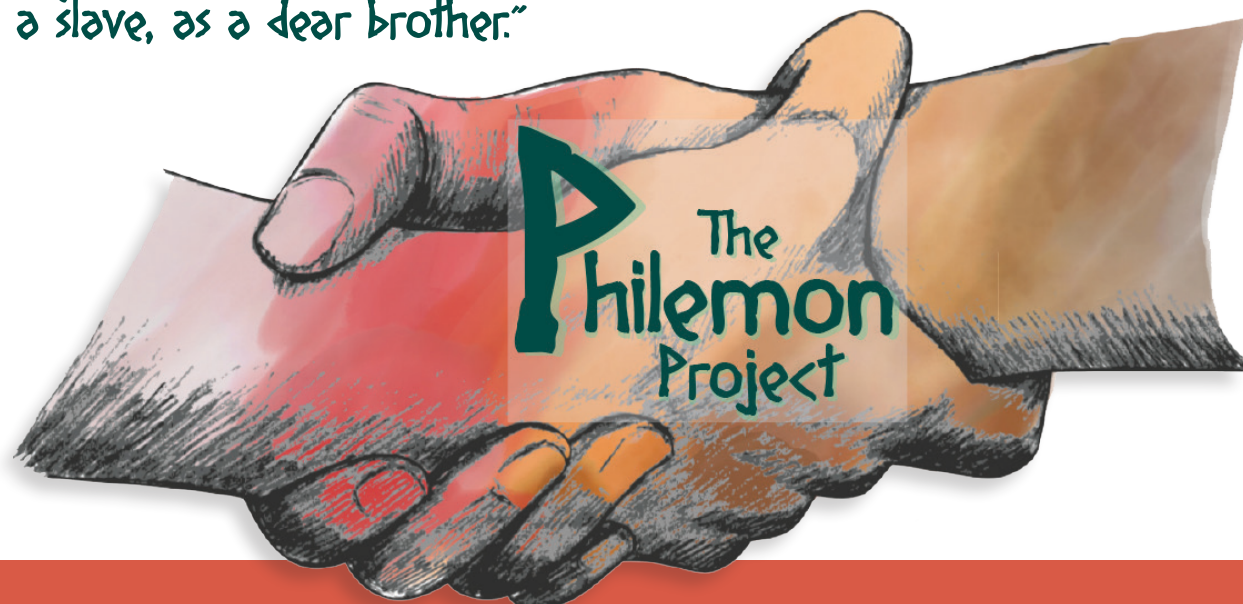


“no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother.”



Project Description and Goal

The Philemon Project is a 10-week team-teaching and preaching series. Rooted in the New Testament book of Philemon, and branching out to consider related issues of how to interpret the Scriptures and apply them to our lives today, the series is focused on empowering God’s people to treasure the gospel by moving their relationships, and the structures of which they are a part, toward greater racial, social, and economic justice—all for the glory of Christ.

Background

Intown Community Church has been working through the Bible with our ongoing “Learning to Love God’s Word” sermon series. Wrapping up the Old Testament in 2020, we have been on course to finish Paul’s Epistles in spring 2021. The last of these is Paul’s Epistle to Philemon.

At 25 verses—one page in most modern Bibles—it would seem that one sermon could cover this part of Scripture. But consider the complicating factors:

- Here a Christian apostle challenges a Christian slave-holder (Philemon) to release from bondage an enslaved fellow-Christian (Onesimus) and to embrace him as an equal—a brother—because of their shared faith in Jesus. What, then, might this short letter have to say about how the gospel calls Christians to pursue social, economic, and racial justice in our own day?
- Yet, Paul does not seem to call for outright abolition of slavery in the Roman empire. To some, this has seemed like justification for slave-holding by Christians. Many American Christians took such an approach in the era before and after the Civil War. But many others, including our team members, believe such an approach is an abuse of this part of Scripture, not a legitimate use. What evidence helps us in this kind of interpretive debate?

Background (continued)

- To many in our day, the very existence of this epistle seems like a moral flaw in the Christian Scriptures, one more piece of evidence that Christianity is inherently immoral. If we don't respond with integrity to this concern, the credibility of the gospel will be compromised in our generation and beyond. How can we answer?
- Common evangelical interpretations (more common among white Christians than non-white believers) sidestep the issues by arguing that first century slavery was a compassionate or just arrangement, that Philemon was a “servant” rather than a “slave,” or that Philemon and Onesimus were employer and employee. Such approaches are historically inaccurate, and they strike many as confirmation that Christians have no honest answer to the moral challenges raised by the text. We must do better. Will we?

Our Moment of Need—and Opportunity

If the issues mentioned above have always brought a special urgency to interpreting, preaching, and living out the gospel implications of the book of Philemon, 2020 has only intensified this reality. An unceasing stream of tragic deaths and the responses these have generated has issued the call: in this moment of racial reckoning, the church cannot sit back and hope for improvement; we must find a healthy way to pursue a path of healing—among ourselves as believers, and for the good of our neighbors under God's common grace.

Now, more than ever, American Christians need to grapple honestly and deeply with this little letter of Philemon. We need to face head-on the challenges it raises. And we need to embrace the gospel transformation that can result if we will stand before this part of God's word ready to believe its promises, to respond as it calls us to repentance, and to act on its vision for our lives. 2020 has revealed desperate need. Let's seize the opportunity to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to bear on that need.



Our Teachers

Working as a team of brothers who love each other, and trusting God to accomplish more through us than we could possibly imagine, we desire to empower God's people to treasure the gospel by moving their relationships, and the structures of which they are a part, toward greater racial, social, and economic justice—all for the glory of Christ.



Thurman Williams

Ordained in the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), Thurman has extensive pastoral experience. He is currently the planting pastor for New City Fellowship—West End in St. Louis, Missouri, where he also serves as Visiting Instructor in Homiletics at Covenant Theological Seminary. Thurman is married to Evie, and they have four children between the ages of 18-24: Charvez, Shaquana, Joshua and Caleb.



Luke Bobo

An accomplished author and teacher on college and seminary faculties, Luke is Director of Strategic Partnerships for Made to Flourish, in Overland Park, Kansas. He is a Visiting Instructor in Contemporary Culture at Covenant Theological Seminary. Luke is married to Rita S. Holmes-Bobo, and they have two adult children, Briana Amber and Caleb Avery.



Steven Gilchrist

Originally from Oklahoma City, Steven currently serves as Church Planting Apprentice at Atlanta Westside Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, Georgia. A graduate of Reformed Theological Seminary in Atlanta, he is exploring a call to church planting, and has recently been approved as a church planting candidate in the PCA. He's married and has twins.



Jimmy Agan

With experience teaching in seminaries and pastoring churches, Jimmy is Senior Pastor at Intown Community Church in Atlanta, a congregation of the PCA. Jimmy, Tricia, and their four adult children (Sarah Elizabeth, now married to Scott, Caroline, Patch, and Abby) came to Atlanta in 2015.

Project Schedule

While Intown is serving as host of The Philemon Project, it as a true team effort. Over the course of the 10-week series, each teaching brother will lead multiple discipleship seminars during Intown's Sunday Morning Life Group time starting at 9:00 a.m. and will preach multiple times during Intown's worship services starting at 10:45 a.m.

Date	Topic	Leaders
January 24, 2021	Seminar - The Philemon Project: Where is God Leading Us?	Steven Gilchrist Jimmy Agan
	Sermon - The Philemon Project: The Gospel as Framework	Jimmy Agan
January 31, 2021	Seminar - Philemon as a Call to Christian Unity	Full Team
	Sermon - Philemon in Light of its Old Testament Context	Thurman Williams
February 7, 2021	Seminar - Philemon as a First-Century Text	Luke Bobo Jimmy Agan
	Sermon - Philemon in Light of its New Testament Context	Jimmy Agan
February 14, 2021	Seminar - What is God Teaching Us?	Group Discussion and Reflection led by Jimmy Agan
	Sermon - Philemon and the End of Slavery	Thurman Williams
February 21, 2021	No Seminar - Normal Intown Sunday Morning Life Group offerings	Regular Life Group Facilitators
	Sermon - Philemon and Human Dignity	Luke Bobo
February 28, 2021	Seminar - Long-Term Legacy of Racism: How Did We Get Here?	Luke Bobo
	Sermon - Philemon, Relationships, and the Power of the Gospel	Steven Gilchrist Jimmy Agan
March 7, 2021	Seminar - Continuing Impacts of Slavery and Racism in the US: Some Evidences	Luke Bobo
	Sermon - Why We are Hopeful: The Spiritual Resources that Fuel our Pursuit of Justice	Thurman Williams Jimmy Agan
March 14, 2021	No Seminar - Normal Intown Sunday Morning Life Group offerings	Regular Life Group Facilitators
	Sermon - Philemon and Justice in the 21st Century	Luke Bobo
March 21, 2021	Seminar - Lament and Longing: Reflection on Hard and Hopeful Truths	Group Discussion and Reflection led by Jimmy Agan
	Sermon - Philemon in the Context of Christian Theology	Steven Gilchrist
March 28, 2021	Seminar - Now What? Concrete Steps of Gospel Commitment	Full Team
	Sermon - Philemon in the Context of Christian Ethics	Steven Gilchrist

