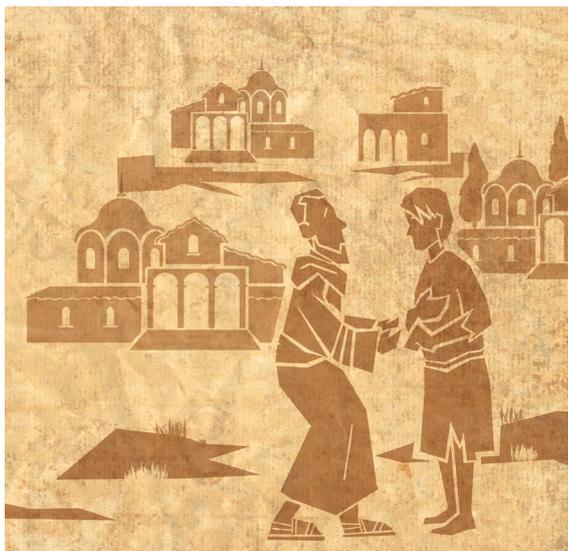


**Philemon 1-21**

**The cost of following Jesus**

In his shortest and most personal letter, Paul writes to a slave-owning Christian, Philemon, on behalf of Onesimus, his runaway slave who has also become a Christian and is a valued helper to Paul. The letter is a challenge to Philemon to count the cost of following Jesus, either by taking Onesimus back or releasing him for Christ's service.

Read this week's passage:



**ACT**

Take three strands of wool of different colours and make a friendship bracelet. One strand represents an area of injustice that you are concerned about. The second represents an action you can take to remedy it. The third represents people who can encourage and support you in this.

*Write*

Take part in a letter-writing campaign for Amnesty International or write a persuasive letter to someone in power about an issue you are passionate about: local, national or international.



Come up with a list of five things you would take to a desert island. Rank them from least to most precious. Why is the number one object the most precious? The letter to Philemon says that our relationship with Jesus is precious and worth any cost.

Find more free Roots resources to reflect on this week's theme:



**Living Scripture**

*'...no longer as a slave but as more than a slave, a beloved brother'*  
Philemon 1:16

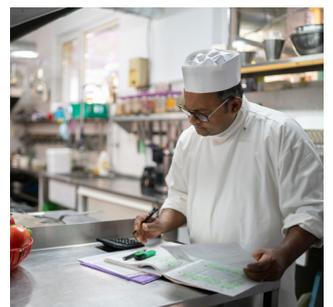
Paul asks Philemon to receive Onesimus back, not as his slave, but as a brother in Christ. A simple decision, you might think, but Philemon is a man of influence, a well-known and respected landowner who had opened his house for people to come and worship Jesus. If he accepts Onesimus back as a brother, in a time where slavery was normal, would his neighbours and friends think he was weak, soft or an unwise businessman? He could lose status in his community. There is another potential risk that Philemon's other slaves might decide to convert to Christ in order to gain their freedom. So perhaps it isn't a simple decision at all.

From Onesimus' perspective, how does he live as a follower of Christ in this unjust society - where slavery exists - and his brother in Christ is oppressing him?

Following Jesus will cost us. It involves hard choices, sacrifice, obedience, and people misunderstanding us, so we must be convinced that the way of Christ is better - for us, for society and the whole of creation - even if in the short term, it is costly. How is Jesus challenging you to count the cost?

**First impressions**

- When have you had to count the cost of a decision?
- What are the costs of following Jesus? And what are the rewards?
- What loving actions is God prompting you to do, this week?



**Pray**

Lord, help us to act with love and kindness to everyone.  
Give us strength to be bold to stand up for others. Shine your light through our lives, especially when we need to act differently to the people around us.  
Help us to encourage one another to live out our faith each day.  
Amen.



Walk the walk: Make a flip-flop by drawing round your foot and adding pipe-cleaner wires. Think about a situation where you can make a difference and write this on the flip-flop.