

Paul's Letter to Philemon

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BIBLE PASSAGE: Philemon 8-22

MAIN POINT: Paul told Philemon to forgive his servant as a Christian brother.

KEY PASSAGE: 2 Timothy 3:16-17

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: How do we live while waiting for Jesus to return?
We remember God's truth, grow in godliness, and spread the gospel.

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(25–30 MINUTES)
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Leader BIBLE STUDY

Paul was a prisoner under house arrest in Rome when a man named Onesimus (oh NESS ih muhs) came to visit him. Onesimus was a slave who had run away from a wealthy man named Philemon.

As it turned out, Paul was a friend of Philemon. So when Paul told Onesimus the good news about Jesus and Onesimus believed, Paul desired forgiveness and reconciliation between Onesimus and Philemon—now brothers in Christ.

So Paul wrote a letter and told Onesimus to take it to Philemon. The Book of Philemon is the letter written by

Paul to Philemon. Though Onesimus had become dear to him and Paul wanted Onesimus to stay with him in Rome, Paul sent him back to Philemon with his letter.

In the letter, Paul urged Philemon to forgive Onesimus and treat him as a fellow brother in Christ. Paul even offered to pay Onesimus's debt for him. Though Paul could have used his authority as an apostle of Christ to force Philemon to do what he wanted, Paul instead appealed to him as a friend and a fellow believer. He urged Philemon to treat Onesimus as if he were Paul himself—with love and kindness.

Paul offered to pay Onesimus's debt to make peace between him and Philemon. In this way, Paul acted like Jesus, who makes peace between God and humanity. Jesus took the punishment we deserve for our sin, paying our debt so that we can be forgiven and welcomed into God's family as brothers and sisters of Jesus. (See Heb. 2:11.)

Paul's letter serves as a reminder to us that everyone is equal before Jesus. People from completely different backgrounds—like Paul, a former Jewish leader; Onesimus, a runaway slave; and Philemon, a Gentile slave-owner—are brought together by the gospel under the lordship of Jesus Christ. In light of God's love for us, we can be loving, kind, and forgiving to our brothers and sisters in Christ for the glory of God.



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The BIBLE STORY

Bible Storytelling Tips

Paul's Letter to Philemon

Philemon 8-22

- **Use art:** Draw figures for each person (Paul, Onesimus, and Philemon). Point to each figure as he is referenced in the story.
- **Make eye contact:** Make eye contact with kids to draw them in, especially when telling narrated portions.

When Paul was a prisoner in Rome, he met a man named Onesimus (oh NESS ih muhs). Onesimus was a servant. He had run away from his owner, Philemon. Philemon was Paul's friend.

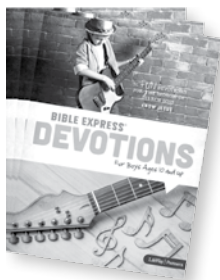
Paul told Onesimus the good news about Jesus, and Onesimus believed in Jesus. He helped Paul, and Paul wanted Onesimus to stay with him. But Paul knew Onesimus needed to do the right thing: to go back to Philemon and ask for forgiveness. So Paul wrote a letter and told Onesimus to take the letter back to Philemon.

“Dear Philemon, I am writing you because I love you. I want you to do the right thing. I am getting old, and I am in prison because I tell people about Jesus. I met Onesimus and told him about Jesus, and he believed. I want him to stay with me, but I want your permission first.

“Onesimus is a believer now. Maybe this is why he left you for a little while—so that he could come back to you as a brother instead of a servant. He is our friend and brother in Christ. Please welcome him like you would welcome me. If he owes you anything, I will pay it.

“Philemon, I would be so happy if you agree to do this. I know you will do what is right.” Paul asked Philemon to get a room ready for him. Paul hoped to visit Philemon soon.

Christ Connection: Paul offered to pay Onesimus's debt to make peace between him and Philemon. In this way, Paul acted like Jesus, who makes peace between God and man. Jesus took the punishment we deserve for our sin. He paid our debt so that we can be forgiven and welcomed by God.



**WANT TO
DISCOVER
GOD'S WORD?
GET
BIBLE EXPRESS!**

Invite kids to check out this week's devotionals to discover how God's Word can help them grow in the gospel. Order in bulk, subscribe quarterly, or purchase individually. For more information, check out www.lifeway.com/devotionals.

Introduce the STORY

SESSION TITLE: Paul's Letter to Philemon

BIBLE PASSAGE: Philemon 8-22

MAIN POINT: Paul told Philemon to forgive his servant as a Christian brother.

KEY PASSAGE: 2 Timothy 3:16-17

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: How do we live while waiting for Jesus to return?
We remember God's truth, grow in godliness, and spread the gospel.

Welcome time

Greet each kid as he or she arrives. Use this time to collect the offering, fill out attendance sheets, and help new kids connect to your group. Prompt kids to think about a time they needed to forgive someone who hurt or upset them. Allow volunteers to share.

SAY • It's not always easy to forgive other people, is it? The Bible says Jesus will always forgive us when we ask, so we can forgive others. Today we will learn about a time when Paul asked his friend to forgive a servant.

Activity page (5 minutes)

Invite kids to complete "A Way Back" on the activity page. Kids should find the path from Onesimus to Philemon.

SAY • Today's Bible story is about a message Paul sent to his friend Philemon. We're going to learn more about what Paul asked Philemon to do.

- "A Way Back" activity page, 1 per kid
- pencils or markers

LOW PREP

- poster board or large sheet of paper
- crayons
- markers
- colored pencils

Session starter (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: Welcome sign

Lay out poster board or large sheet of paper and encourage kids to work together to create a *Welcome* banner for the

classroom or hallway. Help them come up with a plan, theme, and design. Ask what would make people want to come into their classroom or hallway? When they finish, commend the kids on working together.

SAY • Making people feel welcome is important, especially at church. It helps visitors feel comfortable and encourages them to learn more about Jesus.

To make your signs, you had to work together as a team. Did everyone always agree on every decision? Most likely not. You might be tempted to hold a grudge when you don't get your way. Today we will learn about welcoming people and also why we should forgive others when we have a disagreement.

Tip: If your group is large, form smaller groups and create multiple signs.

OPTION 2: Seventy times seven

Before the session, put 7 items in one bag and 490 items in another. Ask boys and girls how many times they should forgive someone, such as a friend or a brother or sister—once or twice a day? How about seven times a day?

Ask a volunteer to find and read Matthew 18:21-22 in his Bible. Let kids compare the bags of items.

SAY • Jesus told Peter to forgive seventy times seven times. Seventy times seven is 490. Jesus didn't mean to forgive that many times and then stop; Jesus wants us to forgive without limit. Jesus forgives us without limit—for our past, present, and future sins—because He loves us. We can forgive others because we have been forgiven.

In today's Bible story, Paul wrote a letter about forgiveness. We'll find out what he said.

- bags, 2
- 497 small items such as beans, beads, or paper clips
- Bible

Transition to teach the story

Teach the STORY

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- room decorations
- Theme Background Slide (optional)

Suggested Theme Decorating Ideas: Simulate a space administration control center using several binders, books, and notebooks on a desk or table. Draw or print a poster of a space administration logo to hang on the wall. Prepare a name tag for each adult leader in the room. Hang up posters or drawings of planets, the solar system, and so forth. Consider displaying the theme background slide.

Countdown

- countdown video

Show the countdown video as your kids arrive, and set it to end as the session begins.

Introduce the session (3 minutes)

- leader attire
- name tag
- large binder or clipboard

[Leader enters wearing a name tag and carrying a large binder or clipboard. Leader looks in the binder and acts as if checking off items to be done. He or she notices the kids and stops in front of the group in an official-looking stance.]

LEADER • Greetings! You must be our new command center recruits. I'm glad you're here, and I hope you're up for the challenge. We have quite a bit of work to do and training to cover to get you ready to assist with our next launch. I assume you've already graduated

with your engineering degrees, correct? [*Pause for the kids to answer no.*] Hmm ... this is going to take a little more effort than I was expecting. No worries. We'll get you trained and ready in no time.

Big picture question (1 minute)

LEADER • First we must learn our big picture question, which will keep us focused during our training time together. [*Point to the big picture question poster or slide and read it aloud.*] ***How do we live while waiting for Jesus to return?*** Let's say that together: ***How do we live while waiting for Jesus to return?***

That may not seem like it has much to do with our training, but I think you'll be surprised. We will discover the answer after we hear today's Bible story.

• Big Picture Question
Poster

Giant timeline (1 minute)

Show the giant timeline or big story circle.

LEADER • Let me give you a quick look at where we're going. We'll be using all our training manuals here [*motion to the table or desk*] but we'll be also use the best training manual for any situation, God's Word.

Today's training comes from the Book of Philemon. It's a letter written to a guy named Philemon from a guy name Paul. Have you heard of Paul? He wrote quite a bit of God's Word in the New Testament, and he's got a message from God for us today. Our next Bible story will be from another letter by Paul as we talk about hope. Then we'll focus on God's truth, and we'll end with a great training on waiting. All of these are key stories, so pay attention! Let's get started with our first training.

• Giant Timeline or
Big Story Circle

- Bibles
- “Paul’s Letter to Philemon” video
- Big Picture Question Poster
- Bible Story Picture Poster

Tell the Bible story (10 minutes)

Open your Bible to Philemon 8-22. Use the Bible storytelling tips on the Bible story page to help you tell the story, or show the Bible story video “Paul’s Letter to Philemon.”

LEADER • Paul wanted—and expected—his friend Philemon to welcome back Onesimus as a friend and brother. **Paul told Philemon to forgive his servant as a Christian brother,** not as a servant.

The Bible says that without Jesus, we are all slaves to sin. Our sin separates us from God. We have such a huge debt of sin that we could never pay it back with good deeds. Paul offered to pay anything Philemon owed to Onesimus. This is a small example of what Jesus did for us. Jesus gave His life to pay our debt and free us from the power of sin. Jesus welcomes us and treats us as brothers and sisters.

We too can welcome and forgive others, treating other believers like brothers and sisters. In this way, we show God’s love and stay focused on the mission at hand. We can’t afford to get distracted by little things while we wait for Jesus’ return.

That brings us back to our big picture question: ***How do we live while waiting for Jesus to return?*** Any ideas about the answers after today’s training? [*Allow kids to respond.*]

Those are great thoughts. Let’s look at the answer together. [*Show the big picture question poster.*] ***We remember God’s truth, grow in godliness, and spread the gospel.*** We will continue to study this throughout our training time together.

Christ connection

LEADER • Today's training is so important. I want to make sure you really understand, so let's take a moment to look at how our story shows connects to Jesus: **Paul told Philemon to forgive his servant as a Christian brother.** Paul offered to pay Onesimus's debt to make peace between him and Philemon.

In this way, Paul acted like Jesus, who makes peace between God and man. Jesus took the punishment we deserve for our sin, paying our debt so that we can be forgiven and welcomed by God.

Tip: Use Scripture and the guide provided to explain how to become a Christian. Make sure kids know when and where they can ask questions.

Key passage (5 minutes)

Show the key passage poster. Lead the boys and girls to read together 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

LEADER • Some people think the Bible is just a random collection of stories and sayings written over hundreds of years, but the Bible is unlike any other book because God directed all of it. He inspired each writer to use just the right words to tell His message to us. We can trust that His Word is true. When we follow God's Word, we will grow into the people God created us to be and accomplish the plans He has for us.

Let's read our key passage together again, only this time, read it with me with some excitement!

Repeat the key passage. Then lead boys and girls in singing "Inspired by God."

- Key Passage Poster
- "Inspired by God" song

Discussion starter video (4 minutes)

LEADER • **Paul told Philemon to forgive his servant as a Christian brother.** Do you think that was hard for

- Unit 35, Session 1" discussion starter video

Philemon to do? Check out this video.
Show the “Unit 35, Session 1” discussion starter video.
Then lead kids to discuss the following questions:

- Why was it hard for Frosty to accept Celery as a teammate instead of an opponent?
- When someone becomes a believer, how should we treat that person, regardless of his or her past?
- How does God treat us, regardless of our past?

LEADER • God calls us to live at peace with one another and welcome believers into God’s family.

Sing (4 minutes)

• “Hope of Heaven” song

LEADER • Every day I think about how Jesus paid the debt of my sin for me. That alone makes Him worthy of my praise. Let’s take time to thank Jesus for what He did and the hope He gives us for the future.

Sing together “Hope of Heaven.”

Pray (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before dismissing to apply the story.

LEADER • Jesus, Your Word is true and trustworthy. We can study it and learn amazing lessons like forgiveness through Your example and through Paul’s letter. Help us to treat others the way You have treated us, as brothers and sisters. Amen.

Dismiss to apply the story

The Gospel: God's Plan for Me

Ask kids if they have ever heard the word *gospel*. Clarify that the word *gospel* means “good news.” It is the message about Christ, the kingdom of God, and salvation. Use the following guide to share the gospel with kids.



God rules. Explain to kids that the Bible tells us God created everything, and He is in charge of everything. Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 1:1 from the Bible. Read Revelation 4:11 or Colossians 1:16-17 aloud and explain what these verses mean.



We sinned. Tell kids that since the time of Adam and Eve, everyone has chosen to disobey God. (Romans 3:23) The Bible calls this sin. Because God is holy, God cannot be around sin. Sin separates us from God and deserves God's punishment of death. (Romans 6:23)



God provided. Choose a child to read John 3:16 aloud. Say that God sent His Son, Jesus, the perfect solution to our sin problem, to rescue us from the punishment we deserve. It's something we, as sinners, could never earn on our own. Jesus alone saves us. Read and explain Ephesians 2:8-9.



Jesus gives. Share with kids that Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again. Because Jesus gave up His life for us, we can be welcomed into God's family for eternity. This is the best gift ever! Read Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; or 1 Peter 3:18.



We respond. Tell kids that they can respond to Jesus. Read Romans 10:9-10,13. Review these aspects of our response: Believe in your heart that Jesus alone saves you through what He's already done on the cross. Repent, turning from self and sin to Jesus. Tell God and others that your faith is in Jesus.

Offer to talk with any child who is interested in responding to Jesus. Provide *I'm a Christian Now!* for new Christians to take home and complete with their families.

Apply the STORY

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BIG PICTURE QUESTION: How do we live while waiting for Jesus to return?
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Key passage activity (5 minutes)

- Key Passage Poster
- envelopes
- index cards
- marker

Before the session, write phrases of the key passage on separate index cards. Put one phrase in each envelope. You may choose to make multiple sets based on the number of kids. Instruct kids to open the envelopes and put the key passage in the correct order. Display the key passage poster for the kids to check their work.

SAY • Who likes to get letters or birthday cards in the mail? [*Allow kids to respond.*] The Bible is God's Word to us, like one long letter. All of the things He wants us to know are in the Bible.

Our key passage tells us that every part of the Bible is inspired by God. We use it to learn, teach others, and grow in our faith so we will be ready for the work God has for us. Let's say it together one more time. [*Lead kids to say the key passage.*]

Bible story review & Bible skills (10 minutes)

- Bibles, 1 per kid
- Main Point Poster
- index cards
- pen

Before the session, write the following references on separate index cards: *Matthew 9:1-2; Matthew 26:27-28; Luke 5:18-20; Luke 6:37; Luke 7:44-48; Matthew 6:14-15.*

Distribute the cards to volunteers to look up and read

the passages. You may choose to create teams of two or three kids to find one or more passages together.

SAY • What did all of these passages have in common? (*forgiveness*) Jesus set the example for us in the Bible. He loved people and forgave them. We should do the same. Let's take a moment to pray and thank God for forgiving our sins and ask that He would help us forgive others. [*Pray or ask a volunteer to pray aloud on behalf of the group.*]

Option: Retell or review the Bible story using the bolded text of the Bible story script.

Activity choice (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: The act of forgiveness

Form groups of three or four kids. Instruct them to work together to think of a real-life scenario of forgiveness, something they might encounter during their day.

(Examples: A sibling borrows a favorite shirt and returns it with a stain; a friend promises to meet you at the mall but never comes; a parent is unable to attend your soccer game.)

Invite them to plan a skit showing the offense and how someone can extend forgiveness. Allow each group to act out a skit of forgiveness for the other groups. Thank kids for their creativity and their teamwork on this activity.

SAY • It's not always easy to forgive in real life situations. But we can forgive others because God has forgiven us so much. **Paul told Philemon to forgive his servant as a Christian brother.** In forgiving someone, we show God's love to the person we forgive.

When you are the person who did wrong, pray for the courage to apologize and ask forgiveness of the person you wronged. That is a great first step in restoring your relationship with the other person.



- dry erase board
- markers
- “Dollar Bills” printable

Note: Be sensitive to families’ home situations.

OPTION 2: Paying your debt

Before the session, print and cut out multiple copies of the “Dollar Bills” printable. Ask the children what kind of things they like to buy.

Write their answers on a dry erase board and assign a dollar amount to each item. Ask the kids about other daily expenses their families might have: utility bills, gas, car payments, food, rent or house payment.

Assign basic monthly amounts for each item. Add up the amounts for a grand monthly total. Examples: utility bills (\$200); car payments (\$250); gas (\$100); food (\$500); rent or house payment (\$800)

Distribute several denominations of bills to the children, giving each kid a various amount. Instruct kids to count up the money they have. (Note: Make sure ahead of time their money seems like a lot, but is less than your monthly total.)

SAY • So what happens at the end of the month if someone’s expenses are higher than the money he has? (*He goes into debt.*) *Debt* means a person owes more than he has. What happens if a person can’t pay his debt? (*He loses things, example: his car can be taken away.*) What if someone paid your bills for you? (*The debt would be forgiven because someone else paid it.*)

Paul told Philemon to forgive his servant as a Christian brother. Paul offered to pay Onesimus’s debt to make peace between him and Philemon. In this way, Paul acted like Jesus, who makes peace between God and man. Jesus took the punishment we deserve for our sin, paying our debt so that we can be forgiven and welcomed by God.

Encourage kids to place one of their dollar bills in their Bible as a reminder that Jesus has paid their debt.

Option: Review the gospel with boys and girls. Explain that kids are welcome to speak with you or another teacher if they have questions.

Journal and prayer (5 minutes)

Distribute journal pages and pencils. Guide kids to think about and answer the questions listed on the page:

- What does this story teach me about God or the gospel?
- What does the story teach me about myself?
- Are there any commands in this story to obey? How are they for God's glory and my good?
- Are there any promises in this story to remember? How do they help me trust and love God?
- How does this story help me to live on mission better?

As kids journal, invite them to share their ideas. Then pray, thanking God for His Word and for providing forgiveness through His Son. Pray that boys and girls would be quick to forgive others this week as they remember the gospel.

As time allows, lead kids to complete "Forgiven and Free" on the activity page.

- pencils
- Journal Page
- "Forgiven and Free" activity page, 1 per kid

Tip: Give parents this week's *Big Picture Cards for Families* to allow families to interact with the biblical content at home.