

Gospel Bridges by Adam Hofer

As Paul was under house arrest in Rome at the end of his ministry, he met a man named Onesimus. He was like most Paul encountered in his journeys. He was lost, broken, and seeking purpose in life. In the days ahead, Paul grew close to Onesimus. As Onesimus grew in Christ, he spent much time and effort helping Paul with his ministry work as Paul was imprisoned in his home. However, Paul was troubled one day when he learned that Onesimus was a runaway slave of Philemon, whom Paul converted to Christianity in Ephesus and was currently leading a house church in Colossae (1000 miles from Rome!). In response, Paul wrote a letter to Philemon and gave the letter to Onesimus to hand deliver to Philemon, which we learned he did from Colossians 4.

We learn, from verses 4-7, that Philemon was well-known for his love for fellow believers. Paul wrote, **“For I have great joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother”** (7). Paul starts the letter by complimenting Philemon.....yet, that did not last long. Right after appealing to Philemon’s character, he goes on in verse 8, **“For this reason, although I have great boldness in Christ to command you to do what is right, I appeal to you, instead on the basis of love”** (8). And who is he appealing for? Onesimus, Philemon’s runaway slave whom Paul referred with great fondness in his letter as “his son” (10) and “his very own heart” (12).

Slavery in Rome was not like slavery in the States. Slavery was not racially motivated. Slaves in the Roman Empire were obtained through conquest, war, judicial punishment, piracy, and the international slave trade. Parents often sold their children into slavery to pay off their debts. There were 16 million slaves in the Roman Empire, which was 20% of their total population! They were considered living tools. Often, slaves ran

away. They were considered *fugitivus*, which is the Latin word where the word ‘fugitive’ was derived from. When caught, the runaway slave’s forehead



would be forged with the letter “F” so everyone who saw them would know of their crime. On top of that, the owner of the slave would be allowed to treat the slave anyway he wanted as punishment. Philemon had a choice to make: to forgive Onesimus or punish him for his sins. Paul did not want to force forgiveness but rather he wanted Philemon’s love to be authentic and not coerced. Paul wanted Philemon to not welcome Onesimus back as a slave but rather as a “loved brother” (16).

Paul goes on in verse 18, **“And if he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything [implying that theft or inappropriate use of Philemon’s funds occurred], charge that to my account.”** He then in verse 19 writes with his very own hand that he would repay it all, which made the letter to Philemon a legal document that Philemon could use to bring Paul to court if he did not repay the debt. On top of that, Roman Law required that whoever gave hospitality to a runaway slave was liable to the slave’s master for the value of each day’s work lost. Paul was intentionally putting himself in financial jeopardy by defending Onesimus. Paul, who was innocent of Onesimus’s crimes, took upon himself all the liability of Onesimus. And that, my friends, is what

God has done for you through Jesus Christ. Jesus came, suffered, and died on the cross, and in doing so, imputed our sin upon Himself and imputed His righteousness upon us! **For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God** (2 Corinthians 5:21). There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1). He paid the price! God joyfully received us into his family, just as He would welcome his own Son.

The letter to Philemon at the surface level is a letter between Paul and Philemon’s direct and church family. However, when you look deeper, you are confronted with three Gospel Bridges, three ways you can live out the Gospel of Jesus: The **first** Gospel Bridge is to forgive those who have wronged you as Philemon needed to do with Onesimus. It is not about what they deserve; it is about reflecting God’s grace through Jesus in our forgiveness of the fugitives in our lives. And in doing so, proclaiming, “I want to be like Christ, my Lord, my Savior.” The **second** Gospel Bridge is to seek forgiveness as Onesimus did. Reconcile relationships by seeing the runaway within yourself. Onesimus could have lived life without making it right with Philemon. He was free. Yet, he knew that living out the Gospel meant for him to take ownership of his mistakes and to reconcile with Philemon. The **third** Gospel Bridge is to become agents of reconciliation as Paul was. Paul showed us in this passage how to live out the Gospel message. Paul stepped forward, became a mediator between Philemon and Onesimus, and took on the liability of Onesimus. Why? Because Jesus did the same thing for us! God joyfully received us into His family, just as He would welcome His own Son because of Jesus’ sacrifice. As you move forward, I encourage you to build these important Gospel bridges. **LIVE the Gospel of Jesus.**

Earn-Your-Way — Our guests have served 3,186 hours in our community!

Our Earn-Your-Way program is blessing our community thanks to the hard work of our guests! Originally, the program was called Earn-A-Bike, which allowed our guests to earn bicycles for themselves and their children through service hours in our community. Since we started the program, the program has grown significantly! We now offer IDs, Birth Certificates, Work boots/shoes, and bicycles through the program. The program requires our guests to put in some sweat equity into addressing their hurdles to employment. Our guests love this program! Serving in our community not only helps the nonprofits they serve; serving is great for our guests' mental health. Many of our guests continue to serve after earning the items they need to find work. Our goal is to open our guests' eyes to the reality that they all have God-given gifts that can be used to love God and people through work! We are glad to report that our guests have served 3,186 hours, which is equivalent to having a full-time worker for a year and a half. So proud of our guests!



Sharing Christmas 2024

We had another great year of Sharing Christmas! With the collaboration with The Community Outreach, we served 392 families (1163 children!). Through the Sharing Christmas program, struggling families purchased brand-new toys at 1/10th of the retail price, which gave them dignity! All profit earned through the Sharing Christmas Store gets reinvested into new toys for Sharing Christmas. Thank you to all who served and donated toys in the Sharing Christmas program.

Join Our Team as our Bike Ministry Coordinator!

Our Geared-To-Empower Bike Ministry is in need of a Bike Ministry Coordinator. Their main job duties would include: 1) sharing the Good News of Jesus, 2) recruiting, training, supervising, and empowering volunteers, 3) assisting children and adults with bicycle repair, 4) preparing bicycles for guests alongside volunteers, 5) coordinating travel repair stations in Sioux Falls metro, and 6) creating and implementing new programs within Bike Ministry. If interested in joining our team, please send Adam Hofer your resume and cover letter via email at adam@centerofhopesf.org.



2024 Stats compared to 2023

God has blessed us with a great year at the Center of Hope! We saw a **40% increase** in overall services, **37% increase** in Faith Based Counseling, **106% increase** in clothing provisions provided to individuals and families in crisis, **28% increase** in bike repair services, **47% increase** in Earn-Your-Way participants, **19% increase** in bicycles distributed, **83% increase** in personal grooming supplies, and **11% increase** in the number of patients served at the Center of Hope Free Evening Clinic for the uninsured. We would not have been able to do this without your support through in-kind and financial donations.

Let's Connect—Mission Moments, Pulpit Supplies, and MORE!

Out of our gratitude, we want you to know that we value our partnership in ministry. If you are a pastor, elder, or deacon of a church, do not hesitate to reach out to us if you need pulpit supply help or if you want us to update your congregation on what God has been doing at the Center of Hope. We would love to join you for worship!
All for HIS glory and honor.

Mission:

The Center of Hope exists to walk alongside people, to bring spiritual and physical health, and ultimately to change the community one life at a time.

Vision:

The Center of Hope encourages and mentors people with the hope of redemption through Jesus Christ. Our focus is holistically addressing physical, emotional, social and spiritual needs of individuals that can only come through creating relationships and accountability. We work in partnership with community organizations to engage in a consistent and positive interaction with guests.

Principles:

1. All people are created in God's image.
2. Self sufficiency
3. Holistic Ministry
4. Reconciliation
5. Partnering to Serve

MEMORIAL GIFTS

Center of Hope appreciates the gifts In Memory of — Robert Ageson, Marlene Timmer and Enulene Kroon

Your Gifts SPREADS HOPE:

Stock or Commodity Gifts—Talk to your financial advisor about gifting stocks and commodities to the Center of Hope.

Make it Double—Check with your employer to see if they will match your charitable contributions to the Center of Hope.

Be a Sustainer of Hope—A monthly gift will bring stability to individuals and families. Give online at: www.centerofhopesf.org

In-Kind Gifts—Clothing, Winter gear, Bicycles, Hygiene items, Backpacks for people transitioning out of prison, encouragement cards/letters, office supplies before donating)

Financial Update

Fiscal year runs from April to March, for the year 2024-25

April—To Date. Income

\$394,799.49

2024-25 Budget Need

\$409,672.04

Help us save on postage by receiving your newsletter electronically! Send your email address to info@centerofhopesf.org Also, please let us know if we need to update your mailing address.