

Small Group Guide



Based on Philemon

Leader Notes

- This topic may bring up political tensions. Keep the focus on our identity in Christ above all earthly identities.
- Some may have experienced deep wounds. Create space for honest sharing while maintaining appropriate boundaries.
- Emphasize that reconciliation doesn't mean ignoring wrong or enabling abuse—Paul acknowledged the wrong Onesimus did.
- Consider sharing your own struggles with division or reconciliation to model vulnerability.

Opening Prayer

Begin by asking God to open hearts and minds to understand what it means to be agents of reconciliation in a divided world.

Icebreaker

Share about a time when someone stood up for you or took responsibility for something that wasn't their fault. How did that make you feel?

Key Scripture Passages

- Philemon 17-19
- Colossians 1:19-20
- 2 Corinthians 5:18-19
- 2 Chronicles 7:14

Discussion Questions

Part 1: Understanding Reconciliation

1. Paul's Example: Paul tells Philemon to "charge it to me" regarding Onesimus's debt. What does this reveal about the cost of reconciliation? How does this mirror what Christ did for us?
2. Personal Reflection: The sermon states, "Many of us would rather lob Bibles over the wall of our gated lives without getting ourselves involved in other people's dysfunction." What does this statement mean to you? When have you been tempted to do this?
3. The Cost: The ministry of reconciliation is described as "beautiful and costly and wonderful and difficult and meaningful all at the same time." Which of these aspects is hardest for you to embrace? Why?

Part 2: Becoming Vulnerable

4. Entering Broken Places: The sermon mentions CASA volunteers and community rescue mission workers who enter into broken places and get wounded. What broken places is God calling you to enter? What fears hold you back?
5. Bearing Burdens: Paul was willing to bear the burden of someone else's sins and mistakes. When is it appropriate to do this? What are the boundaries? How do we avoid enabling bad behavior while still practicing reconciliation?

Part 3: A New Family

6. Radical Change: Paul saw Onesimus's conversion as creating a "radical" change—a slave becoming a "dear brother." What divisions in our world does Christ seek to overcome through the gospel?
7. Us vs. Them: The sermon challenges our tendency to divide people into "us" and "them." Who are the "them" in your life? How might God be calling you to see them as family?
8. Starting Here: "If it can't happen here, it's probably not a chance of it happening across national lines and everywhere else." How well does our church/small group witness to the unity and love of God's family? What could improve?

Part 4: National Identity vs. Kingdom Identity

9. First Loyalty: The sermon states that "nations and empires always want their citizens to give the nation or the empire their first loyalty." How do you see this playing out today? How can we honor our country while giving our first allegiance to Jesus?
 10. God's People Redefined: According to Paul, God's people are no longer defined by nation, language, or ethnicity, but by allegiance to King Jesus. How does this truth challenge the way you think about patriotism, politics, or national identity?
-

Key Takeaways

1. Reconciliation is costly - It requires entering broken places, becoming vulnerable, and sometimes bearing burdens that aren't ours.
 2. We have been given the ministry of reconciliation - This isn't optional for Christians; it's our calling and mission in the world.
 3. Christ creates one new family - In Jesus, all divisions (slave/free, Jew/Gentile, us/them) are overcome.
 4. It starts with us - Unity and reconciliation must begin within the church family before it can spread to the world.
 5. Our first allegiance is to King Jesus - Not to nation, political party, or any other earthly identity.
-

Practical Applications

This Week:

- Identify one broken relationship in your life where you could practice reconciliation. What first step could you take this week?
- Examine your "us vs. them" categories. Write down who you consider "them." Pray for these people daily this week, asking God to help you see them as He does.
- Practice vulnerability with someone in this group. Share a struggle or failure and allow someone to bear that burden with you.

This Month:

- Enter a broken place. Consider volunteering with CASA, a rescue mission, or another ministry that serves marginalized people.
- Have a difficult conversation with someone from a different political, social, or cultural background. Listen more than you speak. Seek to understand rather than convince.
- Evaluate your loyalties. In what areas might national or political identity be competing with your identity in Christ?

Ongoing:

- Make your life a signpost pointing to Jesus's reconciling love. Ask regularly: "Does my life witness to the unity Christ creates?"
- Invest in church family. Move beyond convenience-based relationships to genuine family connections with people who are different from you.

Closing Reflection

Read Philemon 15-16 together: *"Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother."*

Reflection Question: Who in your life needs to be seen not as they were, but as who they are becoming in Christ?

Closing Prayer

Pray together that:

- God would give you courage to enter broken places
 - Christ would heal divisions within your group and church
 - The Holy Spirit would make you agents of reconciliation
 - You would witness to the reality of one new family in Jesus
-