

Phoebe | COMMENDED

A Moving Story

WESLEYS' THOUGHT

Jesus, Lord, we look to thee,
let us in thy name agree;
show thyself the Prince of Peace;
bid our jarring conflicts cease.

By thy reconciling love,
every stumbling-block remove;
each to each unite, endear;
come, and spread thy banner here.

Make us of one heart and mind,
courteous, merciful and kind,
lowly, meek in thought and word,
altogether like our Lord.

Let us for each other care,
each the other's burden bear,
to thy Church the pattern give,
show how true believers live.

Free from anger and from pride,
let us thus in God abide;
all the depth of love express,
all the height of holiness.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)
Singing the Faith #686



BIBLE PASSAGE | ROMANS 16:1-16

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae, ² so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well.

³ Greet Prisca and Aquila, who work with me in Christ Jesus, ⁴ and who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. ⁵ Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who was the first convert in Asia for Christ. ⁶ Greet Mary, who has worked very hard among you. ⁷ Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives who were in prison with me; they are prominent among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was. ⁸ Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. ⁹ Greet Urbanus, our co-worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys. ¹⁰ Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus. ¹¹ Greet my relative Herodion. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus. ¹² Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord. ¹³ Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; and greet his mother—a mother to me also. ¹⁴ Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers and sisters who are with them. ¹⁵ Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. ¹⁶ Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.



DISCUSSION

Most employers, when taking on a new member of staff, will require some form of reference, either from a previous employer or from someone who has known the person well and can speak of their character. It acts as a way of introducing someone into a new situation and providing useful information about them.

Built into the way Methodism organizes itself is the idea that no matter where in the world we may move to, some form of commendation, either by way of a letter or transfer of membership takes place, providing the receiving church with the opportunity to welcome this new person into the church family.

It is one way the church from which the person has come, ask that the receiving church will welcome this person as a Methodist in good standing and perhaps including in the letter the role they had in that church and the contribution they might make in this new situation.

Phoebe | A Moving Story

In Romans 16:1-2, Paul is inviting the church in Rome, by way of a letter of commendation, to welcome Phoebe “in the Lord in a way that God’s people should welcome one another” who is coming to them from her church community in Cenchreae.

Amongst scholars there is some uncertainty as to the precise status Phoebe enjoyed in her church and whether the use of the word in the Greek, meaning deaconess, could be accurately used to describe her status within the church at this time. However, what is clear is the high regard Paul had for her because of the Christian service she has been engaged in, the support and help she had given to him, and his desire that she should be well received and offered whatever assistance she might need on arrival in Rome.

Moving from one place to another can be a difficult process, requiring considerable adjustment as you settle into a new community where everything is unfamiliar. Moving into a new church can be disempowering when you have perhaps held a variety of positions where you were before, but have now to consider how that experience and gifts might be used in this new situation, including if they would be welcome at all!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Using the following questions, share with one another how you respond to this passage out of your own experience.

If you have moved from one Methodist church within Britain or from one of our sister churches across the world, did it include a formal letter of commendation or transfer of membership?

- If it did, do you think it made a difference to how you were received?
- If it didn’t, do you think that having one, would have made any difference?

Paul’s letter of commendation includes an indication of the kind of service Phoebe had been giving as part of her Christian discipleship.

- Do you feel that your current church has made good use of the previous experience and service that you were previously engaged in?
- If not, what do you feel has contributed to that?

Research shows that churches are often less welcoming than they see themselves as being, and that visitors who experience a warm welcome and a community that feels hospitable, are more likely to return.

- How would you rate your current church as a place of open welcome and hospitality and how might you go about improving it?

