

Tell the truth we live!

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[0 : 00] This morning we are focusing in on the DNA of Cornerstone, what makes us the church we are. And to look at the fourth and the final part, we're going to be looking again at the book of Philemon.

And we're going to be focusing in on verse six. And what we're going to be thinking about is sharing our faith, how we love one another and how we love those around us.

So we're going to read together the book of Philemon. So this is on your screen, as you can see. So I will read that and then we'll spend a time of thinking through the passage.

Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus and Timothy, our brother, to Philemon, our dear friend and fellow worker, also to Apphia, our sister and Archippus, our fellow soldier, and to the church that meets in your home.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, because I hear about your love for all this holy people and your faith in the Lord Jesus.

[1 : 13] I pray that your partnership with us in the faith may be effective in deepening your understanding of every good thing we share for the sake of Christ. 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. It is as none other than Paul, an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus, that 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'm in chains for the gospel. But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favour 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.

[2 : 32] 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.

If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand. I will pay it back, not to mention that you owe me your very self.

I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ. Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask.

And one thing more, prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers. Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, send you greetings.

And so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas and Luke, my fellow workers. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. So what we're going to do is we're going to take a little bit of time to reflect on what we've just read in the passage there.

[3 : 44] And to do that, we're going to be looking at this passage under the heading, Tell the Truth We Live. I'm sure each one of us has at least one utterly pointless kitchen gadget rolling around in the back of the drawer.

That banana slicer or the pizza scissors, you bought them in a moment of madness because you read the words, guaranteed or time-saving in the product description.

But yet over time, the words didn't quite match up to the reality. And in frustration, you've just put it to the back of the drawer and have chosen to forget all about it.

Some of you tuning in today may have the view that the church is an organization which is just full of hypocrites, that its words and its actions just don't match up.

And you know what? You wouldn't need to spend too much time on Google before you find plenty of evidence to kind of back this thought up. I was reading an article by The Atlantic a little while ago, and the title of the article was this.

[4 : 55] Some of the most visible Christians are failing the coronavirus test. And in it, the writer spoke on how he viewed Christian leaders as being reckless as they approached the pandemic.

And he said, As Christians, how should we respond?

Well, I think in this passage, we have the best response to this accusation. And our best response, our only response, is as Christians, is to love Jesus and others with our whole heart.

And to share with them the message and the news that Jesus offers. As we take a final look at the DNA of Cornerstone, we want to be a church family that embraces the deep love of Jesus and shares that love with others.

If you're unsure about Jesus, we want to tell you this morning about Jesus' self-giving love, which he offers to all of us unreservedly, and how this love brings inner transformation, which results in deep and lasting joy.

[6 : 41] So we're going to be looking at this letter. And we're going to focus in on one of the truths it contains. But before we start, let's quickly give ourselves a little bit of time to figure out what's going on in the background.

What is the context of this book? Well, we have Paul, one of the great church leaders of the time, and he is in prison because he has been sharing the news about Jesus.

And he's in prison in Rome. And in his prison, he is writing to his friend Philemon. Now, Philemon was another church leader. And this time he was leading a church in the city of Colossae.

The purpose of the letter, why did Paul write the letter? Well, he wrote this letter to Philemon because he wanted Philemon to offer forgiveness and acceptance to one of Philemon's slaves, Onesimus, who had stolen from Philemon and had run away and had found himself in Rome and had found himself in Paul's company and had been transformed by Jesus and was now a follower of Jesus.

And this morning, we're going to focus in on verse six, which is the midpoint of Paul's prayer of thanksgiving. And to help us kind of navigate this teaching, we're going to look at this verse under two headings.

[8 : 15] One, living in God's family and two, sharing the truth we live. And so, as you know, we shared a Thursday thought at Cornerstone.

And the Thursday thought for this week is this. Tell the truth we live. First of all, living in God's family. Every family has its own unique flavour, its own unique set of rules and ways of being, which set it apart from the folks next door.

Our streets are made up of the range of family dynamics, which reflect everything from the stiff upper lips of the Trolleys, the roguish, trotter enterprises, to the chaotic and topsy-turvy world of the Simpsons, and hiding away quietly somewhere are the Waltons.

And you know what? God's family is the same. The unique DNA of God's family. What makes them unique is that they enjoy having the person of Jesus Christ at the very centre of family life.

Jesus' centrality orientates each member towards a life of self-giving love that is perfectly exemplified in Jesus.

[9 : 28] And it's to this common sharing of faith in Jesus that verse 6 is pointing us toward. When Paul prays that Philemon would be active in sharing your faith, he is referring to the fellowship, the communion in Jesus that all Christians have with one another.

How all Christians have this interchange of heart with one another. His prayer, Paul's prayer, is that the shared experience of faith in Jesus would become a dynamic force that constantly feeds their understanding and makes them aware as family members of how great a love Jesus has for them, and how this love fuels a deep desire within them to demonstrate and to share this love with others.

However, the reality of church family life can seem at times to be far removed from the dynamic force of Jesus' great love, which Paul urges us all to demonstrate it.

Conflict and division, feuds and disputes exist and persist. And it can often be a genuine struggle to enjoy the unifying and self-giving love of Jesus within our own church family.

But, you know, the very reason why this letter was written is that demonstrating the self-giving, generous and unifying love of Jesus is really, really tough.

[11 : 13] That is our ambition, but we will never get there until we are perfected in eternity. And so what I'm going to invite you to do for a moment is this.

Imagine you are Philemon and you're reading this letter. You have a friend urging you to have a complete rethink on how you should view Onesimus, the slave who stole from you and ran away.

You and your rich and influential friends naturally want to make an example of Onesimus, but you're being urged to put aside your anger and you're being asked to let go of pride and you're being invited to replace all these feelings of anger and hurt and you're being asked to let go of pride and you're being asked to let go of pride.

A feeling of deep love for Onesimus. A love that will be so powerful and so deep that you will be calling him brother and enjoying having him as your brother.

From now on in, Philemon, when Onesimus hurts, you will hurt. When Onesimus succeeds, you will rejoice in that. Paul is naive.

[12 : 32] He knows that this is really hard. That's why he needs to send a letter with Onesimus and also a chaperone, because Philemon is going to struggle to believe this and to accept Onesimus as a brother.

It can be hard to love our church family with the depth of love that Paul urges Philemon to show. For some of us, it's hard because we may have unwittingly adopted the highly individualistic outlook of our society.

We have contented ourselves in enjoying those who we find enjoyable. And we keep at arm's reach those we find a bit awkward. Not that we're outwardly mean, but you know, they've got their own friends.

Or could it be that sometimes we assume that love is about what we do for one another and have lost sight that it's also about feeling love for one another.

Sometimes doing love is easy, as it's a task that we can just get through. And as long as we can tick it off, we can satisfy ourselves with a job well done.

[13 : 46] However, this love isn't fuelled by Jesus. This love demands that we muster up our own energy to get it done.

And if we do love in our own strength, our strength will one day be sacked. And so we can start off well, but sometimes the love that we have for one another begins to diminish and begins to slow down.

And we notice over time that we are increasingly doing just what suits us. We do love, which is to be commended.

But to unlock the depth of the love that Paul writes about, we need to feel love for one another. When we start feeling love, we respond in compassion.

We respond by moving towards others and we take steps to love them. This deep, compassionate love, which has at its heart Jesus, is fuelled by God's spirit.

[14 : 54] And his work within us gives us the strength to keep going, to keep sharing, to keep loving. This feeling of love towards one another within their church family is like those times we are moved by the love we have for those that we have this deep emotional connection with.

When you see a friend suffer, it hurts because there's a deep emotional connection there. When you see your child or your sibling going through hard times, it hurts because there is a deep emotional bond.

When you see a friend succeed, you rejoice with them. You want to move towards them and say, well done, because of that deep emotional bond.

And that is the kind of emotional bond which Paul is urging Philemon to have for Onesimus and what Paul is urging us as Christians to have with one another.

Paul wrote many letters and in another letter he wrote, and this letter was to the church in Rome, he writes these words. Rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn.

[16 : 13] As a church family, our ambition is to move towards others with an increasing depth of love and emotional connection with one another.

When we see hurt and pain in our church family, we want to move towards to bring comfort. When we see joy, we want to move forward to celebrate with them.

When we see anxiety, we want to move forward to offer assurances. When we see success, we want to move forward to offer congratulations.

And this is such everyday things we can do. There's so many different little things we can do every day to express this. When you're on the next Zoom call, you know, what we do is we try and draw out the person who's new to the group.

Because you're moved by compassion to ensure that they don't feel awkward and left out, but that they feel comfortable and they feel like a valued member of the group.

[17 : 21] Over Christmas time, we are moved by compassion towards our city group. And so we write them a card, we write them a letter to express the deep thankfulness and deep joy that they have brought us over the last year.

Paul is urging Philemon and us to be a church that demonstrates the love of Jesus to one another in increasing depth, reaching out in compassion and being there for each other.

So that's the first thing, to act in love like Jesus, to have this compassion for others, to have this deep emotional bond with one another.

And what we must then do is we mustn't keep it to ourselves, but we must share the truth that we live out amongst our church family and as we live out amongst our friends and neighbours and colleagues.

Many will accuse the church of hypocrisy. Many say, and it's the most common reason people give for not engaging with the church.

[18 : 38] They say that the church says one thing and does another. But you know what, as a church family, we don't need to put ourselves under pressure to be perfect, to live perfect lives.

That is not the opposite of hypocrisy. But what we need to do is to live authentic lives. Authenticity is the opposite of hypocrisy.

The authentic Christian life is the one which seeks to increasingly model the deep and binding love of Jesus. And we want to vocalise this story of transforming love.

We will want to share it as it is the greatest story. It is the one story on earth which has eternal consequences for all of our lives.

And so we share Jesus' story with others as we want more people to come in and enjoy the new life which is offered in Jesus.

[19 : 44] But how do we do this? How can we go about sharing the truth that we live? The first thing we must do, though, is we must pray.

We must pray that we will love our colleagues, neighbours and friends like Jesus. Jesus was compassionate. He wept over the people of Jerusalem.

He saw that they lacked the life-giving relationship which God offered and it deeply impacted him. We cannot be we cannot afford to be apathetic to those around us.

And so we pray for help to love others well. We pray daily that our friends see the beauty of Jesus and the beauty of living life in his family.

But you know, the second thing that's going to help us move towards others to share the story of Jesus is the gospel itself, the good news itself.

[20 : 48] The good news should be this wonderful, joyful energy within us which moves us out with the story of Jesus.

This dynamic energy comes by recalling that the story of Philemon Onesimus is also our story. And it's the story that we want to share with you today if you are sceptical or if you have not yet received Jesus as your own Lord and King.

This morning we love to share with you what Jesus has done and what Jesus is doing. Christ's love, Jesus' love is a lot like that of Philemon.

And we are like Onesimus in the story. As Onesimus, or as the Onesimai, we have a broken and failed relationship with God.

And we cannot bring anything to God to fix the broken relationship. We cannot pay him back. We cannot even work our way back into his favour.

[21 : 56] Rather, we come as we are. We come on the basis that we know that God is merciful, kind and loving, and that the runaways are warmly welcomed into the family of God.

As Christians, we enter the public sphere with a humble attitude. And we let our colleagues, neighbours, and friends know that our belief in Jesus is central to who we are and to everything we do.

The way we think through the challenges of life. The way we make our everyday decisions. The way we interact with our family and friends. The way we give to others. It is all centred on Jesus.

Jesus is the centre point of our life. And as we go about our life amongst friends and colleagues and neighbours, Jesus wants us to be straightforward and natural in sharing who we are and what we're passionate about.

And as we share life with others, the fact that we are shaped by our Christian faith will naturally become apparent and should create opportunities to share with others. I often remember when I was used to be working in school that my colleagues would be amazed at the rhythms of my everyday life.

[23 : 27] They would be amazed that I would sometimes have a city group round and that ten of us would be having a meal together and reading the Bible together and praying for one another.

They really just thought that was an amazing event and it felt so good to them and felt real and authentic and something that they would love in a way to be part of.

But what amazed them even more was when they found out that the church provided meals for two weeks after Annie was born. They couldn't believe how generous people were.

And it was just through the telling of these everyday events, you know, like a church family member came round with a meal last night and it just opened up lots of corridors of opportunity to speak about the love of Jesus, about how Jesus motivated friends and family, how Jesus kind of transformed the way I thought and I conducted my life.

And so sometimes I think we overcomplicate how we share the faith. But I think if we just get back to just simply telling the story of our everyday life and to explain how Jesus fits into the everyday, I think that's a really powerful way for us to share the gospel in an authentic and genuine way.

[24 : 52] So, in conclusion, we share our faith in ourselves with those around us in order to love them well and in order that they too may come and find that the most enjoyable and satisfying life is found in God's family.

Thank you.