When Obedience Takes Courage

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[0:00] So what I'm going to do very briefly, believe it or not, is give you a quick review of Colossians because we're coming toward the end.! We only have three or four more sermons. I just wrote the rest of the year plan out and I can't remember.

But we've got three or four more sermons after this one looking at the book of Colossians. So we're almost done. One of the themes of the book of Colossians is mystery.
At the end of chapter 1, Paul says that the mystery is revealed. That's Christ in you, the hope of glory. We're going to talk more about that this morning. But mystery is more than just that answer.
If we're honest, we realize that most of life is filled with mystery. We just don't know why things happen the way they do. We don't know why bad things happen to good people.
One of the best-selling books of the 70s, the entire decade, was a book that was written to address that question. Why do bad things happen to good people? Then on the other side, we wonder, why do good things happen to bad people?
[1:09] Where's the justice in that? Life's a mystery. Why do we get blindsided by things right when it seems like it's the worst possible time? And yet that happens.

I can tell you from personal, very recent experience, that's exactly what happens. We just don't know. Life is a mystery. We've talked about this. I've mentioned it as a recurring theme in my preaching and just in my counseling people and talking to people.
There are three truths that we have to hold on to. One is that life is hard. Life is tough. Our bodies break down. I was just talking to Emily.
It's her birthday today. She's eight. I said, look at you. You're already falling apart, sweetheart. You're losing your teeth. What's next? But those of us who are older know, she thinks I'm joking. That's life. Life is hard. And then we get blindsided by the unexpected. Life is hard. But there's another truth that life is an adventure. Life is discovery.
[2:13] Life is facing challenges to do good things. And that makes it hard as well. And what gives us hope is it's all rooted in our relationship with Jesus Christ.

We can face the hard things. We can face the adventure of the challenges of fulfilling the calling that God has given us rooted in our relationship with Jesus Christ.
I would actually say that apart from that relationship, it's hopeless. It's hopeless. That was one of the tragedies of spending eight days in the ICU.
We went from being the first person there to being the longest tenured member of the ICU, as far as I know. And we saw people filled with hope who knew Jesus.
But we met quite a few who were in despair as they faced a loved one stuck in a bed. No hope. But we have hope.
[3:17] We have hope. The mystery of life, the answer to those mysteries, what unravels them and solves them, is revealed in Jesus Christ. The mystery is this, Christ in you, the hope of glory.

If you've put your trust in Christ as your Lord and Savior, you have the answer. And we're going to look at that this morning in the story of Onesimus. It is so cool to see very tangibly in a very real, real life experience of this first century man, seeing the gospel play out.
There's something I was thinking about the other day, getting ready for this sermon. One of the mistakes that the evangelical church made in the 70s and 80s, probably going back a little bit sooner than that, was we taught that the gospel was all about what happens to you when you die. Didn't talk much about today, but we talked about what happens when you die. The frequent question from an evangelist was, if you were to die today, where would you go? Many of us came to Christ because of that question.

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But the problem is, the flaw in that thinking is we lose sight of the fact that the gospel isn't just about what happens on the other side of death's door. The gospel has impact today on the trials that we're facing today, on the challenges that are presented by our pursuit of God's calling in our life. [4:48] Those are addressed today. And that's what we're going to see in the life of Onesimus, is that Christ in you, the hope of glory, is not just glory, I have a transformed body, I'm made like Christ after I die, or after He returns.

Christ is in me now. And glory is promised now, in this life as well as life to come. That's the whole gospel, and that's what we're going to talk about this morning.
Now as we went through Colossians, Paul was looking at two different ways that people addressed the mysteries of life. The book of Colossians was written specifically to address this rising cult of Gnosticism.
Gnosticism was just one way that men were trying to figure out, how do we solve the problems of life? And what they believed was that the material world was bad, that God was up in heaven and really didn't like us, was a distant tyrant that we had to please in order to get into His presence.
It sounds a lot like the gods of the Greeks and the Romans and the Mesopotamians. It's not a God that's of love by any means. And so what they believed is you've got to deny yourself.
[6:07] You've got to keep certain holidays. You have to eat certain foods and not eat other foods. You've got to pray in a certain way. You've got to engage angelic help to storm the gates of heaven in order to earn an audience with this God who wants nothing to do with you.

And if you prove worthy, maybe you'll get that audience. It's depressing. It gets worse because they believe that most people didn't attain to it.
And so there were a few gurus who mastered that highest level of spirituality and the rest of us, the rank and file, were just left going to them and asking for their help to intercede for us to get into the presence of God.
Remember we talked about chapter 2. Paul really develops that. And where chapter 2 ends is rules have no benefit to change our behavior. They just don't work.
We can stack up rules all day long and we're still going to just break them. Rules don't change us where we need to be changed. And fundamentally, deep down, we know that to be true. Rules don't work.
[7:14] So what Paul offers is the alternative to that false way of solving the mystery of life. That alternative, Christ in you, the hope of glory, is becoming a mature man in Christ.

In chapter 1 of Colossians, Paul says, That's the goal.
Our mission statement says we exist to glorify God. Walking closely with Him, striving together to become more like Jesus every day. Why does that matter?
Because in becoming more like Jesus, we are able to take a hold of the means that God has provided to solve the mysteries of life. To address hardship and trial and challenge and live the life that we're supposed to live in the way that He intended.
We're going to see that unpacked very practically in the life of Onesimus. I'm really excited to bring this to you because it's really cool. So open your Bibles to Colossians chapter 4.
[8:40] And I'm going to read verses 7 through 18. But we're only going to do 7, 8, and 9. I used to have a friend who was a pastor who would tell people, if he was preaching, if he had to read a long quote or read a long stretch of the Bible, he'd say, pay attention.

You're going to fall asleep. Don't fall asleep. Listen. Pay attention. So hone in on what's being said here. Colossians 4, starting at verse 7. As to all my affairs, Tychicus, our beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bondservant in the Lord, will bring you information.
So he's telling the Colossians about this man that's delivered the letter. For I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts.
And with him, Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your number. They will inform you about the whole situation here. Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings. And also Barnabas, cousin Mark, about whom you received instructions. If he comes to you, welcome him. And also Jesus, who is called Justice, these are the only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are from the circumcision.
[9:56] They're the only ones who are Jews. And they have proved to be an encouragement to me. Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bond slave of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings,

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always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God.

For I testify for him that he has deep concern for you and for those who are in Laodicea in Heropolis. Luke, the beloved physician, sends you his greetings and also Demas.
Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha in the church that is in her house. When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans, and you, for your part, read my letter that is coming from Laodicea.
Say to Archippus, take heed to the ministry which you have received in the Lord, that you may fulfill it. I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my imprisonment.
Grace be with you. Let's pray. God, I love how you've put together the book of Colossians and the way Paul wrote.
[11:06] God, that you deal with deep theology and then you tell us how to live out of our identity of being followers of Jesus. And then you show us specifically what that looks like.

God, you know that we need different ways to learn. And you give us each different pathway to get a better understanding of what you have for us. Lord, I pray for us this morning that as we look at the life of Onesimus and the challenges that he faced, that we would see ourselves in him, that we would take hope, and that we would follow his example.
God, we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. So the reason I read that entire passage is that Paul, I think in every one of his letters, I could be wrong because I didn't check it as thoroughly as I should, but I'm pretty sure in every letter, Paul ends with a list of names.
A few months ago, Tim did a sermon on those names. And if you're like me, that's like reading the phone book. That's nice. Big deal. I'm sure those people cared, but why do I care?
I don't have any idea who they were. And honestly, who even knows how to pronounce their names? Tell you a little secret. If anybody ever asks you to read out of the Bible and you come across a name, don't sound it out.
[12:22] Greek is a dead language. Nobody knows how it's pronounced. So the secret is you square your shoulders, look people in the eye, and just pronounce it however you want. Who's going to tell you you're wrong?

Maybe some seminary professor, but he has nothing to stand on. It's a dead language. Don't worry about it. So why do I care? Because in those names, this is what I discovered in preparing this message, in those names is woven actual tangible application of what Paul was writing in the first part of the book.
If we take the time to look at these men and women, we discover, oh, Paul's still speaking to me. He's just using a different medium.
Now he's using these people's lives. So we want to look at it from that perspective. Now the theme that's woven through Colossians 4, 7 through 18, is a word that Paul sent to Timothy, who he had sent to appoint elders in churches that had been planted during earlier missionary journeys.
2 Timothy 2, 1 through 2. Just read it on the screen and listen. You, therefore, my son, so Paul is writing to Timothy, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.
[13:43] Now this next sentence is lived out in Colossians 4. The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

Do you know why you're a Christian today? Yes, Jesus called you. Yes, somebody shared the gospel with you. Yes, you responded. But ultimately, do you know why you're a Christian today? Why it was possible for you to get the message of the gospel delivered accurately 2,000 years plus after Jesus died?
Because an unbroken chain from you all the way back to Jesus Christ, of men and women who obeyed this.
The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust, entrust. We're looking for faithful people who can share it. Entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.
[14:51] And so on and so on and so on and so on. And so it goes. I got saved at 14. People you've never heard of. Steve Reinhardt.

John Peckham. Bob Larson. Dan Faulkner. Paul Sapp. Took this young, fiery Christian who didn't know anything and taught me the Bible.

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They taught me how to teach the Bible. They corrected me when I was wrong. They entrusted me with a message. They gave me opportunity to share what I learned.
And they taught me and refined it. Really, you're beneficiaries of their work in my life. That's an example. And that's what we see in Colossians chapter 4.
You don't know these people. You'll meet them in heaven. But they've impacted your life. And if I was writing a letter, their names would be there. That's the theme that we're going to see as we look at Onesimus.
[16:04] And because we're looking at Onesimus, we'll be looking at Philemon. And these other names, as we unpack it over the next couple or three weeks, you're going to see this passage, this command to Timothy lived out.

Because Paul practiced what he preached. And we want to be people of the same note. So keep that in mind. 2 Timothy 2, 1 through 2. That's essential to our core value of making disciples.
That's how it's done. So let's talk about the story. We're going to talk about three people. I feel kind of bad, but time is limited. So I'm not going to talk about Tychicus at all. Other than to say, look at how Paul describes him.
Beloved brother. Faithful servant. Fellow bond servant. This is a man that Paul clearly trusted. Trusted him with this letter and the letter to Laodicea and the letter to Hierapolis and sent him to those places as a messenger to make sure that that message was faithfully delivered.
That's all you're going to get on Tychicus. You want to know more? Look him up. Because Onesimus is captivating. So the story of Onesimus has three characters.
[17:13] Onesimus himself, Philemon, and Paul. And I'm going to unpack each of those so you see how their lives intertwine. So first we're going to talk about Onesimus.

What we know from the book of Philemon is that Onesimus was a slave. He belonged to Philemon and he ran away. There's several different views about how Onesimus came to meet Paul.
The view that I hold is that he was a fugitive. He didn't like Philemon, didn't like being a slave, so he ran away. And if you're from a small town, we know Colossae was a small town, the best place to hide if you're a fugitive is a big city, which would be Ephesus.
But Onesimus was on the run. Because slaves belong to somebody. And Roman law required that if you found a slave who was on the run, you were bound by law to return that slave to his master. You couldn't aid and abet a slave. The Romans did frown very much on allowing slaves to be free unless there was a due process.
[18:25] So Onesimus is on the run. He was a slave. He's a runaway. He's a fugitive. He's always looking over his shoulder. Now you think, today, a fugitive's really got a hard road.

There's cameras everywhere. If you've watched any crime show at all on TV, you know that the ATM machine across the street, or the camera on a traffic light, or even someone else's cell phone could get your picture, and boom, you're busted.
It's hard to be a fugitive in the 21st century. Well, don't think it was any easier in the 1st century. As a fugitive, and you're going to find this out in a few minutes, you're on the risk of running into somebody you know.
Who says, dude, what are you doing in Ephesus? Does Philemon know you're here? And so you're living in constant fear of being exposed. And you never know who to trust.
Because you just don't know. Does this person know somebody who knows Philemon? Have they heard about me? And so you're always in fear. It's a horrible way to live.
[19:32] You're lost. At this point in the story, Onesimus is not only lost in the sense that he is unmoored. He has no community. He's away from everywhere he's ever been.

But he's lost in the spiritual sense. He hasn't met Jesus yet. So that's Onesimus. Our other character is Philemon. Philemon. We know Philemon was wealthy because he was a slave owner. It says in the book of Philemon that he was wealthy enough that he had a big enough home that a house church met in his home later in the story. So he's wealthy. He's a slave owner.
He's well-traveled. Paul said in Colossians that he had never met most of the recipients of his letter. But when we get to Philemon here in a few minutes, you're going to see that he knew Philemon well.
He loved Philemon. So it's logical to assume that if Paul didn't go to Philemon, Philemon probably came to Paul. He's wealthy. Maybe he did business in Ephesus.

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[20:33] Maybe he was looking for a runaway slave in Ephesus. Regardless of the reason that he was in Ephesus, ultimately because he too was lost, he met Paul, the third character of our story.

Now we all know Paul, the apostle, the missionary, the evangelist, the disciple maker. Paul was in Ephesus as part of the third missionary journey.
This is in Acts chapter 19. He was there and God did amazing work. There was a revival that happened. And while he was there, people came flocking to Christ, caused a riot.
Christianity does that sometimes. We're following the Lord. But God was moving in Ephesus. To such a degree, it says in Acts 4.19, you can just listen to this.
This took place for two years, so Paul's in Ephesus, so that all who lived in Asia, look at a map sometime. Asia's huge. All who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks, from Ephesus.
[21:50] And so Philemon goes to Ephesus, blah, easy for me to say, Ephesus, and meets Paul. And comes to Christ.

Onesimus meets Paul. And comes to Christ. And then it gets complicated. As life does. So Philemon, he goes to Ephesus, he hears the gospel, he accepts Jesus' offer of salvation, and he becomes a disciple of Paul.
We don't know how long he was in Ephesus. But it was long enough for him to learn some core truths. To understand what the gospel meant for him. Enough that he would go home and start a church in his home.
He was a transformed man. Onesimus, hiding it on the run, somehow comes across Paul. Here's the gospel. Accepts Jesus.
Becomes a disciple of Paul. I kind of think there was a gap. I don't think it was simultaneous. But he's also discipled. He learns what it means to walk with Jesus and to be transformed into the likeness of Jesus.
[23:05] So Paul's discipled Philemon. Paul has discipled Onesimus. Can you imagine the day that Paul goes, wait a minute. Philemon was looking for a fugitive slave.

Onesimus is... Look at that. We're going to talk about divine appointments in a few minutes. Look how God works. So these men are brought together.
But they don't cross paths yet. Paul meets Philemon. Paul meets Onesimus. But they're separate. To understand what happens.
What's going on here. To take the next step in the story. I want you to listen very carefully. The words are going to be up on the screen. But I want you to listen. Because this is an even longer passage.
But listen carefully. Not to the words necessarily themselves. But to what Paul... The tone that Paul uses. When he speaks to Philemon. Listen to what he says to Philemon.
[24:16] About Philemon himself. Paul, prisoner of Christ Jesus. Timothy, our dear friend. To our fellow worker.

To... To...
To... To... To... To... To... To... To... To... To... God, our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. Always thank my God as I remember you from my prayers, because I hear about the faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for the saints.
I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding, a very good thing we have. Your love has given the great joy and encouraged you, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints.
Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold in order you to do what you ought to do, yet I appeal to you on the basis of life.
[25:29] I, then as Paul, as an old man, now also prisoner of Christ Jesus, I appeal to you for my son, Onesos, who became my son while I was in Shugis.

Poorly he was useless to you, but now he has become a useful hope to you and to me. I am sending him, who is my very heart, back to you.
I would have light to keep him with me, so that he could take your face and help me, while I am in chance for the gospel. I do not want to do anything without consent, so that a favor you do will be spontaneous.

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Of course. Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back, for good, no longer as a slave, but better, very dear, and better, better than a slave, as a dear brother.
He is very dear to me, but even and dear to you, both as a man, and as a brother in the Lord. So if you considered me on the heart, and you are welcome again, as you have welcomed me.
[26:43] He has done you any wrong, or owes you anything, charge it to me. I fall in writing this with my own hands. I will pay it back, not to mention that you owe me your very self.

I do wish, brother, that I may house and benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ. Confidence of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask.
One thing more, prepare a guesting for me, because I hope to be restored to you, in answer to your prayers. Bethelus, my fellow prisoner in Christ, Jesus, thanks his greeting, also Mark, and Eris Sarvis, him as, and both my fellow workers, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.
Be with you. Thanks, Jim. Did you catch the language? This is, this, Paul's daughters to the Thessalonians are pretty tender, but this, is a whole other level.
You can tell, Paul invested his life in Philemon, he loved that man. He trusted him, he respected him, they had a deep friendship.
[28:09] Then look at how he describes Onesimus, my son. He describes him as, as his beloved. What a gift. He's a faithful and beloved brother.

Do you see the tone? There's, there's some themes here that we're going to, that we're going to explore, and then we're going to wrap up the story. The first of the themes that comes through the story is redemption.
Both men got saved. They came to Christ. I love the word redemption, because in Onesimus' case, it's not just metaphorical.
Theologians use the word redemption metaphorically. We've talked about that in the past. My sin, my, I have been bought out of bondage to sin, slavery to sin, through Jesus' death on the cross. That's redemption. That's a metaphor. Therefore, Onesimus and Philemon experienced that, but you're going to see Onesimus experiences literal redemption. He is taken from bondage as a slave to freedom.
[29:19] That's our experience in Christ. Redemption. Paul wrote in Romans 8, 28, all things work together for good for those who love God, for those who love God and are called according to his purpose.

That's redemption. He takes the messy things of our lives and creates things that are beautiful out of them. That's redemption. That's what we see here going on with these two men.
Onesimus is freed from slavery. That's redemption. Philemon has the opportunity to be on the other side of redemption, paying a price. He's losing an asset.
If he sets Onesimus free, he's short a slave. Redemption. The other one is friendship. Did you catch that in the book of Philemon? You can tell your friends that you read the entire book of the Bible. Actually, Jim read it, but you participated. But did you catch this wasn't just a boss writing to an employee. There was tenderness and emotion and friendship.
[30:25] I was thinking as Jim was reading, there was audacity. I expect you to set him free. Count his debts against me. And oh, by the way, you owe me your very soul, my brother.

That's audacity. Oh, by the way, make a bed for me. And he just assumes that Philemon is praying for him. That's friendship. That's true friendship. That's what the body of Christ should have.
That's what we should have together, is that level of friendship, that we can make audacious requests, nervy requests, without the other person saying, well, who do you think you are?
Instead we say, of course. It's my pleasure. That's the type of friendship that he's talking about.
There's a deep friendship between Philemon and Paul.
There's an equal friendship between Onesimus and Paul. I'll just say this real briefly. You know I'm manic about discipleship. Discipleship being the process of following Jesus.
[31:31] Discipleship and friendship are inextricably linked. You can't disciple somebody who's not your friend. You may not start as friends, but you're going to land there.

Which is the way it works. And that's what we see in the lives of these men. We see discipleship taking place. Paul is living out that command that he gave to Timothy to entrust to faithful men the message that he had received.

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We see discipleship happening. And it's discipleship that isn't just passing on knowledge and information, but it's discipleship with its shoes on.
It's being put to work. It's being put to action. We're going to talk about that here in just a minute. These men are challenged to act out of their new identities in Christ. There's community. This letter was not sent to Philemon's mailbox, and he read it in his office by himself.
Tychicus had specific instructions that are actually reflected in the letter of Philemon itself. Read this publicly, because we do these things in community.
[32:35] Number one, there's pressure on Philemon. It's a little bit. What are you going to do, Philemon? The rest of the church is wondering. But I think there's also another element. There's social pressure, yes, but there's also a sense of everybody knew Onesimus.

It's a small town. They knew Philemon. What Paul was saying through this letter to Philemon, church, you've got to welcome this guy into a different type of relationship.
You've got to welcome him as an equal into the community. He's not Philemon's slave. He's your brother. So we see community. We see redemption. We see friendship. We see discipleship or apprenticeship taking place.
We see community. We see community. We see Paul immersed in a community of friends. If you read the book of Acts, one thing becomes very obvious very quickly.
Paul didn't travel by himself. Luke was along for the ride. Silas was along for the ride. Or they went, it sounds like they're all hanging on to Paul. They were working together. But you had Barnabas, John Mark, Silas, Timothy, Luke.
[33:46] You go on and on. All these guys that he lists in writing to the Colossians. Paul didn't live life alone. He was in community all the time.

That's the life that we're called to live. The church should be like a small town in a good way.
And this is un-American in the 21st century. We should be in each other's business. Seriously. We should be in each other's business. Not, oh, did you hear what happened?
Did you hear what they did? No, not like that. But in the sense that you collectively, have been in my business. If I had said no, and trust me, it's tempting.
I'm a self-sufficient, independent guy who's got pride. But if I had said no, Kara and I would be in a serious world of hurt right now.
[34:49] This is an area where God's working on me. He's been teaching me to say yes. We need to say yes to each other, to offer us of help.

We need to be unoffended when people ask us personal questions. Because they care. That's what Paul is talking about.
That's the community of faith. We're a small town that we're totally invested in each other's well-being, in each other's success. That's echoed in 1 Corinthians 12.
When one rejoices, we all rejoice. In Romans 12. Same exact concept. We should celebrate with Emily that it's her birthday.
We should celebrate the good things that we experience. A clean bill of health for Jim. All these things. Progress for Kara.
[35:52] Promotions. Kids who are being successful. A promotion at work. We should share these things with each other because we're excited. And we're excited for the person.

Or we're mourning with the person and we're shouldering the burden with them. That is a community of faith. That's what God has.
So let's talk about the rest of the story. What happened? The Bible doesn't tell us. Don't you hate cliffhangers? Did Philemon release Onesimus?
Did he throw him in jail? What happened next? Where'd he go? What happened to the church in Colossae? We actually don't know that one either. God, why don't you tell us? Well, there are hints. Tradition tells us that from the end of the first century into the second, from the end of the first century into the second, there was a leader in the Ephesian church named Onesimus.
[37:01] What do we conclude? He was free. He was free. He wasn't in Colossae anymore. He was in Ephesus. He was set free.

He was able to travel. He grew. He became a leader in the church. He blessed other people. He continued to live out the 2 Timothy 2.2 command as he developed people and introduced them to Jesus and helped people walk more closely with Jesus.

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That's the rest of the story. Now, as we round the corner and wrap up the sermon, I want to bring this home. So I've alluded, I mentioned this earlier when I was doing the announcement. Colossians 1, 11, and 12 has become a core passage for Kara and I. She's struggling to read right now, so we have a ritual every morning where I go, we talk about this verse because I want to cement it in her head.
I'm going to read it to you first in the New American Standard. That's a mouthful.
[38:26] There is so much rich, deep truth in there. You should meditate on it. Think about it. Look at it through the lens of trials and tribulations you're facing or people you know are facing.

But I'm going to make it easier for you. I'm going to read it again out of the message. This paraphrase is a home run. And this is what Kara and I go through every day.
We pray that you'll have the strength to stick it out for the long haul. Not the grim strength of gritting your teeth, but the glory strength that God gives.
Listen to this. It is strength that endures the unendurable and spills over into joy. thanking the Father who makes us strong enough to take part in everything bright and beautiful that he has for us.
Thanking the Father who makes us strong enough to take part in everything bright and beautiful that he has for us. Let me explain what that means because that's actually a theme in Paul's writing. That we are being made strong enough to handle the presence of God.
[39:48] We're being made strong enough to walk the path that God has for us. He's making us something so that we can handle what comes next all the way into eternity.

Let's go back to Onesimus and Philemon. So Philemon was discipled by Paul. Sent home. Onesimus gets saved. He's discipled by Paul.
Paul connects the dots and realizes, oh, oh, you're that Onesimus. Brother, we got to talk about something. Onesimus, you're here based on a lie.
You're not a free man. You're a slave. And worse than a slave, you're a fugitive. And my brother, my son, this is Paul speaking, we got to do something about that.
Because I know something you don't know. Your master, the one that has first claim on your life, actually isn't Jesus.
[40:54] It's Philemon. He's your brother. Can you imagine Onesimus? Uh-oh. I don't want to have this conversation.

I don't want to go back. I don't want to face the music. I don't want to pay the penalty. But Paul, being a faithful disciple-maker, being a faithful friend, speaks truth.
Brother, you have got to close this loop. You have to make this right. And you're going to have to trust me. You're going to have to trust the work of God in the life of Philemon that you can take this risk of obedience to get to the other side.
because if you don't, you're still a fugitive. Now, you're going to heaven, but you're going to be on the run for the rest of your life. And by the way, now I have obligations because as a Roman citizen, I'm supposed to turn you in.
That's the law. We've got to close this loop. talk about risk. So when Paul says, think of the Father who makes us strong enough, that's not metaphor.
[42:13] That's literal. It's literal. God is at work in you to give you the strength to face the hard things that you've got to face. To have the conversation that you have to have.

To set aside the sin that you really like. It takes strength and courage because it's scary. It's terrifying in some cases.
We don't want to do it. But Onesimus does. How do we know? Colossians 4, verse 9. I'm sending Onesimus to you with Tychicus.
He's actually carrying a second letter. So, Onesimus gained the strength he needed, took the risk of obedience, and trust me, obedience takes risk.
If you haven't experienced that and you're following of Jesus yet, just wait. It's coming. Obedience to the Lord takes risk. But when you step into that risk, God is working in you to build strength.
[43:16] And what comes next? Thanking the Father who makes us strong enough to take part in everything bright and beautiful that he has for us.

That's not just heaven. What do we know, or think we know, about the life of Onesimus? He went on to be a godly, influential man in the center, one of the central hubs of the spread of the gospel through the known world.

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The slave experienced light and beauty because he obeyed, because he exercised courage, because he accessed the strength that was available to him because of his relationship with Christ. That is what I've been learning over the last two and a half weeks. As you face trials, as you face challenges, and you're afraid, go back to Onesimus.
Take the risk of obedience because God is working in you to create the strength, to give you the ability to get to the other side, to all things bright and beautiful that he has for you.
[44:52] It's there on the other side of obedience, of following Jesus. That's the lesson of Onesimus. And that's why we need to pay more attention to the list of names at the end of a book.

Let's pray together. God, it's breathtaking to me the way that you work all things together for good, the way you bring people together, the way you orchestrate connections, to not just fulfill your big glorious plan, but also your plan in each of our little lives.
God, you brought together Paul and Philemon and Onesimus, and together they discovered a whole new depth of relationship with you and life in you.
God, I pray for each of us that we would experience that same courage, that we would draw strength from you to face risk with courage, to discover all things bright and beautiful that you have for us because we trust you, Lord.
We trust that you do have good things for us. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

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