

# God in our friendships

**Prepare** *Thank God for your friends. Mention some by name, thanking him for specific things about them and for his work in those relationships.*

## Read Philemon

**Explore** Friendships can be a lifeline. Some of my mates have helped keep me going through pretty rough times. Friends are useful people to have around. God can use them to encourage us, to guide us, to comfort us. This letter from Paul to his friend Philemon does all these things (see vs 6,17,22). Paul reminds Philemon of the difference the cross makes to our friendships. As Christians a whole new dimension is added to the way we relate to others.

It's comparatively easy to think about Jesus having paid for my sins on the cross. But it can be unbelievably hard to take on board that the cross also paid for the wrong things other Christians have done to hurt me. Paul seems to think Philemon is going to have trouble with this one, too (vs 17–20). But the slave who stole from him and then ran away is now a Christian, and willing to return to his master. Paul asks Philemon to look at him through the cross, with forgiveness.

Paul draws attention to the slave's name – Onesimus, meaning 'useful'. In the past, the name was inappropriate. Now that he is a Christian, Onesimus really is useful (v 11). He has become a friend and a 'dear brother'. What a difference it makes, having God in a relationship.

**Respond** *Ask God to help you focus on the cross as you relate to others, removing barriers of all sorts that have the potential to come between you. If there's someone you find it difficult to get on with at the moment, consider verses 17–19 as if Jesus himself was speaking to you. Are you being a useful friend?*

**The Bible in a Year:** 1 Kings 22; Psalms 60,61