

From Useless to Useful: A Thematic Exposition of Philemon

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[0 : 00] Welcome to Ontario Community Church, where we're dedicated to encouraging, equipping, and engaging lives for Christ. Located in Ontario, Oregon, Pastor Patrick Daly preaches insightful sermons from the Word of God, offering practical applications for modern living.

We're delighted to share this sermon with you. Well, good morning, Ontario. How are we all doing this morning? Good. It is great to be with all of you here this morning.

My name is Patrick Daly, and I have the privilege of serving as the pastor here at Ontario Community Church. Today, we are going to go over the book of Philemon, and we're gonna do what's called a thematic exposition.

We are going to go have an overview over the book and find the connections with the Kinsuki art. Many of you have seen Kinsuki art before, where there is a broken bowl or a piece of pottery that is piece back together, and it has a little gold in the cracks.

And we'll discover the connections with them. Today's sermon and scripture reading, we are asking God to speak to us through His Word, through His reading and through His study.

[1 : 20] We're gonna learn about transformation, forgiveness, and restoration. And before we begin with our sermon today, I wanna ask all of you this question.

It may resonate with you. Have you ever felt broken, or have you ever felt that you're not good enough? Perhaps you have felt a moment in your life where you felt useless.

Maybe there was a, you felt a void, or something that is missing in your life, and you just wanted to have meaning. You wanted something more to this life than the superficial, the material possessions, if you will.

I want us to think of that question as we proceed this morning. I know that for many of us in this life, many of us search for something. We feel that there's something that's missing, and we want to find that, and sometimes we turn to the wrong things.

To fill that void, sometimes we go to drugs, we go to alcohol or gambling. Sometimes it's pornography, or something that will never fill that void.

[2 : 30] But it is in Christ that makes us whole, that brings restoration and healing. I want us to think about these things as we go through.

We're gonna learn about a man who was considered to be useless, and he became useful. For in being useless, it is a reminder in the story of Philemon, about someone who was once a slave, and Paul is making an appeal for him to be a free man.

Not just as a slave, but as one who was a sinner, having freedom in Christ. For it is God who is the great transformer of our minds and our hearts.

He takes that which is broken, and he pieces us back together. It is in him that we find new life. We find new identity in Christ, and we are rendered useful when we make that decision for him.

When we say yes to Jesus Christ, when we receive that gift of salvation in him. So we're gonna pray, we're gonna read this book together, and we're gonna go deeper into the Word of God.

[3 : 49] And since this book is shorter, we should read it together. But first, let's go ahead and open in prayer. Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for this time and this opportunity for all of us to come together in love and in unity.

We have sung some great songs. It is a way for us to worship you, to glorify you and to honor you. For you are the sovereign God. You are in control.

You are the great potter, and we are the clay. It is time for us to open your Word. We ask that you let your Word speak to us. May our minds be open to what your Word has to say, and may our hearts be open to live and to love like you.

May the message today inspire us. May it motivate us. May it move us to make a decision for you, to grow in you and to go in your holy name.

Let it be done according to your will. We are like broken vessels without you, but in finding you, like the ancient art of Kintsuki, where broken pottery is mended together.

[5 : 00] We are made whole. We are made more valuable, and you give us purpose. It is because of Jesus' life, death, burial, and resurrection, we are offered salvation through Jesus Christ, and it is in you that we live, and it is in you that we love.

Be with us this morning. Be with us this morning. It is in Jesus' name that we pray, and we all say together, amen. Amen. I want us to turn to our Bibles on, it's gonna be page 1186.

Part of a thematic exposition, we have the opportunity to open the word of God and read it together, so feel free to read out loud, or to just follow along.

We use our Pew Bibles, the ESV, the ESV blue pew Bible that you'll find. If you use another translation, that's fine. AJV, new page, NIV, whatever it is.

So it's the letter of Paul to Philemon. I'll give you guys a little bit more time.

[6 : 15] All right. So let's read it together. Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, and Timothy our ruler.

To Philemon, our beloved fellow worker, and Afia our sister, and Arcephus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house, grace to you, and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I thank my God always when I remember you in my prayers, because I hear of your love and of the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus, and for all the saints, and I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ.

For I derive much joy and comfort from your love, my brother, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, that's beautiful.

The hearts of the saints have been refreshed. 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.

[7 : 31] Paul could have commanded Philemon here, but he chooses to appeal. I, Paul, an old man and now a prisoner, also for Christ Jesus, I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment.

Now listen here. Formally, he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.

I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart. Sending my very heart, that's very heavy language. I would have been glad to keep him with me in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel, but I prefer to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion, but of your own accord.

For this perhaps is why he was parted for you for a while, that you might have him back forever, no longer as a bond servant, but more than a bond servant.

As a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you both in the flesh and in the Lord. So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me.

[9 : 00] If he has wronged you at all or owes you anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, write this with my own hand. I will repay it to say nothing of your owing me, even your own self.

Yes, brother, I want some benefit from you and the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ. Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.

At the same time, prepare a yes room for me, for I am hoping that through your prayers, I will be graciously given to you. Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ, Jesus sends greeting to you.

And so do Mark, Aristicus, Demis, and Luke, my fellow workers. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

We have just read together the book of Philemon. Congratulations. There is so much to unpack here.

[10 : 05] I want you to keep in mind that we are doing a thematic exposition. We're going over the major themes and the major verses. In the coming weeks, we will do a line by line exposition of it.

But for now, we're going over the main themes. So this book of Philemon, it's different than many of the other Pauline letters or epistles, in the fact that this letter is more focused on something that is more specific, something that is more personal.

This is considered to be the most personal letter in all of scripture. It is a part of our Bible, though. And like every book of the Bible, we should read, we should study, and we should apply it.

Paul doesn't introduce himself as an apostle. So there's really no formality like the other letters. Paul begins by writing a personal letter to Philemon about one person, Onesimus.

There is not a variety of theological topics or issues like the other letters. This letter is written between Paul, Philemon, in regards to Onesimus.

[11 : 18] Of course, there are other letters and there are deep themes that we can find in here. Paul wrote to Timothy and to Titus. There's other letters that provide guidance and encouragement and instruction for the early church.

In the other letters, there is theological depth. There's formality. But it's not really the case in this letter. This letter tells the story of one man and one situation, Onesimus.

The name of this man, and here's a fun fact for you, the name Onesimus, it's defined as profitable. It is defined, you know how names have meanings behind them.

Onesimus, it means profitable or useful. And what's so interesting about this letter is, Onesimus was once useless and now he is useful.

It's a play on words. It's as though Paul is saying, useful was once useless and now he's useful again. Paul goes on on, he's being thankful about the love that Philemon has for others and the faith that he is sharing to each other.

[12 : 34] It brings great joy and it brings great comfort to Paul because of the hearts that have been refreshed. I love that language, the refreshing of the hearts. The idea of being refreshed is allowing for someone to be rested or to have that sense of calm.

I wish for my heart to be refreshed, don't you? Paul could have commanded Philemon to take back Onesimus, but instead he chooses to appeal to him instead.

And this is the main theme that is found in verse 11. Formally, he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.

We learn that Onesimus is being sent back by Paul to Philemon and this is not an easy thing to do. It is hard for Paul to do this because Onesimus is a bond servant to Philemon as it says in verse 14.

He did not want to do anything without Philemon's consent. Just as it says in the text, he wants your consent.

[13 : 44] And it can be said that Paul did not want to take advantage of Philemon. He wants to send Onesimus back. In sending Onesimus back, Paul appeals to Philemon to take him back not as a bond servant, not as a slave, but something that is more than that.

As a brother. Can you imagine how controversial that was back in biblical times? Where it was common to have slaves, where it was common to have bond servants.

Paul is saying to Philemon, he is rendered useful. Send, I'm sending him back, take him in as a brother in Christ. And we can see two meanings here.

No longer as a slave to sin, but also no longer as a literal slave. That must have been very controversial at that time.

Can you imagine? But that goes to show you the change that has happened in Onesimus's life. He was once useless, but now he is useful.

[14 : 53] And that's very heavy, very difficult language. I don't want to be rendered useless. I don't want to be viewed upon as useless to God.

I want to be useful to the Lord. And I hope we all in the same way want to be useful. To take him back as a brother, very powerful language.

Towards the beginning of the book, we see that Philemon, he is referred to as beloved, just as Onesimus is later on in the letter, which goes to show how close Onesimus was with Paul.

Paul wishes for Onesimus to not go back to his former life in being a slave or a bond servant, but to be received as a beloved brother. And this is very significant because Paul is seen, Onesimus as a close friend, someone who is beloved.

And I'm reminded of what Galatians chapter three, verse 28 has to say, some of you may know this, that there is neither Jew nor Greek. There is neither slave nor free.

[16 : 02] There is no male and female, for you all are one in Christ Jesus. Paul offers to pay all that Onesimus has done wrong.

Now, we don't know to what extent, what did he do? Well, we know he ran off, and we know that there's some wrong that was done between Philemon and Onesimus.

He could have stolen, he could have cheated, and he could have swindled, and we don't know the extent. But what we do know is that the wrong that Onesimus did, Paul is willing to pay it back all to him.

And Paul goes on to write about the debt that Philemon owns to Paul. It's very light-hearted language because Paul helps lead Philemon to Christ.

So it's like, oh, well, you owe me because you're saved. You know, the debt's being paid off, so he's being funny in that. This can be understood as, it also can be understood as an actual debt that was owed, some scholars say.

[17 : 06] But it's more commonly that Philemon is owing Paul the spiritual debt of salvation, but he's just messing around, if you will. Paul did play a part in Philemon's conversion.

And we have to realize that the debt of salvation is not, it's not a debt that can be repaid. It's just, this is part of Paul's appeal to restore Onesimus, to receive him as a brother.

And Paul has faith in Philemon that he will do more than what he is saying and requesting a room to be given to him and perhaps those who are traveling with him. Then we go to the end of the text where the fellow workers are greeting Philemon in the letter, and that is the book of Philemon.

In a nutshell, that is the overview of it. This book is short, but it is a book of scripture. We shouldn't ignore, we shouldn't neglect any of the Bible.

Every book of the Bible should be read. It should be studied. We should never be afraid or ashamed of the gospel or any book of the Bible.

[18 : 18] Now, wanna go back to verse 11 here. This is the critical verse that we find. He was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me.

The unique thing about this book is, like I said, Onesimus means useful. I'd love to have a name like that, being useful, but it kinda keeps you in check, making sure you're staying on the straight and narrow, if you will.

He went from being useless to useful. He went from being a slave to sin to freedom in Christ. And Paul is making this appeal. He is no longer a slave to sin, but he is free in Christ.

Let's make him a free man. What a statement. What a statement that is. And this transitions into what we can learn and what we can take away from this book.

I don't know about you, but I feel that we can identify with Onesimus. We can relate to him. It is hard language, but it is truth.

[19 : 31] When we live a life without God, we are, in the eyes of God, we are rendered useless. Without Christ at the center of our lives, we are but nothing.

We are but broken without him. We are lost without him and we cannot do it on our own. We are sinners that are in need of a savior.

And this is where there is a connection with Kinsugi pottery. This letter from Paul to Philemon is a reminder that we were once useless, but we become useful when we make a decision for Christ.

To choose Christ is to realize that we are indeed, we are broken and it is in him that we are restored. We are made whole and we are given salvation by saying yes to Jesus Christ, just like the thief on the cross said, Jesus, remember me when you go into your kingdom, when you enter into your kingdom.

Kinsugi is defined as golden joinery. It's a traditional Japanese art form that involves repairing broken pottery. And it puts, you see gold in the cracks, powdered gold.

[20 : 48] We have to remember that it is Christ who is the creator, redeemer and sustainer. And you'll find in your notes that this is mainly connected with Colossians chapter one verse 15 through verses 20.

And we can go on and on about these verses, but just read it for yourself on there. Christ as creator. This is where you see a whole, if you will.

Right, it is our original state. It is like our original state before sin. Thing without sin in the world. There was that connection with God.

And in Kinsugi art, perfect, unbroken pottery. God created us in his image, just like how he created the heavens and the earth.

God made us. Our God is everlasting and all things were created by him. Many of you have heard before that God is the potter and we are the clay, we are the work of his hands.

[21 : 54] And before sin entered the world, we were once whole. This original creation was before sin entered the world. And once sin entered, we were rendered broken and useless.

That's harsh words. Even as I'm saying this, that's not easy. The original piece of pottery, it was whole.

It was serving its purpose. But because sin entered the world, broken, like a bowl that falls to the ground. We have Christ as redeemer.

The redemptive path is redemption from sin through Christ. It is not about what you do. It is about what has been done by Jesus Christ, fulfilling the many prophecies, his life, his death, his burial, his resurrection.

And in Kinsugi art, it's mending broken pottery. Together with gold. Christ redeemed us by his death, his burial, his resurrection.

[23 : 04] There was a pastor that I once knew who would say that Jesus reversed the curse of sin. Jesus reversed the curse. Like I said, Christ redeemed us from our sins.

Will you receive the gift of salvation? Sin introduced brokenness into our lives and the image that I can think of is a piece of pottery that is breaking or shattering.

You know the sound when something breaks, a plate, a bowl, your favorite coffee cup. It is through Christ.

It is through making a decision through Christ. We are redeemed and we are restored. God takes our brokenness and makes something beautiful out of it.

The art of repairing something that is broken with gold is symbolic for redemption and restoration. Instead of being discarded and thrown away, we have the chance to run to the Father, to choose Jesus Christ, to receive that gift of salvation.

[24 : 10] And Christ restores us just as the broken pieces are gathered, cared for, and put back together. The pottery is placed back together. It's made with gold and it adds value to the pottery.

It makes the piece, the bowl, the plate, the cup even. It makes it far more valuable than it was to begin with.

For when we choose to have Christ in our life, it is as though we are being made pure, being made whole again. For God uses us for greater purpose, my friends.

It is in Christ that we live. He takes that which is broken and pieces it back together for His purpose, for God's plan.

God gives each and every one of us the opportunity to choose Him. For when we choose Him, we must remember, God will never leave you or forsake you.

[25 : 12] We are not left or forgotten. For God takes us, He makes us whole again. Seek that relationship. Seek first the kingdom of God and its righteousness.

And finally, we have Christ as sustainer based off of Colossians chapter 1 verse 17 and the other verses. Continual protection and care in Christ.

That doesn't mean that, look, you are protected by Christ but we still live in a fallen world. We still live in a broken world where it's almost as though you're walking through and you see many plates that are broken on the ground.

You see many bowls and cups. They need repairing from God our Father. They need to be mended whole. That is why we share the gospel. That is why we share in our testimony.

Because God is the great transformer of culture. He is the great transformer of our lives. He pieces us together. So we have continual protection and care in Christ and in Kintsugi art, strength and pottery.

[26 : 23] It is more beautiful. It is more valuable than before. It is Christ who puts us back together and it does not stop once we are made whole.

When we make a decision for Christ, it is not the end, it is the beginning. We receive salvation and we begin on the path of doing good in the name of Jesus Christ, the name above all names.

If someone fixed your grandma's precious China, wouldn't you be appreciative of that? If someone put that together, let's say you had a friend visiting your house, I am sure many of you have this happening before.

And they knocked the plate on the ground and it shattered. What if they took that plate and they fixed it together? You would be very appreciative of that.

God takes us as that broken pottery. The oopsidazies is sin, if you will. Sin entering the world separates us from God.

[27 : 34] But to know that we can be restored and rendered useful, just like Onesimus, what went from useless to being useful, is very powerful language.

It doesn't matter what you have been through. It doesn't matter how broken you are. It doesn't matter how bad things have gotten, how overwhelmed you are, how depressed you are.

When you come to Christ, it is to come to the potter. It is to come to the Creator and to seek refuge. It is to seek comfort. It is to seek shelter. It is to seek continued protection.

Seek first the kingdom of God. We need to seek a relationship first and foremost with Jesus Christ. We need to admit that we are broken.

Is any of us perfect here? I'd like to talk to you after. Is anyone perfect here? Let's have a discussion here. We need to admit we are lost and broken without Him.

[28 : 33] Let us be on a path that is towards Christ. And it all begins on making that decision for Jesus Christ. It is saying yes and believing in Him.

Many of you know John 3.16, for God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that whoever, whoever, everyone, everybody, not the elites, not the rich, not the people who, I donate \$10 million, I built these houses.

No, no, no. Everyone, everyone, whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. That is the beauty of the Gospel.

It is for everyone. We have learned about the main theme in Phrygina, going from useless to useful.

In the next, in the coming weeks, we're going to go over line by line. Who are all these people in Philemon? What, do we know anything about Onesimus? Do we know anything about Philemon?

[29 : 39] Where is the connection in Scripture? We'll go over that in the next few weeks. We've learned about Paul who is writing to Philemon to take Onesimus back. Being useless to useful, I want to be useful to God.

And I hope that all of you want to be useful. May we no longer be slaves to sin, but may we have freedom in Christ.

Not freedom to sin, freedom from sin. We learned about Kintsugi. It is the art of fixing that which is broken and making it more valuable than once before.

There is a connection with sin nature and how God has offered us a way for restoration, for healing of the brokenness that is in this world.

God is that constant. And this ever-changing fog of culture. Culture may change, and heck, we change sometimes. But God is that constant.

[30 : 41] I need a constant in my life. This world's changing way too much for not a young guy. I can't imagine for you older people the amount of change that's happening. The point is, God is that constant.

The firm foundation. And even though we are broken, even though we are imperfect, God loves us despite our imperfection. Say yes to Jesus Christ.

Christ's sacrifice on the cross, it redeems us for we are forgiven and we are set free from sin. No longer to live the former life of brokenness, but to live a new life in a new state, if you will.

Be mended together in the hands of the Father. The agape love that God has for us reminds us how God finds beauty in our imperfection.

God exhibits love, even though we are imperfect, even though we fall short. Come to the Father. Be whole again.

[31 : 46] And even though in this life, like I said, we make mistakes, we sin, we blunder, we screw up, don't we? God is there for us. Kinstugy is about fixing that which is broken and giving it new life, making it more valuable, just like how God takes that which is broken, our lives gives it new life, new identity, new purpose, and restoring us to Him.

We are made more valuable. Do you feel lost? Do you feel broken? Do you feel useless in life? If you do, I encourage you to seek that relationship with Jesus Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life, and just as we have gone over, the Creator, the Redeemer, and Sustainer, in Him we find purpose, in Him we find comfort and safety.

In Him we become useful. Just like how Onesimus was once useless and became useful, he changed his trajectory, so much so that the Apostle Paul is writing a letter to Philemon saying, this man has changed man.

He didn't have to write the letter. Can you imagine if Onesimus went back to Philemon? After he stole and did all the bad things? But no, Paul is making an appeal.

This is a changed man. I have to tell you about this. I am appealing to you, Philemon. I think of all of how you refresh other Christians.

[33 : 22] Consider that this man is useful to you in the same way that he's useful to me. And we think once again of John 3.16, whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

And the closing question, how can God, the Kinsuki artist, heal and restore you? God takes our brokenness. He takes our flaws and our imperfections.

He takes everything that we are. And when we choose Him, He turns our lives. He turns it around into something beautiful. We have a testimony about how God works in our lives.

He gives us purpose. And may you, each and every one of you, be on a path of restoration and sustainability in Christ that comes first through choosing Christ.

May you choose Christ. May you grow in Christ. And it doesn't stop there. May you grow in the name of Jesus Christ, proclaiming the gospel, sharing your testimony, sharing your faith with others, and spread the gospel.

[34 : 40] For Jesus Christ is the light of the world. I don't know about you, but I need some light in my life. The more I learn about how culture is changing, I know I need Jesus who is there for me.

He won't forsake me. He won't let me down like others have. Christ is the constant. Let's pray together. Father God, we thank you for giving us this time and this opportunity for us to come together and go over the truths of your Word and the connections that we find in Scripture and in real life.

You, God, are the comforter of the week. You give us the chance to come to you when we ourselves are broken and rendered useless. Without you, we are nothing. But in you and through you, you restore us.

You pick us up and put our feet on solid ground. You heal our brokenness. You give us new life, identity, and purpose. I pray for those who do not know you. May they see that life is greater in knowing you.

I pray for the ones who are distant. May they come and return to you. And for the ones that know you, may they be people who are encouraging others to come to know you, to become a follower of you, and to live, learn, and love like you.

[35 : 55] Be with us today as we wrap up this sermon and as we leave this place. It is in Jesus' name that we pray and we all say together, amen.

Amen. Thank you for tuning in to the Ontario Community Church Sermon Podcast. For more about our church and how you can get involved or support our mission, please visit ontariocommunitychurch.org.

May God's blessings be with you.