

Paul's Letter to Philemon

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BIBLE PASSAGE: Philemon 8-22

MAIN POINT: Paul told Philemon to forgive his servant.

KEY PASSAGE: 2 Timothy 3:16

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: How do we live while waiting for Jesus to come back? We follow Jesus and tell everyone about Him.

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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 puppets:** Use puppets or people figures to represent Philemon, Onesimus, and Paul. Move the figures as each person in the story moves or speaks.
- **Use drawings:** Cut out three figures to represent Onesimus, Philemon, and Paul. Tape Philemon and Paul to two areas of a wall next to your teaching area. Move Onesimus from Philemon to Paul and back to Philemon as you tell the Bible story.

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. 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. First, Paul wrote a letter for Onesimus to give 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.

“Philemon, I would be so happy if you agree to do this. I know you will do what is right. Please get a room ready for me. I know you are praying for me. I hope God will answer your prayers so I can visit you soon.”

Christ Connection: Paul asked Philemon to forgive Onesimus and treat him like a brother in Jesus. He wanted to make peace between his friends. In this way, Paul acted like Jesus. Jesus came into the world to make peace between God and people. He died on the cross for our sin so we can be part of God's family forever.



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DISCOVER
GOD'S WORD?
GET
MORE!**

Invite preschoolers 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

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BIG PICTURE QUESTION: How do we live while waiting for Jesus to come back? We follow Jesus and tell everyone about Him.

Welcome time

- "I Have Hope" song
- offering basket
- Allergy Alert download
- favorite toys related to the Bible story theme

Play the unit theme song in the background as you greet preschoolers and follow your church's security procedures. Set an offering basket near the door to collect at an appropriate time. Post an allergy alert, if necessary. Set out a few favorite theme-related toys, such as puzzles and blocks.

Activity page

- "Peacemaker Maze" activity page, 1 per child
- pencils or crayons

Help preschoolers complete the maze, marking the path for Onesimus to pick up a letter from Paul and take it back to Philemon.

SAY • In our Bible story today, a man ran away, but Paul sent him back home with a letter. Listen to our Bible story to hear what the letter said.

Play out "Going home from church"

Invite preschoolers to sit in a circle with you and begin a pat-pat, clap-clap rhythm pattern. Say the rhythm and perform the motions, inviting children to repeat them after you.

"I'm going home from church. [*Pump arms as if marching.*]

Going to eat some lunch [*Pretend to eat.*]



And tell what I learned. [*Point to mouth.*]

Uh-oh! Rain!

Very heavy rain!

Didn't wear my rain coat [*Shake your head.*]

Didn't bring my umbrella [*Shake your head.*]

Oh no! Gotta run through it!

Splish splash, splish splash

Splish splash, splish splash!"

Play out other scenarios such as walking through mud, the car breaking down, and so forth.

SAY • Oh my! I hope your trip home today will be less adventurous. In today's Bible story, a man named Onesimus went home. Paul gave him a letter to take home with him. We will find out why Paul sent a letter with Onesimus in today's Bible story.

Play a matching game

Print and cut apart the "Natural Enemies" pictures. Place the cards faceup in a grid for the preschoolers to examine. Help children match each animal with its natural enemy.

SAY • The Bible tells us that one day, enemies will be friends and even lions will lie down with lambs! In our story today, we will hear how Paul helped make peace between two of his friends.

• "Natural Enemies"
printable

Answers:

- frog/fly
- cat/bird
- fox/hen
- dog/squirrel
- lion/lamb

Transition to tell the story

To gain the attention of all the preschoolers to move them to Bible study, show the countdown video, flip off the lights, or clap a simple rhythm for the children to copy. Invite children to roar like lions or bleat like lambs on their way to Bible study.

• countdown video
(optional)

Teach THE STORY

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BIG PICTURE QUESTION: How do we live while waiting for Jesus to come back? We follow Jesus and tell everyone about Him.

Introduce the Bible story

Share an age-appropriate story about a time that you did something wrong and had to apologize. Emphasize the gracious response you received.

SAY • In our Bible story today, a man made a mistake and needed to make it right. Let's listen to how it went.

Watch or tell the Bible story

Place a bookmark at Philemon in your Bible. Invite a preschooler to open it. Reverently display the open Bible.

SAY • What book is this? The Bible! Whose words are in the Bible? God's! Is the whole Bible true? Yes! Today's story is a letter that Paul wrote to a friend named Philemon. It is in our Bible because God spoke through Paul to Philemon.

Show the video or tell the Bible story using the provided storytelling tips. Use the bolded version of the Bible story for young preschoolers.

Talk about the Bible story

SAY • Wait—Onesimus was a servant and he ran away, but **Paul told Philemon to forgive his servant** and treat him like a brother in Jesus. That's asking for a lot of

- Bible
- bookmark
- "Paul's Letter to Philemon" video (optional)
- Bible Story Picture Poster

- Main Point Poster
- Giant Timeline or Big Story Circle

forgiveness! In this way, Paul acted like Jesus. Jesus came into the world to make peace between God and people. He died on the cross for our sin so we can be part of God's family forever. Now God helps us forgive and love each other, too!

Point to the Bible story picture on the giant timeline or big story circle as you ask the following review questions:

1. Who wrote the letter in today's story? (*Paul*)
2. To whom did he write? (*Philemon*)
3. Who ran away and then apologized? (*Onesimus*)
4. Who makes peace between God and people? (*Jesus*)

Learn the big picture question

SAY • The next few weeks, we are learning from several letters in the Bible the answer to our big picture question, ***How do we live while waiting for Jesus to come back? We follow Jesus and tell everyone about Him.*** Paul followed Jesus and told Onesimus and Philemon how to follow him, too. Paul told Philemon to forgive his servant as Jesus forgives us.

• Big Picture Question Poster

Practice the key passage

Open your Bible to 2 Timothy 3:16. Read the key passage aloud several times. Sing together the key passage song, "All Scripture."

SAY • Our new key passage tells us that the whole Bible comes from God! Today, we learned how Paul made peace between his friends, just like Jesus makes peace between God and people.

• Key Passage Poster
• "All Scripture" song

Transition to experience the story

Experience THE STORY

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LOW PREP

• paper

Play “Servant to Family”

Instruct preschoolers to line up on one side of the room with you, and place another leader on the other side of the room with a stack of papers. Tell preschoolers that you are Philemon and the other leader is Paul. Play a version of “Red Light, Green Light” where the children will try to sneak away from you to the other leader, pick up a paper, and bring it back to you. If you catch a child moving after saying “red light,” ask him to return to the servant’s house (where Philemon is) and start over. When children finish, say, “Welcome to the family!”

SAY • Paul told Philemon to forgive his servant. Paul asked Philemon to forgive Onesimus and treat him like a brother in Jesus. He wanted to make peace between his friends. In this way, Paul acted like Jesus. Jesus came into the world to make peace between God and people. He died on the cross for our sin so we can be part of God’s family forever.



LOW PREP

• paper

• pencils or crayons

“Write” an apology letter

Ask preschoolers to think of a time that they disobeyed or hurt someone’s feelings. Encourage them to draw a picture for that person. As children work, talk to each child

individually about who he or she needs to apologize to and why. Write a short letter on each child's paper and pray with him or her. Encourage children to give their letters to the person.

SAY • Onesimus had to tell Philemon he was sorry for running away, so Paul wrote a letter for him. **Paul told Philemon to forgive his servant.** Jesus came into the world to make peace between God and people. You can pray for help from God when you need to say you're sorry!

Make a collage

Write *God's Family* on a large sheet of paper. Help preschoolers cut out pictures of many different types of people and glue them to the paper. Display the collage in your classroom throughout the unit.

- large sheet of paper
- magazine cutouts
- glue

SAY • Paul told Philemon to forgive his servant, Onesimus and treat him like a brother in Jesus. Paul wanted to make peace between his friends. In this way, Paul acted like Jesus. Jesus came into the world to make peace between God and people. He died on the cross for our sin so we can be part of God's family forever.

Cleansing change

Place old, dirty pennies in a small container with a squirt of ketchup. Allow preschoolers to rub the ketchup on the pennies using a toothbrush. Then wipe the pennies clean. Keep wipes handy for cleanup.

SAY • Wow, those pennies really changed after we cleaned them with ketchup! People change after Jesus changes their hearts, too. **Paul told Philemon to**

- pennies
- Allergy Alert download
- ketchup
- new, inexpensive toothbrushes
- paper towels
- hand wipes

forgive his servant because Jesus had forgiven both of them. Now they can shine with God's love like these pennies shine!

- clear contact plastic
- colored tissue paper
- marker
- tape

Beauty from brokenness

Tape a piece of contact plastic sticky side up in front of each preschooler. Provide several colors of tissue paper for children to tear and place on their sheet. Lay another sheet of contact plastic over each child's artwork and write the main point with a permanent marker.

SAY • Onesimus ran away from Philemon, which was wrong. When we do wrong things, it is like tearing paper. You can tape the paper together again, but it will still look broken. Instead, God makes a beautiful picture from our brokenness! **Paul told Philemon to forgive his servant** and treat him as a brother instead. Even though it was wrong for Onesimus to run away, that was how he heard about Jesus and joined God's family!

Snack

Play the countdown video to signal the end of activities. Guide preschoolers to clean their areas. Take a restroom break and wash hands. Gather preschoolers for snack time. Thank God for the snack.

Invite preschoolers to serve one another a favorite snack. Talk about how Onesimus didn't want to serve Philemon before he believed in Jesus. But afterwards, he was happy to serve others! **Paul told Philemon to forgive his servant** and welcome him back.

- countdown video (optional)
- Allergy Alert download
- snack food
- paper cups and napkins

Transition

When a child finishes his snack, guide him to throw away any trash. He may select a book or puzzle to examine, play quietly with play dough or a favorite toy, or color the Bible story coloring page.

Offer the journal page and invite preschoolers to draw a picture of their family or friends at church. Explain how Christians are all in God's family, so we should love and forgive one another like family. Jesus came into the world to make peace between God and people. He died on the cross for our sin so we can be part of God's family forever. Pray for the children.

SAY • God, thank You for always loving and forgiving us. Sometimes it is hard for us to say we're sorry or forgive someone who has hurt us. But You sent Jesus to die for our sin and give us Your Spirit. So please help us forgive others as You have forgiven us. Amen!

If parents are picking up their children at this time, tell them something that their child enjoyed doing or did well during the session. Distribute the preschool big picture cards for families.

- books
- puzzles
- play dough
- Journal Page printable, 1 per child
- Bible Story Coloring Page
- crayons
- Big Picture Cards for Families: Babies, Toddlers, and Preschoolers