

Read: Philemon 1,7-21

Hard Choices

Philemon 7-17

Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the Lord's people.

Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love. I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.

I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you. I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do would not seem forced but would be voluntary. 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. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord.

So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Maggie had tears in her eyes. She was mad. Evelyn had hurt her and then left without apologizing. Maggie was so mad that she didn't even want to see Evelyn again.

Have you ever been that mad? So mad that you didn't want to see someone or talk to them again?

Now, let's say that Maggie's friend, Bethany, came over and asked Maggie to forgive Evelyn. That might be hard for Maggie—after all, Evelyn hurt Maggie. Maggie was still mad. It didn't seem fair for her to just forgive Evelyn for what she had done.

What would you do if a friend came to you and asked you to forgive the person who hurt you? It would be hard wouldn't it? Maybe you would still be mad. Maybe you would still have a feeling of wanting to get back at the other person. Maybe you wouldn't want to forgive them.

Let's change the names now. Let's pretend it is God who has tears in his eyes. He was upset because _____ (fill in your name) had hurt him—you disobeyed him, you were unloving, and you didn't even apologize. How would you want God to respond?

We know how God responds because he tells us! He forgives us! He sent his Son Jesus to die for us. That wasn't easy. Now, because of what Jesus did, God chooses not to remember all the different times and all the different ways we disobey him. He chooses to show love to us and forgive us, even when we don't deserve it!

And as his children, God calls on us to do the same. It isn't easy, in fact, it can be really hard. But sometimes, as a believer, God calls us to do the hard thing. He asks us to treat people the same way he treats us—with love and patience. He urges us to forgive others when they hurt us.

The questions below are to help families discuss this devotion. The questions are divided by age group as suggestions, but anyone could reflect on any of the questions as they desire.

Questions for the Younger Children

- When someone hurts you or is mean to you, do you want to forgive them? Why or why not?
- Think of one thing you have done today that was wrong. Say this prayer: Dear Jesus, please forgive me for _____. Thank you for your love and forgiveness. Amen.

Questions for Elementary Age Children

- Do you find it easy or hard to forgive someone? Why?
- Why do we forgive someone when they sin against us?

Questions for Middle School and Above

- Why do you think it is so hard to forgive someone who has hurt us?
- What are some things we can do when we find it hard to forgive?

Closing Prayer:

Heavenly Father, sometimes you ask me to do hard things. Thank you for forgiving me and making me your child. Help me to forgive those who hurt me. In Jesus' name. Amen.