

## **Facing Facts**

- How do you like to relax?
  - TV, a good book, a walk in the country, cinema, ....
  - best of all, a holiday "away from it all"!
- For most of us, relaxation, rest, recuperation involves a degree of escape, getting away from the normal routines of life:
  - certainly if those routines of life are draining of energy and life;
  - but even if they are, in themselves good, we sometimes need to get away to be rested and refreshed.
- That escapism is great for rest and refreshment, but it isn't productive in getting things done!
  - if we were only ever on holiday, our lives would never achieve much and would be ultimately empty and unsatisfying;
  - if all we ever do is sit in front of the goggle box, when we are able to do more, if we run away from responsibilities or opportunities, then we will get nowhere and achieve nothing.
- That simple truth - that we need to face facts, face up to the reality of our lives - was certainly true for Onesimus.
  - he was a slave; property of his master, his toil not his own but his master's, not free to run away, such escape punishable by death;
  - his master was Philemon, a rich man, but also a now Christian, one who was considered by Paul a fellow worker in the faith;
  - seems Onesimus has run away to Rome, met Paul, become a Christian ("who became my son"), and is now returning to his master...
  - whether initiative came from Paul (could be considered stealing another man's property to keep a runaway slave!), or from Onesimus, Onesimus was having to face the facts of the situation;
  - he was learning to deal with the reality of life, however unpleasant it was for him, rather than simply run away from it.
- That's the first thing that Onesimus can teach us, that facing facts is very often the beginning of growth and positive change.

## **Taking Risks**

- To return to Philemon was a big risk for Onesimus:
  - quite literally risking his life - could have been killed;
  - more likely some fairly severe form of punishment, partly to punish the runaway, but partly also to discourage the same action by other slaves.
- We don't have quite the same risks to face, most of the time, but facing facts can lead us into situations where there is an element of risk.
- *Story: a young man who liked his drink a bit too much; was starting to get into trouble with the Police; was just discovering that the drink had become his master, and not he its.*
- *Having smashed a large plate glass window in one of the shops in his local town centre while drunk, he was arrested, charged, and put on probation; one of the terms of his probation was involvement in a detox programme.*
- *Through a Christian at the detox centre, he himself became a Christian, and knew he had to face up to what he had done; being a recovering alcoholic, he didn't have much security in life - work and accommodation were both hard to come by, but he saved as hard as he could and eventually had £100.*
- *He went back to face up to the shopkeeper, who was understandably very angry; but the young man persevered with his apology, and paid back what he could - an apology which was eventually accepted, and a relationship which was in large measure restored.*
- Facing facts, especially about our mistakes and failures, will often lead us into

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situations that are uncomfortable, where we risk rejection, where we risk being mis-understood:

- because we are seeking reconciliation and not revenge...
- because we are going against the flow
- But that risk taking is the second step in a process of growth that we do well to learn from Onesimus.

### Reaching Reconciliation

- Our failures, our mistakes, our sin doesn't just break relationships with those around us:
  - friends, family, work-colleagues, neighbours, whoever....
- Most fundamentally, our sin breaks our relationship with God.
- And nothing we can offer to God is enough to restore that relationship.
  - Onesimus could have hoped that by working very, very hard Philemon might have been less harsh with him...
  - that young drunk could hope that by paying back something of the damage he'd cause, he could be reconciled with the shopkeeper...
- But we can never do enough to pay God back.
- Only Jesus dying on the Cross is enough for us to be forgiven by God.
  
- For Onesimus, becoming a Christian had changed him.
  - he had received, from God, a fresh start and fresh priorities;
  - not merely a spiritual fresh start, but also one that had consequences into the rest of his life, in all his relationships.
  - he was taken by God, and made truly useful (the name "Onesimus" means useful ) - helped Paul, for instance...
- But he still needed to face up to the consequences of his actions:
  - for him the main unresolved sin being his disobedience of the law in running from his master, his disrespect
  - his fresh start couldn't come about without risk of seeking reconciliation with his master Philemon.
  
- We don't know how Onesimus and the letter from Paul he carried were received by Philemon - though probably positively!
  - but we can certainly learn from Onesimus that to grow in faith, we need to face facts, face up to our sin, not just in general, but in particular;
  - we can learn from Onesimus that from that facing of facts will often come a need to take risks directed at reconciliation; that isn't comfortable or easy, but growth doesn't come from escapism!
  - and finally, we can learn from Onesimus to reach for reconciliation, for it was for reconciliation that Christian came to die for us, and from his reconciliation comes all our Christian living.

#### Truth:

- growth comes as we (i) face facts, (ii) take risks, and (iii) reach for reconciliation;
- stagnant Christian lives grow in (i) escapism, (ii) avoidance of risk and (iii) a satisfaction with shallow, broken relationships.