

they knew of God's love because of the love they saw in me.

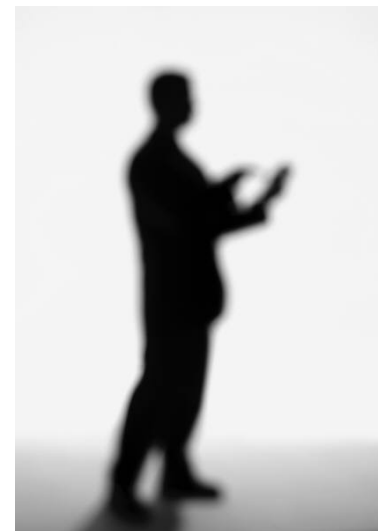
Week One – Reflect on your relationships with the people you work with or who work for you. Read Ephesians 6:5-8; Colossians 3:22-25; 1 Timothy 6:1-2. Compare these scriptures with your attitude at work.

Week Two – Have you ever had a friend steal from you or fail you in some way? What did you want to do? Compare that feeling with the description of what our sin did to Jesus in Isaiah 53 and the forgiveness you have received.

Week Three – Paul calls Onesimus a person who is now profitable. He also asks Philemon to understand what makes Onesimus a person of value. Read the following scripture 1 Peter 2:10; Luke 15:24, 32; Titus 3:3-8. What makes a person a profitable and valuable member of the family of God?

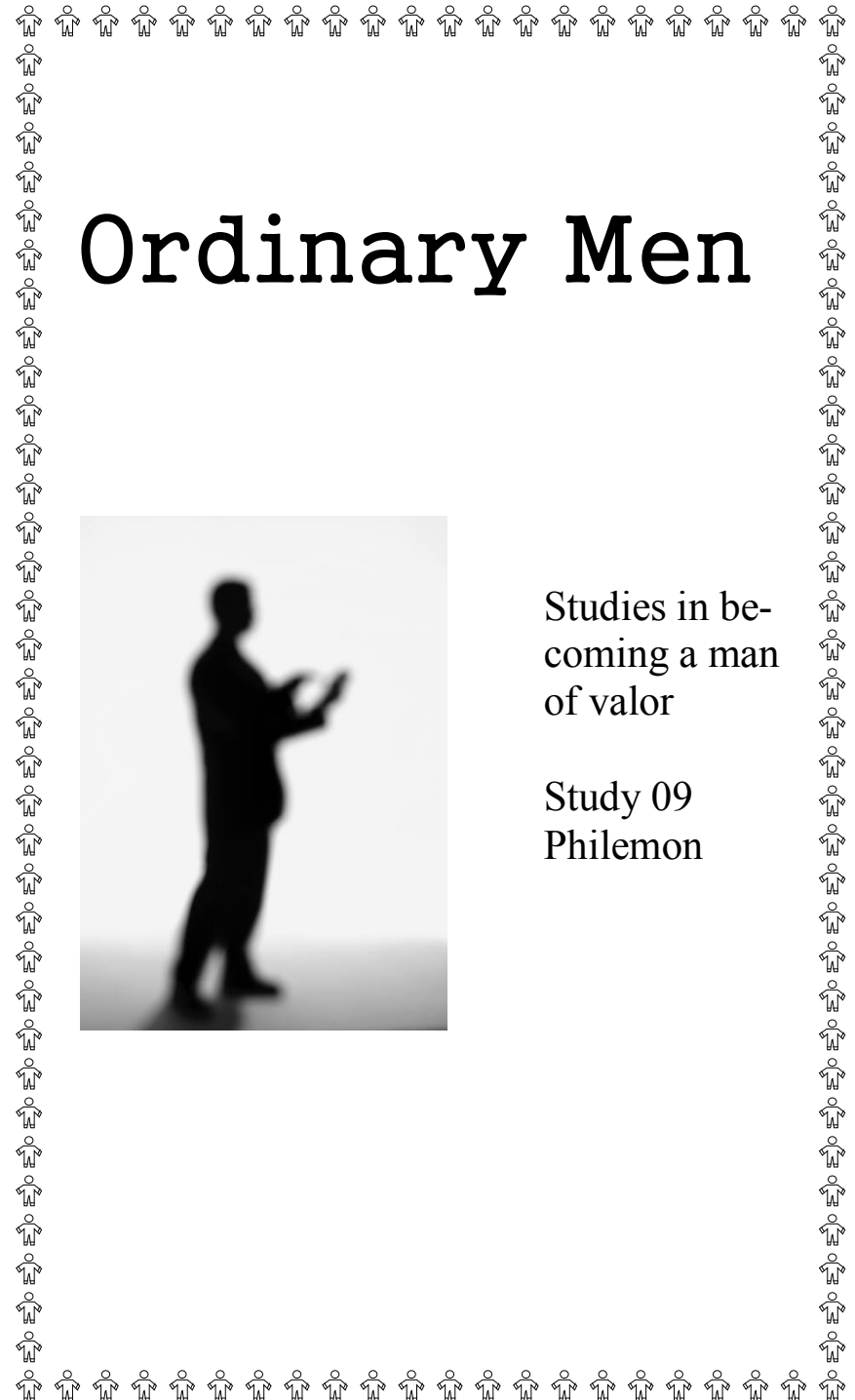
Week Four – Paul encourages Philemon to use this opportunity to communicate his faith to others. Our actions must match our words for our testimony to have value. Read 1 Corinthians 9:12-14 and Philippians 1:9-11. Are there areas and attitudes in your life that are blocking people's ability to see the evidence of God's love through you?

Ordinary Men



Studies in becoming a man of valor

Study 09
Philemon



Journal Entry 60 AD for Philemon

Today's events have brought one area of my life full circle. Onesimus is back working in the house. I never thought that would be possible. Especially considering what he did to me about 4 years ago.

I have always considered myself a fair man. I treat those who work for me with respect and I work hard to be sure they understand what I expect of them. Many of the others around me think that I am far too indulgent, far too patient. A few years ago that would not have been true. I used to be just like them. I was a harsh man, intolerant and quick to punish even the slightest mistake or sign of laziness. That was until a man named Tychicus showed up in our town and I met the Lord.

My life changed and I began to see clearly that there was a better way to run my business. My friends laughed at what I was doing. They said it would never work. But that didn't stop me. I changed how I treated my wife, my family and my workers. I tried to understand their needs and provide for their cares. It wasn't long until I began to see a significant change in their attitude and in the quality of the work they were doing. The work got done faster and was done better than when I used to criticize them, beat them and threaten them.

So I was stunned when one morning (about 4 years ago) I discovered one of the household workers had disappeared along with a large sum of money. I was so furious that when my wife began to remind me of the guidelines we had learned from Tychicus I grabbed her and threw her to the ground. The action was so harsh she passed out.

As suddenly as I had become angry, I was now terrified at what I had just done. I looked around me and saw fear written on the faces of all my children and workers. They remembered how I used to act and knew how violent I could be. That look, the look of terror, shook me. I fell down on my knees and began to pray asking for forgiveness for my reckless act.

I turned to my wife and lifted her up. I looked into her eyes and saw something I never expected to see. I saw forgiveness. Oh how my heart leapt. In that instant I realized that though Onesimus had taken something of value I had almost lost something of greater value - my self-respect and my relationship with God, my family and even my workers.

As I turned and spoke, my words stunned them. Instead of berating them for letting Onesimus steal from me I asked them to forgive me for how I had behaved. I promised them that nothing would change and that we would continue to live by the rules and guidelines of love given to us by the Lord. Many of our family and workers made decisions to accept Jesus as their Savior in the days following that morning.

Onesimus returned this morning. When he walked through the gate I could feel the rage building. The sense of betrayal. But at the same time I was a bit confused. Coming back like this was a very risky decision. By law he could be executed for what he did; at best imprisoned for life or condemned to be fodder for the games. That would be a short life at best.

He was not alone. He came with Tychicus, one of Paul's helpers. His presence further perplexed me. When I asked what was happening he simply gave me a letter; a personal letter to me from Paul. That letter brought everything full circle. It explained that Onesimus had found Paul in Rome. He, Paul, the apostle, asked me to forgive Onesimus and accept him back not just as a worker but as a brother in the Lord.

How does one explain all that went through my mind? How does one set aside such a debt, such an insult, and not just forgive but treat one like an equal? I could only do that by remembering the price that was paid for me so that I could be accepted into God's family. Remembering that, truthfully, each of us is a thief who has robbed from God over and over and deserves to be punished. Remembering the price that was paid to restore us so that we could be called "child of God."

I looked up from the letter to Onesimus. He, a trusted servant, in a moment of weakness, fear, feeling helpless and trapped, had tried to solve his problem by stealing and running away. Then I saw myself. My actions and attitudes may have looked different, but before I met Jesus I was stealing from God and always running, just like Onesimus.

I realized what I needed to do. My friends were going to laugh at me, they were going to criticize me, and they were going to be afraid of how my action would affect them. But that didn't matter. God had set me free and so the right thing to do was set Onesimus free. He would no longer be my slave but my employee. If he wanted to. That was going to cause some changes in my life and work. Yet with God's help I would learn how to deal with each person and each situation so that