the power of God.

This one verse provides for us a window through which we can look into the world of great men and

women of the faith who have gone before us, and what they have learned about prayer. The tough challenges in life are only resolved through effective praying. There's something here in this verse about...

## 1. THE ACTIVITY OF PRAYER

**Philemon 22 - And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers.**

The word for “prayers” here means to make a request of God ... to call on God. This is one of a few different words used to describe the activity of prayer in the NT. Now there are many things I could say at this point but let me just zero in on three of the most important aspects of the activity of prayer:

- **WE MUST PRAY URGENTLY**

Now if we really believed that when we prayed we were talking to the King of Creation, the God with all power, the God who created this vast universe, I'm thinking that we better be urgent about it. You see, if we truly cared about God's will being done in our lives and in the lives of our loved ones ... and if truly understood that God had the power to accomplish amazing things ... why wouldn't there be urgency in our praying?

There was an urgency in Philemon's praying. He was more than a thousand miles removed from Paul. Someone has said that prayer is life's limitless reach. Philemon was crying out to God to do something that he could not do.

Let me show you what urgency looks like in praying. There's a great example of this in the life of another man associated with the church in Colossae. Look at Philemon 23.

**Philemon 23 - Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings.**

Epaphras was in prison with Paul for preaching the Gospel. But he was a real man of prayer. And we know this from reading Paul's other letter to the church in Colossae.

**Colossians 4:12 - Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.**

When is the last time you had that kind of urgency in your praying for something or someone? Think about it ... wrestling in prayer for others. Put your heart and soul into it. God is real; the needs of others are real ... so pray urgently.

The activity of prayer means...

- **PRAYING PERSISTENTLY**

The word for “prayer” here is in the plural. That means there was repeated activity. Philemon didn’t just pray once or twice that God would release Paul from prison and bring him to Colossae. He prayed persistently.

The Bible says that Jesus taught His disciples to pray and not faint or grow weary.

**Matthew 7:8 - For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.**

Those verbs are continuous action: keep on asking, keep on seeking, keep on knocking. Don’t give up.

**Ephesians 6:18 - And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.**

Maybe you’ve been praying for something for a long time, and you’re just tired. Don’t give up. Persistent praying is an indication of our faith. It’s not that God didn’t hear us the first time we asked. It’s that God wants to see if we really trust Him enough to continue to look to Him for that need.

And then the activity of prayer includes:

- **PRAYING SPECIFICALLY**

Philemon was praying about something specific. He wasn’t just praying for Paul ... “God bless Paul in prison.” No, he was praying specifically that Paul would be released from prison so that he could come to Colossae and minister to them there.

**Matthew 21:22 - If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.”**

**James 4:2 - You do not have, because you do not ask God.**

**Philippians 4:6 - Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.**

Now when we get anxious we are generally anxious about details or specifics. So whatever it is that we are anxious about, we should specifically ask God.

One of the greatest helps in this is keeping a prayer list. I have a prayer list, and when someone asks me to pray for them I make a note to add it to my list later.

So there’s something about the activity of prayer. But also in this verse there’s something about ...

## **2. AGREEMENT IN PRAYER**

**Philemon 22 - And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers.**

The “you” and the “your” there in v.22 are plural pronouns. What that means is that it wasn’t just Philemon praying about it. Apparently most everyone in the church was praying about it. How did Paul know that Philemon had been praying about this? Obviously Philemon must have shared it with him.

An important principle in effective praying is that we pray in agreement with others. Jesus said...

**Matthew 18:19 - “I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.**

Now agreement is important for several reasons. First, if two or three agree to pray about something they help us discern the will of God (and we’ll talk more about that in a moment). Second, God so delights in unity among His people, He blesses it by blessing their praying together in agreement.

**Psalm 133:1 - How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!**

Now this agreement in prayer can be accomplished in different ways. It can be as simple as asking other people to pray with you about a certain matter. Certainly husbands and wives should agree together in prayer. But a big way this happens is when we pray together in groups. I mentioned our A2C groups earlier. The Book of Acts shows us how the church prayed together.

**Acts 2:42 - They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.**

But there’s also something here in this verse about...

### **3. ANSWERS TO PRAYER**

**Philemon 22 - And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers.**

It’s one thing for us to talk about people praying. People pray all the time. The big question that brings God into the picture is this: Is there anyone up there listening to my prayer? Is there anyone up there who not only hears my prayers, but who also can actually accomplish the impossible?

Paul was confident that God would somehow answer Philemon’s prayer. Now listen carefully. When it says there “in answer to your prayers,” it literally says, “I hope to be restored to you *through your prayers.*”

In other words, God is always working through our praying. Now does that mean that He always gives us exactly what we ask for? Well, obviously not. Sometimes God in His grace grants us exactly what we ask for. Sometimes He gives something even better than we ask for. Sometimes He chooses not to give us what we ask, because He knows that we have no way of knowing that what

we're asking for is not in His perfect purpose and will. Or sometimes God will withhold the answer for a season while He is perfecting our faith through persistent prayer.

EXAMPLES: Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane for the cup of the suffering to pass from Him; but it didn't. Paul prayed for his thorn in the flesh to be removed; but it wasn't removed. Instead God said, "My grace is sufficient for you. My strength is made perfect in suffering."

So God is always working through our praying. But we also know there are some important aspects to successful praying:

- **Pray with a clean heart**

Philemon would need to forgive Onesimus if his prayers were to be answered and Paul could return. Praying with a clean heart is essential.

**Psalm 66:18 - If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened;**

- **Pray with expectant faith**

Paul said, "You're praying for this, so prepare for your prayer to be answered. Prepare a room for me." It is essential that we pray with genuine faith.

**James 1:6 - But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.**

**James 1:7 - That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord;**

**ILLUSTRATION** - Have you prepared for your prayer to be answered? You're praying for rain. Do you have an umbrella handy?

- **Pray in the will of God**

Praying in the will of God is a primary prerequisite to answered prayer.

**James 4:3 - When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.**

**1 John 5:14 - This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.**

**1 John 5:15 - And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.**

**ILLUSTRATION** – I like to think of it as a circle. God at the top and I am at the bottom. Prayer should start with God. God will show us by His Spirit how we are to pray. So God reveals to me

that I should pray for something. Then as I hear from God in that way I begin to pray specifically. And successful praying is when God hears our praying things that He has revealed to us we should pray for. For example, there's a great ministry called Celebrate Recovery. It's an outreach to people with all kinds of hurts, habits and hang-ups. For a long time I've felt that we needed a ministry like this but it takes a very unique kind of person to lead it. There were many who were happy to help out, but not a leader. So I began to pray that God would raise up people who could give leadership to this ministry. Well not long ago a couple joined our church. And as I got acquainted with them I learned that they had led a Celebrate Recovery program in another city. And that ministry is getting closer to becoming a reality.

Now there's something else here I want you to see. There's something here about...

#### **4. ASSURANCE THROUGH PRAYER**

**Philemon 22 - And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers.**

Obviously there's a time gap between when the prayer is offered and when the prayer is answered. What do we do while we are waiting for our prayers to be answered? Hope is what keeps you going while you're waiting for God to answer your prayers. This is the strength that faith gives us in our praying.

**Romans 12:12 - Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.**

#### **CONCLUSION**

Now my motivation in preaching this today is to refresh our memory about the importance of prayer in our lives and what effective praying looks like. And for most of us there are times that we do better than at other times. And we struggle with making this part of every hour of every day. Let me ask you to think about it this way:

**ILLUSTRATION** - What if your doctor told you that you had a serious heart condition that in the past was always fatal. However, now there is a pill which, if you take it every day, it will keep you alive for years and years. But you can never miss a single day, or you will die. Now if your doctor told you this and you believed it, you would never miss a day taking that pill. You would never say, "Oh, I just didn't get to it." No, you would make sure that you got to it, wouldn't you?"

Well, that's how critical prayer is to our lives as believers. Our spiritual life and power and strength absolutely depend on it.