

# So that you may be Active in Sharing Faith

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Preacher: Claire Nicholls

[ 0 : 0 0 ] morning it's good to be here with you today this is not my first visit here but my first visit to a service I came here for a training course a long time ago well not that long ago really and I've also met with the leaders as well so I know you a little bit but not a lot so it's always good to be with a church on a Sunday because I get to meet so much more of you a little bit about me because the first question that is often asked when I come to preach after the sermon is where on earth are you from because you've got a weird accent I grew up in Nottingham it's a Nottingham accent it's not Yorkshire accent it's a Nottingham accent and you'll notice when I use the word love that's where it comes in so that's where I'm from I've been in this role as regional minister for about eight months now you will probably know my predecessor Carol she retired in July so we overlapped a little bit and I look after churches in southeast London so all the way you're probably my furthest one of my furthest west really and all the way over to Dartford and then all the way around to past Orpington through Bromley Croydon Purley and then up through the middle Lambeth and then back to you again so yes so so that's what I look after

I also am trying to put to trying to form a justice hub for London Baptist it's been going on for a while but we're getting there so looking at racial justice disability justice women's justice climate justice all of those kind of things and looking at how we can resource the association in that and I also am part of the London Baptist Property Board so I'm learning about buildings and finances which is good I used to be a maths teacher so that helps with that I can do numbers and algebra so so it helps with the property board and before this I was minister of a church in Croydon in New Addington which is South Croydon and before that I was minister of a church in a little place called Ramsbottom which is just north of Manchester but God called me to London very strongly and over the last few years I've learned to love London I love living here and London's learned to love me so so that's why I'm here I mean the story is much longer than that but God's called me and God has been with me on the whole journey all the way through which is why I'm here with you today in

Hearn Hill Baptist Church so we're looking at Philemon and Philemon is a great story and you want to know a little bit more about the characters in there don't you well I do but we don't know a lot but we know some things but before we we look into who this um this man Anisimus is and and Paul's relationship with him and Philemon's relationship with him and how that fits into the prayer that Paul prays in verse 6 I want to ask you a question you don't have to answer me just think about it or some questions have you ever been let down so badly by someone that you never want to see them again have you ever had someone who challenged who you are and what you do through their actions have you ever had an employee who's just run off and disappeared have you struggled to balance your feelings with your faith in these situations is there anyone you would find it difficult to welcome as a brother or sister in Christ this is what Philemon is about what Paul writes to Philemon is for you too so I've been asked to preach on one of Paul's so that you may be prayers and I was given the title so that you may be active now you may have noticed in the reading that we had that those words weren't in there so that you may be active but the words so that you may be effective were in there and that's because there are some translation issues with this verse verse 6 of Philemon and so if I brought two Bibles up because if you read this earlier version of the NIV it says so that you may be active and this version says the newer version says so that you may be effective we'll come to that in a minute and what that might mean and the thinking around that but first to understand what it means to be active or effective in the way Paul writes and prays in Philemon we need to understand a little bit more about the letter which is why we read the whole letter it's quite a short letter as letters go it's no Romans it's just one chapter 25 verses so the letter was probably sent with the letter to the Colossians and Anisimus is mentioned in the letter to the Colossians it's a letter to one of the leaders in the church there probably called Philemon it could be that the church met in his house it's a very short letter as I said it's Paul's shortest letter and he's writing it from prison he's writing it from a place of vulnerability but also a place where he can find clarity of thought and also as he's heard news from the new churches that are growing he could write on what he has observed and what he has heard from afar this letter is to Philemon and family it's a personal letter yet the rest of the church would know it was there and they would probably hear it read too they needed to keep Philemon to account in this so it's only right that it's there it's private and personal but it's also public because it's sent alongside the other letter and and it's in our bibles so you'd imagine that people got to know about it because because it's here and it's important it talks about Paul's encounters with Anisimus who it looks like is a slave was a slave is a slave and how on his return to Philemon because it looks like Anisimus has become useless to him maybe he's run away Philemon might want to consider how Anisimus is received

and Paul says receive him as a brother in Christ now a runaway slave in the ancient world as we're looking at it now would normally be in deep trouble if they were caught returning of his own accord just turning up at Philemon's door would be a scary thing for Onesimus to do it was a capital offense to run away from your master an offense punishable by death Philemon had rights in law to seek vengeance against Onesimus now we don't know why Onesimus has run away and turned up and talked to Paul but maybe he committed an offense maybe he'd been stealing and that needed punishment as well whatever had happened and given him reason to leave the household of Philemon given him reason to run the fact is he had been disloyal and had jeopardized the household and in the ancient world slavery was normal so this is talked about like it's a normal thing and we know today that it is wrong but in that world it was normal the economy depended on it the slave population was originally made up of captured prisoners of war and the kidnapped victims of pirates and bandits to them slavery was a gift of life it's become a slave or die but by that the point by this point when Paul writes to Philemon a lot a lot of the slaves would have never known anything different they would have been descendants of slaves there may also have been those who had been convicted of crime children sold by their parents who couldn't afford to bring them up dumped children and people who became slaves to avoid starvation even those who didn't have much in life but had a household would have had two or three slaves it was the way things were and slaves wouldn't have been seen legally as people but as property they had no legal human rights they couldn't get married they couldn't have a legal family and any children they had belonged to their owner now any wise master would take care of those in their household and that included the slaves as it was there in their own interest to have good and well-behaved slaves runaways would have had nowhere to go they might sell themselves or join a band of robbers but they would always be on the run and if they were caught again if their life was spared they might have to wear an iron neck collar to alert others in case they try to flee again wasn't a good place to be so for Onesimus in all of this it's a massive risk to go back because his life would be in danger it's also a risk for Philemon not quite as much of a risk but a risk for Philemon to take him back because he might lose face within the community and how could he trust him what if Onesimus ran away again so how Philemon responds to

Onesimus on his return it matters and it's into this context that Paul writes it's into this context that Paul begins his letter with a prayer well when we get to verse 6 he begins his letter with a prayer that starts so that you may be active or effective now how Philemon responds to Onesimus on his return then matters for the sake of the gospel how he receives him tells the story of his faith and his focus it tells us of his activeness and his effectiveness in sharing in the gospel so because the translations are so different active and effective I began to look at when I began to look at this verse I went down a little bit of a word study rabbit hole so I looked at all the different versions of the Bible well not all of them because that would take a long time but I looked at the most the most recent translations and the older translations the most recent as I've said already don't have the word active at all they have effective and it looks like biblical scholars have united in a change of emphasis in the translation of this passage now the word translated to active or effective is a Greek word and it can be translated either way it's the word *energas* it sounds like active doesn't it *energas* energy there are links to energy clearly here and I wonder what was behind the translator's thoughts what has been behind their thoughts when they've translated it to effective instead effective might seem milder perhaps more passive let's let's let's get out there and do this so what is going on here I suppose we could think about it as Paul wanting their faith-led activism to have an effect and change the culture around I wonder if that fits a little bit more into what Philemon is being asked to do for Philemon the big question is will the way he receives or does not receive Onesimus be one that actively pursues the good news of Jesus Christ and as a consequence affects the status quo of the community around Onesimus had come to faith and the challenge will be for Philemon as to how he accepts him as a brother in Christ despite him needing in the ways of the day harsh punishment for running away now I looked at some other places where this word is used translated active or effective and another place where it is used is in one of my favorite verses in the bible which is Hebrews 4:12 where the writer talks about how the word of God is living and active it gets into our very being it gets into our sinews I love that word I love that just just that the word of God is living in us Jesus is living in us as revealed in scripture perhaps if we think about the prayer in that context maybe it's about how the word of God is living in us and changing lives how does our faith in Jesus get into the very core of the culture around how do we share the good news within and into our community through the way in which the word in which Jesus is active in our lives we've got to make it far more than surface level haven't we it becomes who we are to our very core

[ 14 : 24 ] we need to be living out the word we need to be a gospel community in who we are in what we do and in what we say the word of God needs to flow out of us speaking of grace and of faith and of salvation speaking of the goodness of God the word of God is in our breath in the way the faith community breathes this is massive and it's a massive challenge for each of us as we encounter the people we meet and for Philemon he pleads Paul has got to do and be everything that culture says he shouldn't be as an Anisimus returns to him Paul asks Philemon to welcome Anisimus as he would welcome Paul not as a runaway slave but as a brother in Christ in Philemon's heart of hearts in his humanness how is that possible it can only be made possible by the all-surpassing grace of God and the second thing that is interesting in the translation of this passage is the word that is translated as sharing or partnership partnership in in the version that's on the screen is actually the Greek word koinonia and some of you may have heard that before because it's been quite a popular word to talk about lately the earlier the earliest NIV version says I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith the latest says I pray that your partnership with us in the faith may be effective it's clearly not an easy translation to get right however koinonia is more normally translated fellowship or participation the sharing of faith is not then about evangelizing in this context or it kind of comes into it but it's about how faith is lived out in community which fits much better with what Paul is asking Philemon to do in how he receives Anisimus back how does Philemon bring the good news of Jesus Christ to a runaway slave he accepts him into the family as a brother and not as a criminal the sharing of faith that Paul calls Philemon to is about how he shares faith within the community of Christ and welcomes Anisimus in it means getting together to experience faith working it out in fellowship with one another Paul is telling Philemon and the

Colossian church that he is praying that they will work together in Christ that they will be active and effective in working together in Christ that's the good news they are bringing in this context that community and reconciliation is possible because of Christ and their call is to demonstrate that Philemon's call is to live that out and that the church will grow in appreciation of the remarkable nature of what God has accomplished and the impact it has on them if Philemon can welcome Anisimus back as his brother that changes so much about the community so how does this prayer of Paul speak to us as a church family is it's really challenging how does it speak to you as the church family at this church well the call is to be active and effective in your faith both as individuals and as a community this letter was written to one man to Philemon and it addresses a particular scenario about his life a runaway slave Paul calls him to welcome Anisimus back as a brother that's his own personal challenge now when I asked at the beginning about someone you might find it difficult to welcome as a brother or sister in Christ someone may have come to mind this is a hard question because because there's lots of stuff that goes on around this but this person might be your Anisimus if you were Philemon what would you do we don't know what he did in the end we hope he might have listened to Paul's pleadings but we don't know if he did but what can we do how can your response be active in your faith how can it speak of the good news how can it be effective in showing and speaking the good news of Jesus where is grace and forgiveness in all of this in verse 5 Paul reminds Philemon that this is about the love he has for

God's people this is about the good things they share because of Jesus our response to the one we thought about the one who stands in front of us should not be based on guilt this is what we ought to do we ought to do it Paul doesn't start with that it should be based on overwhelming and growing sense an overwhelming and growing sense of Christ's love for us and for others as Philemon looks at Anisimus as he delivers the letter the first thing he must see to be able to welcome him in is that God loves this man if we look at the person in front of us and endeavor to see them as God sees them it changes the way we treat them and the way we welcome them in it means we can choose to call them brother or sister despite finding them really difficult despite not getting on it doesn't mean we have don't have to work through the issues because Anisimus and Philemon have got some work to do imagine that they had a lot of things to work on in the coming days and weeks if their starting point was to be actively pursuing the love of Christ in their relationship as they try it would make their endeavors much more effective it's going to be tough isn't it it'll be tough for Philemon and that's where the community is needed the koinonia the shared faith lived out in fellowship as he prays about faith being active and effective as they share together in that faith Paul reminds the church that they are accountable to one another if Philemon accepts Anisimus as a brother then the whole church needs to too that adds some extra challenge in there as well doesn't it if there are people mumbling in the background that Philemon's been taken for a mug that does not make for an effective witness if the church is not supportive then at his lowest moments in his doubts about whether he's done the right thing

Philemon might change his mind and walk away from the brotherhood with Anisimus that Paul has pleaded with him to take up to make this work Philemon needs to be accountable to the church fellowship and so does Anisimus they need to be reminded that they are both loved and they are both under grace they need to be reminded that they are both sinners but that Christ has set them free and forgiven them from their sin to make this work Philemon needs as much grace as Anisimus because he's hurt and he's broken by Anisimus's behaviour and the fellowship will help with that they're all in this together we are all in this together if you as Hearn Hill Baptist Church are going to thrive as you walk into the future as you explore what ministry looks like ahead then you all need to know and remind one another that you are all loved and you are all under God's grace our shared faith in Christ bonds us and welds us to one another the way we make decisions affects the entire community

Anisimus comes back Philemon could be a laughing stock but grace the good news of Jesus Christ always comes above convention it's easier to live out grace right by turning and living amongst a community of Christ that supports one another when Jesus washed the disciples feet he gave them a new commandment to love one another as he loved them and it is by this that all would know that they were his disciples Paul's prayer in the letter to Philemon is this lived out in reality the reaction of the world around to Philemon's welcome of Anisimus will be one of surprise shock maybe horror but hopefully intrigue as Paul prays for the church to share in the faith in a way that is both active and effective then others will see something of the grace of God in how they are with one another and when they get an opportunity to share why they are like this they can tell those they meet of the goodness of God a third use of that word and aghast active, effective is in 1 Corinthians 16.9 where Paul talks about a door for effective work being open to him despite it being a difficult situation if we can get the shared life of faith right whatever circumstances are around us in the community we will thrive despite what is being thrown at us and doors will be open to us as through us

[ 24 : 38 ] Christ's grace and love abounds so my prayer for you as a church is this that you will be able to share in the faith in a way that is both active and effective a way that helps you to thrive and then that others might see something of the grace of God in how you are with one another then when you get an opportunity to share why you are like this you will be able to tell those you meet of the goodness of God Amen