



DEAR CHURCH PHILEMON

These letters were written by real people to other people about very real issues...and this letter is about as real as it gets. Philemon may be Paul's shortest letter, but it packs a serious punch. Paul wrote this letter to urge a man named Philemon to welcome his runaway slave back, not just as a slave, but as a brother in Christ. It has so much to teach us about what it looks like when the cross stands in the midst of all of our relationships.

Day 1 Read Philemon 1:1-25

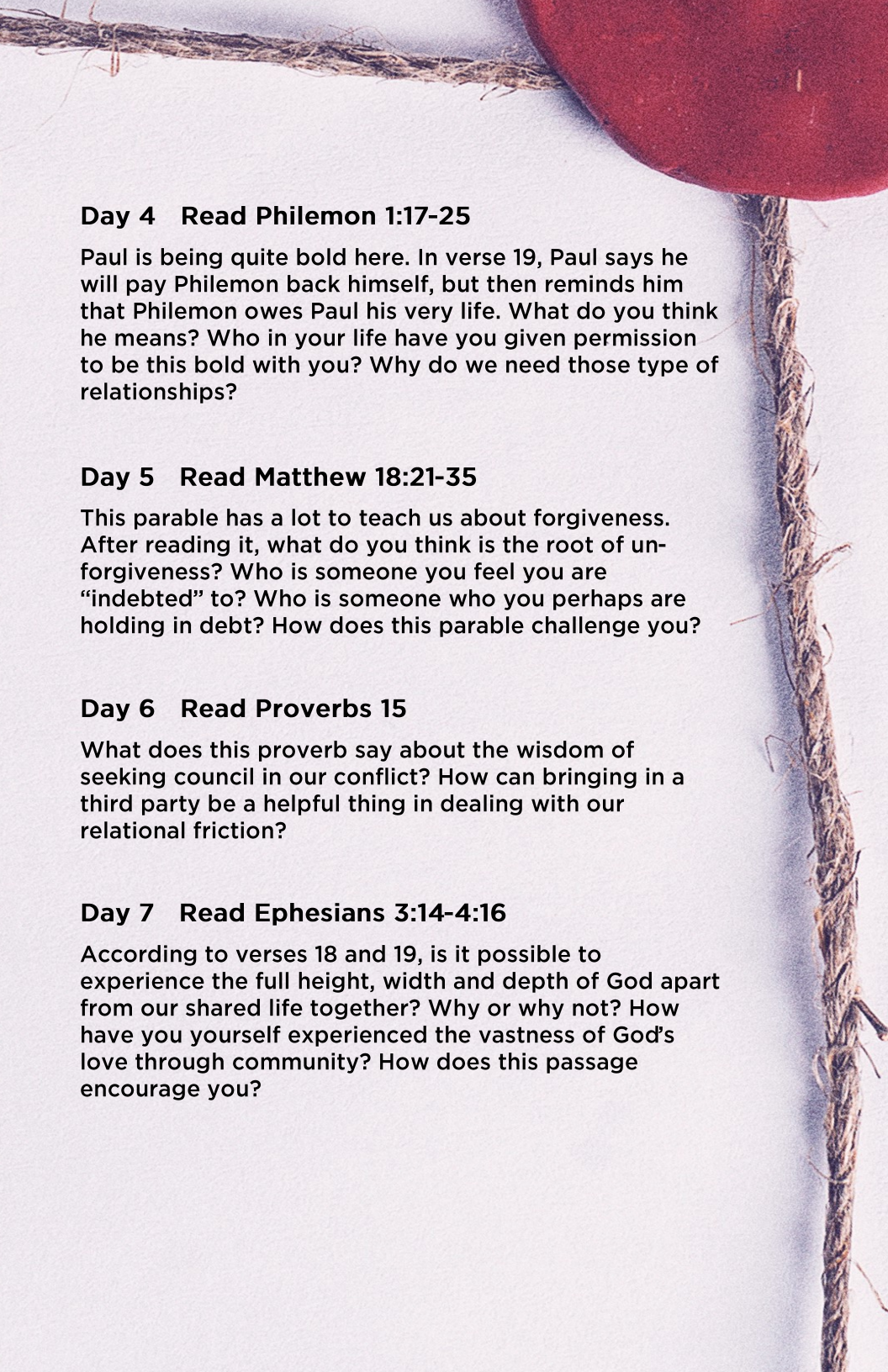
Go ahead and read the entire letter today. We will take it in small chunks for the next several days. After your initial reading, what do you find interesting about Paul's strategy in trying to convince Philemon to welcome Onesimus back as a brother? What can we learn from Paul?

Day 2 Read Philemon 1:1-7

This letter is written to Philemon, but it is addressed to an entire church (verse 2). Why is this significant? How is Paul's approach countercultural? What does this say about the type of community the church ought to be?

Day 3 Read Philemon 1:8-16

Paul doesn't mention the cross in this letter, but it is there behind all of it. Where does the way of the cross show up in this passage? Put verses 8-9 into your own words. How can we follow Paul's lead in moments when we are the ones who have the leverage or the power? How would that help bring about reconciliation?



Day 4 Read Philemon 1:17-25

Paul is being quite bold here. In verse 19, Paul says he will pay Philemon back himself, but then reminds him that Philemon owes Paul his very life. What do you think he means? Who in your life have you given permission to be this bold with you? Why do we need those type of relationships?

Day 5 Read Matthew 18:21-35

This parable has a lot to teach us about forgiveness. After reading it, what do you think is the root of unforgiveness? Who is someone you feel you are “indebted” to? Who is someone who you perhaps are holding in debt? How does this parable challenge you?

Day 6 Read Proverbs 15

What does this proverb say about the wisdom of seeking council in our conflict? How can bringing in a third party be a helpful thing in dealing with our relational friction?

Day 7 Read Ephesians 3:14-4:16

According to verses 18 and 19, is it possible to experience the full height, width and depth of God apart from our shared life together? Why or why not? How have you yourself experienced the vastness of God’s love through community? How does this passage encourage you?