

Series Slide

The Irish rock band U2 almost broke up in 1990.

Instead- they were saved by one of their most iconic songs.

When I listened to it this week- I could have sworn it was about the NT book of Philemon.

I'm not going to assume you know U2. the front man of the Band- Bono- is now 66 years old...sooo...not exactly TODAY'S Music.

The lead guitarist goes by 'The Edge'.

They rose to fame in the late 1980s with songs like

"With or Without You"

"In the Name of Love" and

"I Still haven't found what I'm looking for"

In 1990- they were headed to Berlin Germany to record their 7th studio album when the Dalai Llama sent them an invitation asking them to be a part of the Festival of Oneness. Bono declined and with his reply included a PS...

"One, but not the same"

A few months later- the band was in Berlin working at a studio within a few feet of the Berlin wall- that had come down less than a year prior

(if you're playing along at home- you might be wondering what is going on with me and Berlin wall references lately- I swear to you its all the Lord because I'm not seeking it out. I promise I didn't plan this back in February "Wait til I hit with Philemon and my Berlin Wall theme!"

Maybe he wants us thinking about tearing down walls and building unity.

Anyway- The Edge's marriage was ...well on the edge of ending...and The Band themselves were having disagreements about their sound and their direction...and even some of their theology... so the four of them were at each others throats...and it felt like the album was just not going to happen.

That's when- over the top of the frustration and bickering and anger- the Edge started playing this....

And then Bono folded that line in...the one he had recently written to the Dali Lama- We're one, but were not the same.

And then the lyrics to the song filled out to be just chock full beautiful and heartbreaking lines.

**Love is a Temple. Love the higher law.
You ask me to enter
But then you make me crawl.
And I can't be holding on
To what you got
When all you got is hurt.**

Or...

**Did I ask too much?
More than a lot?
You gave me nothing
Now its all I've got
We're one, but we're not the same
Well, we hurt each other, then we do it again**

We get to carry each other, Carry each other

The song is about a relationship that is broken. On the verge of collapse. ...and yet- the people deeply need each other.

The song became all about Germany's reunification...and Edge's marriage...and all of their fighting....

...at the center of the song "One" is realization that successful relationships can't wallpaper over differences and just say "We're ONE! We're UNIFIED!" At the same time...a successful relationship can't just be two individuals in a marriage or 4 individuals in a band.

...You need both.

Individuality...and Oneness.

Diversity, and Unity.

One God, three persons.

Father, Son, Holy Spirit.

This is the way Bono put it in his memoir- Surrender

"One was the song that saved us. We wrote the song that we needed to hear.

I understood that in the end I am one quarter of an artist without Edge, Adam, and Larry. I am one half of a person without [my wife] Ali.”- Bono

Here's The Edge's on his take on the song.

“On one level it's a bitter, twisted, vitriolic conversation between two people who've been through some nasty, heavy stuff: 'We hurt each other, then we do it again.' But on another level, there's the idea that 'we get to carry each other.' 'Get to' is the key. 'Got to' would be too obvious.”- The Edge

...and that's why this song reminds me of the Apostle Paul's letter to Philemon.

Title Slide “We Get to Carry Each Other: The Transcendent Mission of Friendship” - Philemon

Paul wrote to Philemon- who was a leader in the church of Colossae- to take back Onesimus- a slave who had stolen from him and run away... to welcome him back not as a slave- but instead as a member of his family. A brother.

Last week we talked about what that means for the necessity of forgiveness and the part we are called to play in Reconciling Relationships...

...this week I want to show you the transcendent purpose that comes out of this short 28 verse letter...and that is going to propel us into the next 6 weeks where we're going to talk about Transcendent Purpose- what it is...and how to find it.

Philemon 1-25

Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother:

**To Philemon our dear friend and coworker,
2 to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church that meets in your home.**

3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

4 I always thank my God when I mention you in my prayers, 5 because I hear of your love for all the saints and the faith that you have in the Lord Jesus. 6 I pray that your participation in the faith may become effective through knowing every good thing that is in us for the glory of Christ. 7 For I have great joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.

8 For this reason, although I have great boldness in Christ to command you to do what is right, 9 I appeal to you, instead, on the basis of love. I, Paul, as an elderly man and now also as a prisoner of Christ Jesus, 10 appeal to you for my son, Onesimus. I became his father while I was in chains. 11 Once he was useless to you, but now he is useful both to you and to me. 12 I am sending him back to you — I am sending my very own heart. 13 I wanted to keep him with me, so that in my imprisonment for the gospel he might serve me in your place. 14 But I didn't want to do anything without your consent, so that your good deed might not be out of obligation, but of your own free will. 15 For perhaps this is why he was separated from you for a brief time, so that you might get him back permanently, 16 no longer as a slave, but more than a slave — as a dearly loved brother. He is especially so to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

17 So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would me. 18 And if he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. 19 I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it — not to mention to you that you owe me even your very self. 20 Yes, brother, may I benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. 21 Since I am confident of your obedience, I am writing to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say. 22 Meanwhile, also prepare a guest room for me, since I hope that through your prayers I will be restored to you.

23 Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings, and so do 24 Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my coworkers.

25 The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Transition:

In that line in One- We get to carry each other- There are two beautiful things happening...

One is implied...the other is explicit.

The implied truth in that line is that we are going somewhere together. There is a purpose to our relationship. After all- if you are carrying someone you better know WHERE and WHY you are trying to get where you are going- or else why not just sit with them.

The other thing- that is explicit- is that its a PRIVILEGE to carry them. Its a joy. Like the EDGE said...we GET TO carry each other.

Often- churches will emphasize EITHER MISSION (We need to get the gospel out to everyone)- or RELATIONSHIPS- (We need deep relationships. I need to find MY PEOPLE).

I think just as Paul reconciles Onesimus and Philemon in this letter- so he is reconciling Deep Relationships- Friendships....with Transcendent Purpose- MISSION.

So I have 2 points tonight- the first point I'm going to hammer on Mission. The second point I'm gonna drive home Friendship.

Giddy up.

1) Friendship is FOR transcendent mission.

Let me show you a few things in this text we just read...that you might miss if you get caught up in the drama of Paul trying to reconcile a Onesimus and Philemon.

v 1

To Philemon our dear friend and coworker

The Greek word there for "Dear friend" is Agapetos. That comes from AGAPE- which is the kind of love that comes FROM God. Its unconditional sacrificial committed covenant love.

That's a pretty deep friendship.

Next he calls Philemon his Co worker- thats the word Sunergos. We get our word Synergy from that.

Synergy is teamwork that is really in a state of flow. Its what U2 had when the EDGE started playing those first Chords of One. they were working together creating something.

So right off the bat in this letter you see Paul is not separating DEEP FRIENDSHIP Agapetos from TRANSCENDENT MISSION- SYNERGOS.

He includes Philemon AS BOTH.

Then- watch what he does with the other two folks he greets here- possibly Philemon's family.

v 2

The first Apphia- he calls "our sister"- BTW- Apphia means "Fruitful" or Productive. So in this very phrase you have the concept of a dearly beloved friend- SISTER....AND someone who is productive- a co-worker.

Then he says hello to Archippus. Archippus literally means “Chief of the Horses”.

U2 has a song called “Who’s gonna ride your wild horses”and Archippus is like “I Will”

Sooo...full circle. Lets pray.

No- look what He calls Archippus- Fellow Soldier. Ok- thats a bit misleading. Its more accurate to say “Someone who has struggled through difficulty alongside me”.

Think about the mini-series “Band of Brothers” about WW2 soldiers. None of those soldiers joined the army to make friends. But along the way- as they suffered together in pursuit of a mission- they became brothers. FELLOW SOLDIERS.

F3

I meet with guys 5 days a week at 5 am to work out. We’ve been together in the extreme cold or the oppressive heat. We see sunrises together. We’ve done burpees in single degree temperatures together. None of us showed up to those workouts with our main focus making friends- but along the way- going through hard things together actually forms a bond.

And Im gonna tell you. When I work out on my own- my workouts are shorter and less intense. I get far more done when I’m with a band of brothers.

There is a marriage of transcendent Mission and Friendship.

Speaking of marriage- the best marriages are actually friendships that decide to make a commitment to a mission together. To have children. To be fruitful and multiply. To display the gospel of Jesus Christ in the way they interact.

A 2022 study showed that 2 of the main components of happily married couples that remain together for life- and enjoy one another as they get older- including in the bedroom, BTW- 2 of the 4 components are 1) A strong commitment to the marriage and 2) They are committed church attenders.

<https://ifstudies.org/report-brief/for-better-four-proven-ways-to-a-strong-and-stable-marriage>

In other words- they are constantly drawn in to the reality that their marriage isn’t just about them and their personal happiness. Their Friendship is ABOUT a mission. Because they are in church and committed to what the Scripture teaches.

When marriage- or any friendship becomes about a transcendent mission- a holy upward calling to glorify God- y’all the friendship actually gets better.

The best and deepest relationships aren't about each other. They aren't face to face, sharing a milkshake with two straws- The best friendships are shoulder to shoulder- fellow soldiers on a mission- pursuing something bigger than the friendship.

v 6

Paul tells Philemon that he is praying that his “participation in the faith BECOMES EFFECTIVE through knowing EVERY GOOD THING that is in US for the GLORY OF CHRIST.

Ok first- Participation. This is the Greek word “Koinania” which too often gets translated “fellowship” which a lot of Christians immediately assume means room temperature casseroles and pecan pies.

Fellowship is what we talk about when we are NOT doing mission. But that is not at all the way Paul uses it.

It means mutual participation. Its more of the idea of fellow soldiers. Its the idea- Koinania is not just an idea to think about and smile- its something you do- Its active.

Its mission. So Paul says I want the cooperative mission the collective corporate action that comes from your faith in Jesus to ...watch this...BE EFFECTIVE- that's the Greek word Energēs. - you can hear the English word “energy” coming from that.

He goes on in this sentence to say “ you are going to be effective by KNOWING EVERY GOOD THING that is in US - ok- meaning- your faith in who Jesus is and what he has done in his resurrection-is going to push you to struggle and fight together to squeeze out the good gift that god has given each one of us for the Glory of Christ.

again- he ends with Mission. FOR THE GLORY of Christ. To make Jesus famous. To show the world he has WEIGHT...that he matters. THIS is our transcendent mission- to make known the GLORY of Christ.

And we need each other- these deep relationships that become effective for bringing Christ Glory.

v 10-11

First, Paul talks about this deep relationship with Onesimus- Philemon's servant that stole from him and ran away- Paul led him to faith in Christ.

And he says “I became his father” and “I appeal to you for my son”

Deep relational language...now watch v 11

Onesimus' name means "useful". Likely it was a name given to a slave. In other words- at the beginning of their relationship- Philemon only considered Onesimus USEFUL... not really relational.

But watch Paul's play on words here. He says Once- Useful was USELESS to you- because there was no transcendent purpose. Neither you nor him were following Jesus. You weren't living for the GLORY of Christ. There was no Koinania- no mutual participation in the glory of Christ. Nobody had any gifts of the Holy Spirit that you were squeezing out of one another- you weren't on mission together... you were just another master and slave- hating one another, one using the other...

BUT- now that he has become my son in the faith- He is now the TRUE Onesimus! He is USEFUL TO BOTH YOU AND ME!

Why- because all 3 of us- now we have been forgiven, we have been reconciled to our God- we have been given the paraclete- the gift of the holy Spirit, We have been sent on mission to glorify God TOGETHER We are fellow Soldiers. A Band of Brothers! NOW we're finally USEFUL!

We aren't wasting our time just making money, or just watching sports, or just sitting down another evening eating Ice Cream and watching a TV show we won't remember the plot of in 2 months.

WE'RE GOING SOMEWHERE TOGETHER!

v 12

We go deep again- When I send him to you...I'm sending my very heart.

Back to 1)

Onesimus NAME was useful. Imagine- a life where you were only seen as USEFUL to someone.

Nobody wants to simply be USED...

Strangely- none of us want to be USELESS either.

People literally commit suicide because they feel useless- purposeless...even as people tell them they love them.

So- the question is CAN WE BE BOTH? USEFUL AND BE SOMEONE'S VERY HEART?

And this is the BEAUTY of how God makes Humanity.

It's totally different from the way that other stories of the creation of humanity go.

For example- in the ENUMA ELISH- a popular Babylonian creation myth at the time Genesis was written- the god of creation is Marduk. He was at war with the semi-deity Tiamat. In order to create- he killed Tiamat, split her body in two- and with one half of her body created the sky... and with the other half created the earth.

In these myths- humans come from the spilled blood of gods- and are typically created to be slaves.

In other words- in all the other creation stories at the time that Genesis came onto the scene- the world was created from raw power. One god dominating another god— and then dominating humans who are simply useful to the gods that created them.

So in one sense- in these stories- humans have purpose- but there is no love. No partnership. No Koinania.

But watch the story of creation from the Bible.

Genesis 1:26-28 (CSB)

26 Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock, the whole earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth.”

27 So God created man in his own image;

he created him in the image of God;

he created them male and female.

28 God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth,

God creates man in his own image. .. I am sending you my own heart. He makes marriage a center piece of this. A partnership meant to point beyond itself.

There is SOO much Koinania here! Friendship that is pointed at a transcendent mission.

Genesis 2:15-16

15 The Lord God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden to work it and watch over it.

Cultivate and protect the garden. He is sent out with a purpose- to do something With God togethe- man and woman working together. Dependent.

Bono said about U2s near break up in 1990

“We ran out of love for being in the band”- Bono

Notice- it wasn't about love for each other that they fell apart.

They RAN OUT OF LOVE FOR THEIR KOINANIA. They were no longer participating together in a mission...they were just four individuals.

But, Bono remember what Bono said that brought him back- when they wrote the song One?

I understood that in the end I am one quarter of an artist without Edge, Adam, and Larry. I am one half of a person without [my wife] Ali.”- Bono

He understood himself as a band of brothers...as a husband to a wife on a mission.

Back to 1)

So can I ask you about your friendships?

Are your friendships GOING anywhere?

Are your friendships SHOULDER TO SHOULDER on a mission- or are they just about individuals staring at each other until you are done enjoying one another's company.

You are made for mission. And the friendships that last are the ones that are pointed together at Making JESUS famous. Bringing him glory.

Finally....

2) Friendship IS transcendent mission.

There are 2 lines in ONE that I really love.

The first is this one.

Love is a temple. Love's the higher law.

The Temple- is the dwelling place of God. In Hebrew it sometimes is literally translated House of God. When the Israelites were in the desert- they carried a portable TABERNACLE with them. Which means DWELLING PLACE.

In fact- to TABERNACLE- which is used as a verb in the NT

Specifically by John the apostle- who calls himself "The Disciple that Jesus loved"

When Bono sings Love is a Temple. Love the Higher Law.
what he's saying is LOVE is where GOD DWELLS. Specifically what is offered at the temple is Sacrifice.

GOD DWELLS in SACRIFICIAL LOVE.

Love is the HIGHER LAW means that we have a transcendent ethic of right or wrong- that isn't arbitrary- ITS BASED ON GOD'S LOVE FOR US,

John 1:14a

14 The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

He TABERNACLED DWELT among us.

Revelation 21:3-4

3 Then I heard a loud voice from the throne: Look, God's dwelling is with humanity, and he will live with them. They will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and will be their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more, because the previous things have passed away

We get a picture of this TABERNACLING. LOOK- its about belonging to God and to one another. the MISSION IS FRIENDSHIP. look at the comfort! The PARACLETEING!

Its not just raw mission. ...

Luke 16:9

And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of worldly wealth so that when it fails, they may welcome you into eternal dwellings.

The second line i love from One is this

We get to carry each other.

'Get to' suggests it is our privilege to carry one another. It puts everything in perspective and introduces the idea of grace. - The Edge

We get to carry each other.

Galatians 6:2-5

2 Carry one another's burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. 3 For if anyone considers himself to be something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. 4 Let each person examine his own work, and then he can take pride in himself alone, and not compare himself with someone else. 5 For each person will have to carry his own load.

You know what this is?- We're ONE but were not the same- we get to carry each others burdens.

LOVE IS THE HIGHER LAW- the LAW OF CHRIST.

Philemon v 23-24

Epaphras- Ministry partner- Pastor that started Churches in Colasse and partner of Paul. Paul commends his deep dedication to being a prayer warriors...always wrestling for others.

Mark- was a partner with Paul- But eventually left him half way through one of his journeys- caused a big riff between him and his Barnabas- who went with Mark while Paul went with another band member Silas...

The band was on the verge of breaking up...but later,...in this letter and in Colossians Paul commends him as a true partner in the faith.

Aristarchus and Luke- sailed with Paul in the book of Acts and were part of a shipwreck on the Island of Malta. Talk about deep relationships- survive a Shipwreck with somebody.

Demas- later abandons Paul- deserts him in his imprisonment because Paul said "He loves this present world"

In other words- no transcendent Mission.

So the book of Philemon begins and ends with all of these friendships- deep relationships that were all USEFUL for MISSION...but all these relationships became the very SWEETNESS AND BITTERNESS of Paul's life.

'Get to' suggests it is our privilege to carry one another. It puts everything in perspective and introduces the idea of grace. - The Edge

& v 25

The Grace of the LORD—- the CHARIS- the GIFT is experienced through these relationships...forever.

Do you know what Christ did for you?

He bore your burden on the Cross?

John 15:12-17

2 “This is my command: Love one another as I have loved you. 13 No one has greater love than this: to lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15 I do not call you servants anymore, because a servant doesn’t know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have heard from my Father. 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce fruit and that your fruit should remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give you.

17 “This is what I command you: Love one another. -

Prayer Counselors

Who are your friends? What are your friendships about?

If they aren’t filled with the transcendent purpose of glorifying Christ...if you aren’t laying your life down in love— what do you need to do next in those relationships?

Will you pray?