

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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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

• Around the room:

Use stools or small tables to set up stations around the room. Place an object at each station that represents something from the story, such as handcuffs to represent slavery, money to represent debt, a heart to represent love, and a cross to represent Christian faith. As you tell the story, walk from station to station to display the symbolic items.

• Eye contact: Maintain eye contact with kids to hold their attention.

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.

“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
ADVENTURE!**

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

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BIG PICTURE QUESTION: How do we live while waiting for Jesus to return?
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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. As kids arrive, ask them to share a time when they had to forgive someone. What did they have to forgive that person for?

SAY • Is it hard or easy to forgive someone? Often it can be a difficult thing to do! Sometimes it's easier to stay mad at someone or demand that the person who wronged you pay for what he or she did. But that's not what Jesus does. Jesus forgives us and asks us to do the same for others.

Activity page (5 minutes)

- "Where's Onesimus?" activity page, 1 per kid
- pencils or markers

Invite kids to complete the "Where's Onesimus?" activity page. Instruct them to search the crowds to find the man who matches the picture of Onesimus.

SAY • Onesimus was a servant who had run away from Philemon, the man he worked for. Why do you think he ran away? Do you think Philemon looked for Onesimus? We'll hear more about Onesimus and Philemon in our Bible story!

Session starter (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: Forgiven much

Form groups of three kids. Give one kid in each group a large pile of play money bills and another kid in each group a small pile of play money coins. The third kid in each group will be the banker. Explain that the piles of money (large and small) represent how much money the kids owe the banker. Allow the banker to choose if he will collect the money for himself or forgive the debt.

SAY • If the banker chooses to forgive what people owe, which person do you think would be more grateful to have the debt canceled, the one who owed the large pile of money, or the one who owed just a few coins? [Allow responses.] Why do you think that is? Today we'll hear a story about a man who needed to forgive someone because he himself had been forgiven by Jesus.



- play money, bills and coins

OPTION 2: Welcome home banner

Provide a large sheet of paper or poster board to the kids and instruct them to make and decorate a banner to welcome someone home. Help the kids write *Welcome Home* on the paper.

SAY • How many of you have ever welcomed someone home? We usually welcome friends and family members home to show them we care about them. How do you think you would welcome a servant who owed you money and ran away without paying you back? Today we will hear about a time something like that happened!

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

Transition to teach the story

Teach the STORY

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- room decorations
- Theme Background Slide (optional)

Suggested Theme Decorating Ideas: Decorate the room to look like the control center of a space program. Print or paint a sign with a space program logo to hang in the room. Use foam board or old computer monitors to create the illusion of multiple displays. Use string and different sized balls to create a model of the solar system to hang from the ceiling.

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

[Leader enters wearing a flight suit and carrying a large helmet.]

LEADER • Hello, boys and girls! My name is *[leader's name]*. I'm so glad you are able to join me today as I prepare for our next space launch. In case you didn't know, I'm an astronaut, and my crew and I are getting ready for our next mission into space. My team and I have to train really hard to make sure our bodies can handle being in space. You might think it's easy to

float around in zero gravity, but it can be really tough if you're not used to it!

Have you ever had to prepare for something difficult? Not only are we preparing for space travel, but we're all also preparing for Jesus to return one day. We don't know when it will be, but He has promised to come back and make all things new!

Over the next few weeks, we will be exploring what it means to prepare for Jesus to return. I have lots of exciting Bible stories to share with you. I can't wait to get started!

Big picture question (1 minute)

LEADER • Part of your training mission today is to help me figure out the answer to our big picture question. Our question is, ***How do we live while waiting for Jesus to return?*** We know that Jesus will return someday, but we don't know exactly when that will be, so it's important to use our time wisely while we are still waiting.

What do you think it looks like to use our time on earth wisely? Listen closely to the Bible story and see if you can detect any ways that Paul encourages us to live as Christ followers.

Giant timeline (1 minute)

Show the giant timeline or big story circle.

LEADER • Paul was a missionary, which means that he obeyed God's call to share the gospel with people who didn't know Jesus. Paul loved Jesus more than anything in the world, and he wanted to tell everyone he could about how they could be saved

• Giant Timeline or
Big Story Circle

from their sin. Lots of people heard the good news and they believed! They wanted to experience the grace and love that God had shown Paul.

But not everyone liked what Paul had to say, so Paul had been put in prison. Even while he was in chains, Paul wrote letters to the believers he had met. He wanted to encourage them in their faith. He wrote a letter to his friend Philemon. That's where our story picks up.

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 • When Paul met Onesimus, the servant who ran away from Philemon, he shared the gospel with him. Onesimus believed the truth that Jesus died to save him from sin. As a result, **Paul told Philemon to forgive his servant as a Christian brother**, not a runaway servant. Paul could have used his authority as an apostle and leader in the church to force Philemon to welcome Onesimus, but instead, Paul asked Philemon to welcome Onesimus out of love. Paul even offered to pay any debt that Onesimus owed to Philemon.

Paul wanted to remind his friend Philemon about the truth of God's forgiveness. We have been forgiven so much for our sin, so we can forgive others when they hurt us. Is it always easy to show forgiveness? Sometimes it's really tough, but when we ask Him, God will always help us forgive. Paul also wanted

- Bibles
- "Paul's Letter to Philemon" video
- Big Picture Question Poster
- Bible Story Picture Poster

Philemon to understand that all believers are part of God's forever family. ***How do we live while waiting for Jesus to return? We remember God's truth, grow in godliness, and spread the gospel.***

Christ connection

LEADER • The Bible teaches that before a person knows Jesus, he or she is a slave to sin. None of us can choose to do the right things without God. We are doomed to fail and remain separated from God unless we trust Jesus. Jesus died on the cross to make the way for us to be set free from sin and to become children of God,

Paul encouraged Philemon to forgive Onesimus and treat him as a brother in Christ. 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 • God used many people to write down the words that are in the Bible, but all of it came from God. Throughout the Bible there are stories, poems, proverbs, songs, and even prophecies. All of Scripture is God's Word, and it is trustworthy. Let's work on memorizing our key passage over the next few weeks! Lead boys and girls in singing "Inspired by God."

- Key Passage Poster
- "Inspired by God" song

• “Unit 35, Session 1”
discussion starter
video

Discussion starter video (4 minutes)

LEADER • Have you ever struggled to love someone as a friend or teammate?

Show the “Unit 35, Session 1” discussion starter video. Discuss why Frosty struggled to accept Celery as part of his team. How does the gospel change us? How do we treat new believers? What if they did bad things in the past?

LEADER • When a person believes in Jesus, she becomes a new creation. We are bonded to other believers by our love of Jesus, no matter what our past looks like. **Paul told Philemon to forgive his servant as a Christian brother**, and we are called to show that kind of forgiveness too.

Sing (4 minutes)

• “Hope of Heaven” song

LEADER • It’s not easy to show forgiveness to others, but it is possible. We have hope for the future because of Jesus. Let’s sing!

Sing together “Hope of Heaven.”

Pray (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before dismissing to apply the story.

LEADER • God, thank You for inviting us to be part of Your family through Jesus. Help us to love others well this week. Help us show forgiveness when others hurt us and seek forgiveness when we hurt others. We pray that You would use us to welcome others into Your family as we share the gospel. 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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Key passage activity (5 minutes)

- Key Passage Poster
- ball

Show the key passage poster and say the verses together a few times. Instruct the kids to stand in a circle and toss a ball from one kid to another across the circle, each saying the next word of the verse. See how fast they can pass the ball and say the key passage without making a mistake.

SAY • One of the best ways to know God better is by reading the Bible. It's so much more than just a book with interesting stories. God's Word shows us who God is, what He is like, and how we can know Him. When we read the Bible, we can see God's incredible love for us because the whole Bible points us to Jesus, our Savior.

Bible story review & Bible skills (10 minutes)

- Bibles, 1 per kid
- Main Point Poster

Distribute Bibles to the kids and help them look up the Book of Philemon. Ask a volunteer to tell which testament Philemon is in (*New*) and which division (*Paul's Letters*).

SAY • The Book of Philemon is one of the letters in the New Testament written by Paul. Many of the New Testament books are letters for either specific people or the believers in a certain area. But these books

are also for us today. God's Word speaks to us even though it was written many years ago because it comes directly from God. Let's see how much we can remember of what we learned during the Bible story today.

Play charades using words from the story. For each word that is guessed ask the class to explain how that word relates to the Bible story.

Suggested words:

- servant
- letter
- forgive
- pay
- run away
- friend
- love
- Jesus

SAY • Paul told Philemon to forgive his servant as a Christian brother. We are called to love and forgive others too. When people believe in Jesus, they become sons and daughters of God and brothers and sisters in Christ. If a person wrongs us or treats us badly, it can be hard to show that person love and forgiveness, but we know that Jesus forgives our sin and loves us.

We can follow His example and trust the Holy Spirit to help us show love to others. ***How do we live while waiting for Jesus to return? We remember God's truth, grow in godliness, and spread the gospel.*** Forgiving like Jesus is a great way to grow in godliness, and it's only possible when we remember the truth of the gospel!

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

LOW PREP

- index cards
- pencils

Tip: Allow kids who can't write to draw hearts on the cards.

Activity choice (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: Returning servant relay

Form two teams and instruct the teams to line up on one side of the classroom. Choose one person on each team to be Paul, who will stand across from his team at the opposite end of the room. When you say go, the first kid in each team will grab an index card and run to Paul who will write *FORGIVE HIM* and give the card back to the runner. The runner will then return to his team. The first team that completes the relay wins.

SAY • Paul told Philemon to forgive his servant as a Christian brother. Paul reminded Philemon that God had forgiven him, so now he must forgive others. It's not always easy to forgive people, especially if they hurt us deeply. Because of what Jesus has done for us, we can show forgiveness and grace to others.

OPTION 2: How much forgiveness?

Show the class a jar filled with 490 jelly beans, but do not tell them how many beans are in the jar. Invite them to guess how many jelly beans are in the jar.

SAY • Paul told Philemon to forgive his servant as a Christian brother. How many times should we forgive someone? Just once? Twice? Or even seven times? Peter asked that same question to Jesus. We can read Jesus' answer in Matthew 18:22. Jesus told Peter that we should forgive someone seventy times seven times. That's 490 times! There are 490 jelly beans here! That's a lot, isn't it?

When Jesus told His disciples to forgive 490 times, that doesn't mean that if someone sinned against

them 491 times they shouldn't forgive them. Jesus was demonstrating that, because He has forgiven us of our enormous debt of sin, we can forgive others too, no matter how many times they hurt us.

Journal and prayer (5 minutes)

Distribute each child's journal. Ask the kids to write about or draw a picture to answer the following questions:

- What does this story teach me about God or about the gospel?
- What does this story teach me about myself?
- Whom can I tell about this story?

Make sure each child secures this week's sheet in the journal, and then collect them. Keep the journals in the classroom so they will be available every week or as often as you wish to use them.

If time remains, take prayer requests or allow kids to complete the Bible story coloring page provided with this session. Pray for your group.

- pencils and crayons
- Journal Page
- Bible Story Coloring 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.