

Your Story

Pastor Ken

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Your story is too valuable to lose. Your story is too important to keep silent. Your story is too surprising to sit on!

⁸ Therefore, although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, ⁹ yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love. It is as none other than Paul—an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus— ¹⁰ that I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. ¹¹ Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me. (Phil-NIV)

Your story is too valuable to lose. Your story is too important to keep silent. Your story is too surprising to sit on!

Your story is a narrative you tell about how the grace of God, has saved you, uses you for his purposes and points family and friends to faith in Jesus Christ.

Nothing else in life matters to God. To God there are only two types of people in the world—saved people and unsaved or lost people.

Every person's life would be better if Jesus Christ were in the center of it.

Your story **possesses** drama. **Provides** details. **Promotes** God's design.

1. It **possesses drama**. And sometimes the drama is about life and death.

Such was the case for Moses, many times in his life.

Jonah almost suffocated from disobedience (swallowed by a great fish), when he should have been the savior from destruction.

And who can forget Joseph in a pit; Daniel in a lion's den; James the first martyr in the NT.

2. It **provides details**. Each story unfolds with details. A missed bus. A misused business practices. A misunderstood conversation. The devil is in the details.

3. It **promotes God's design**. God designed the puzzle pieces of your story to fit the empty space in His jigsaw puzzle.

Years ago, I received in the mail, a lost NIV bible that had gone missing for over 10 years. The keeper of my bible found it on a flight, I had departed from. The finder kept it. Read from it. Marked in it. And, was changed by my notes in the margin. When I received it back, over 10 years later, the reader of my bible attached a note, thanking me for how God's word had changed their life. Wow!

God designed the puzzle pieces of your life: your bible study, encouraging words, your giving, your prayers from your story to fit the empty space of His jigsaw puzzle.

It is all a part of a narrative or story, that you tell to show how the grace of God is at work in my life.

Know your story. Tell your story. Believe your story.

At the convergence of all three (know, tell, believe), you will find the answer to the question: **why has God created me with this story?** My story includes leadership development at the Boy's Club. My story reveals my gifts.

Know your story because it will reveal your gifts.

My story takes me to Ft Worth, Texas where I was theologically trained in biblical languages because God wanted me to point those who do not know the power that awaits them when they are filled with the Holy Spirit.

Tell your story because it reveals God's assignment.

And growing up in poverty has inspired my ministry to show love for the marginalized, poor, and disenfranchised.

Believe in your story, it will help you make a BIG deal out of God!

Your story matters to God. We need you! Someone has to tell sinners the stories of God's forgiveness.

Someone has to tell parents how to be patient.

Someone has to tell new believers how to read the bible.

All of this is done with stories. In this short 3-week series, I plan to teach you how to (1) Know your story. (2) Tell your story. (3) Believe in your story.

The book of Philemon provides a blueprint for how to know, tell and believe your story.

Paul uses 445 words to tell the story forgiveness. Restoration.

It takes about 2 minutes to read. So, if you are using it for your 15 minutes in a chair, be a good boy scout and read it 7 times.

This is a personal letter written by the apostle Paul. It is the only one of its kind in the bible. Don't let the size fool you, the story is riveting and has 3 actors: Philemon, Paul, Onesimus.

Philemon: A Christian with a huge home to start a house church.

Paul: A convert to Christ, who is no stranger to prison. Imprisoned in Rome.

Onesimus: A runaway slave who meets Paul in Rome and confesses to stealing from his employer.

Never underestimate what God can do in prison.

Growing up in poverty, turned me into a thief. I ripped off store after store in Everett Washington. Onesimus story fits square into the theft category. A fugitive and thief. If caught, he was a candidate for branding and even death. While on the run Onesimus was always in danger of being found out. His only hope was to flee to Rome and lose himself into the faceless sea of people.

Fortunately for Onesimus God had freedom waiting on the other end of his journey. The Lord would bring this runaway slave turned thief into contact with the apostle Paul, who would introduce him to Jesus Christ and then pour his life into this nobody.

¹⁰ that I appeal to you for my son Onesimus,^[a] who became my son while I was in chains. ¹¹ Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me. (Phil. 10-11)

After reaching out in faith, Onesimus shackles of fear and shame fell to the ground. In Christ Onesimus was free.

But liberty in Christ does not mean you are free from taking responsibility for your past actions. While Onesimus had been made right with God, now he needed to return to Philemon and make it right with him: to own it, take responsibility and learn from his mistakes.

Compared to many of the New Testament books, Philemon reads like a post-card. So many have overlooked this one chapter-25 verse book written in ancient times yet, it is so alive with relevance for today.

Why does it get overlooked? Flipping through the pages of God's word, it is easy to run past one chapter, to sail past the biblical landscape and not even see it. Who doesn't think that because it is short, it must have little value? Nothing could be further from the truth. Don't be fooled by size, this missile of God's word can unload a gigantic payload of truth.

The New Testament's primary author is a guy named Paul (a villain turned hero) who had a dramatic conversion to Christ on the road to Damascus. Paul was a terrorist and anyone claiming faith in Christ was a threat to his cause. His conversion included blindness and a dramatic visitation by the Lord-**he became blind so he could learn to see.**

God's plan for Paul was to use his gifts of writing to share the message of Christ's death and resurrection with the world. Paul authored thirteen letters in the New Testament and Philemon is his shortest and most personal. It is a companion book, to the book of Colossians. This book, Philemon is a personal request made to a believer in the Colossian church.

Writing from Rome while under house arrest...

¹³ I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel.

...Paul writes to a slave owner named Philemon encouraging him to welcome back Onesimus (villain, fugitive and thief).

Treat him as a brother, not as a bother. As a friend, not a foe. As a fellow believer, not a fugitive. Which he was.

*(16) no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother.
(Phil 16-NIV)*

A fugitive slave that stole and became a Christian as the result of Paul's witness. Paul's writings instruct us in how to be restored when you blow it!

Like Paul and his instructions to Philemon, all of us have to learn what to do when you blow it! Our basic problem is that all of us have gotten off to a false start. We are all villains in God's eyes. Everyone is running, like Paul, like Onesimus in the wrong direction. It started in the garden, and it continued in the city. It started with two-Adam and Eve and continued with billions. It happened thousands of years ago and continues today.

That is why Christ's first command for all who would follow him is always repent! Turn around. Go the other way. Change the way you think. Learn to think before you think. Repentance

The word for repentance in the New Testament is, "*metanoia*," it means, "to change your mind." To bring about repentance, we have to accept what God thinks about our wrongs. Our sins. Our misdeeds.

When it comes to doing God's will, it is impossible to obey unless our mind is renewed. Jesus entire message was summed up in one declaration:

Everyone is running in the wrong direction so they can avoid "the big problem."
What is the big problem?

As humans we do not want to face the reality of sin, troubles, mistakes, and calamities. God's solution to this problem is to turn and face him-head on. Paul is suggesting to Onesimus that the solution to the big problem is not to flee, but to flee such an approach to life...

...and return to his former boss and be reconciled. Paul's strategy for pulling this off is found in the book of Philemon, it describes what to do when you blow it!

- (1) When you blow it-own it!
- (2) When you blow it-take responsibility!
- (3) When you blow it-learn from it!

Let's go through these biblical insights one at a time. A word of caution, this will not be easy. Nobody likes facing their mistakes head-on. We are all blinded by our own sin.

1. When you blow it - own it!

18 If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me. (Phil. 18 - NIV)

Philemon was the injured party. Onesimus has done the damage. Three Greek words tell the story:

1. To act unjustly-done you wrong,
2. To owe someone a debt-owes you anything,
3. To charge to someone's account-charge it to me.

Paul goes so far as to offer his own wallet on behalf of the offender. Paul will be Onesimus' guarantor.

Even under house arrest Paul has the power and authority to offer an IOU to Philemon to make it right, put Onesimus on the right track of owning his mistake.

Some people struggle with acknowledging that they are the cause of their problems. This hinders them from taking ownership.

A man who is laid off by his company in economically, difficult times may think the company owes him another job.

A young person makes a bad choice and fails to own it because everyone else is doing it.

We are certainly not the cause of all our problems. The innocent are wounded. We are the cause of many. So here is God's way to look at it:

The person who cares about the problem owns the problem.

When you care about owning it, empowerment enables you to make right choices.

Ownership gives you freedom.

You are no longer a slave to your past.

Ownership gives you God's power.

God will give you his grace to deal with it if you humble yourself. You own it when you take the first steps-when you blow it, own it!

2. When you blow it - take responsibility for it!

¹² I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you. ¹³ I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel.

¹⁴ But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do would not seem forced but would be voluntary.

Before Onesimus can truly live up to the meaning of his name-useful, he has to return and make it right with his former employer. Just because Christ forgives your sins, it does not mean you are off the hook for the consequences.

Here is a brief list of what to take responsibility for in life.

- (1) Your own unhappiness. Let God help you with the outcome of your choices.
- (2) Specific choices. Determine the cause of your mistakes, failures, sins, and problems.
- (3) Needed support. Seek out others who can help you get back on track and heal.
- (4) Weakness and imperfections. Identify those areas where you stumble. If you are not sure, ask your spouse.

3. When you blow it - learn from it!

¹⁰ that I appeal to you for my son Onesimus,^[a] who became my son while I was in chains. ¹¹ Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.

God wants you to learn from your hurts, mistakes, sins, and troubles. So, what happens if you are not willing to learn from your hurts, mistakes, and sins? Instead of it making you better, it makes you bitter. It is through your imperfections, and shortcomings that you grow. You must want to grow, decide to grow, make an effort to grow and persist in growing.

Growth will only take place if you are willing to share what you learn about your mistakes, failures, and sins. You and I must stop the cover up and admit our faults, failures and fears. That is the only way you will learn, and others will benefit.

The very experiences that you have been embarrassed by and tried to hide; God is trying to use for his ministry. The very experiences that you have been resenting and regretting God calls that your ministry. He wants others to benefit from your mistakes. He wants to keep others from traveling your path.

*¹² There is a way that appears to be right,
but in the end it leads to death. (Prov. 14-NIV)*

Change begins when you look differently at your failures and mistakes. Here are a few insights to consider.

When you make a mistake, make your mistake work for you.

Your mistake is a part of your story.

God wants others to benefit from your mistakes.

Philemon becomes a hero in 25 verses. Onesimus goes from being villain to a pastor/bishop in 50 years. And Paul records the account of this event in the word of God. It is recorded for all eternity. It still offers hope today for those wanting to learn and what to do when you blow it! When you want to learn how to make your mistake work for you!

Did Philemon take back Onesimus? Did Onesimus ever return to Paul and offer aid in his imprisonment? These questions go unanswered but years later we find a similar event that gives us hope.

About 50 Years later, an early church father named Ignatius, writes a letter to the pastor at the church of Ephesus. The pastor or bishop's name? Onesimus.

According to William Barclay, Ignatius makes a similar request, like the one Paul made:

Ignatius uses, the same play on words, Paul used-he is Onesimus by name and Onesimus by nature, the profitable one to Christ. It may well be that the runaway slave had become with the passing years the great bishop of Ephesus.

If this happened, Bishop Onesimus of Ephesus played a significant role in his story recorded in God's word and his message, "your story matters more than can believe."

At this point Jake will be introduced. Speak for 20 minutes. When you are done, Jake pray over those who want to use their story for God's purposes. Then I will return and conclude.

Ken returns to the stage and provides the final comments and invites those who want prayer to come to the altar. Dismisses the service and invites people to the **I Have Decided Wall**.