

## Paul's Letter to Philemon

**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.

**TEACH  
THE STORY**  
(15–20 MINUTES)  
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**EXPERIENCE  
THE STORY**  
(25–30 MINUTES)  
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**REVIEW  
THE STORY**  
(10+ 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 puppets:

Use puppets or people figures to represent Philemon, Onesimus, and Paul. You may also use the "Bible Story People" printable. Move the figures as each person in the story moves or speaks.

### • Use drawings:

Print and cut out the "Bible Story People" printable. 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.*

# Teach THE STORY

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## Welcome and worship with song

- "Children of the Kingdom" song
- "I Have Hope" song

Greet preschoolers with a smile. As preschoolers arrive, sing an action song such as "Children of the Kingdom" to engage them and help them feel welcomed. Begin worship by leading preschoolers in "I Have Hope."

## Watch or tell the Bible story

- Bible
- "Paul's Letter to Philemon" video (optional)
- Bible Story Picture Poster
- Main Point Poster
- Giant Timeline or Big Story Circle

Share a brief, simple story of a time you forgave someone. **SAY** • Forgiving someone can be hard to do. Today we are going to hear Paul's advice to his friend who needed to forgive someone.

Open your Bible to the Book of 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.

## Practice the key passage and a Bible skill

- Bible
- Key Passage Poster
- Bible marker or ribbon
- "All Scripture" song

Place a Bible marker or ribbon at 2 Timothy 3:16. Invite a few volunteers to come up one at a time and open your Bible to the key passage.

**SAY** • Second Timothy 3:16 says all Scripture is inspired by God. *Inspired* means that God told Paul to write this verse, and God gave Paul the words to use. That

means God gave us all of the Bible stories we read together, including our story today. Let's sing a song to help us remember this wonderful truth.

Sing the key passage song "All Scripture" together.

## Learn the big picture question and answer

**SAY** • Jesus did more than just say that we are forgiven.

Jesus died on the cross to rescue us from sin, and He gave us the Holy Spirit to help us love and obey Him. That reminds me of our big picture question, *How do we live while waiting for Jesus to come back? We follow Jesus and tell everyone about Him.*

• Big Picture Question Poster

## Respond through song and prayer

**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.

Sing "I Have Hope" and "John 14:6" as preschoolers move with the music. Prepare for prayer by singing "One." You may also collect an offering.

**SAY** • Jesus, we love You. Thank You for teaching us that it is good to forgive others. Help us this week to forgive people and tell others about You. Amen.

• Main Point Poster  
• "I Have Hope" song  
• "John 14:6" song  
• "One" song  
• offering basket

## Transition to experience the story

• countdown video (optional)

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## LOW PREP

Sample scenarios:

- Mom says no cookies, child takes one.
- Dad says time for bed, child gets ready for bed.
- A friend asks for a turn on the swings, child says no.
- You break your brother's favorite toy car and hide it.

- construction paper
- clear contact plastic
- markers or crayons

## Vote for right or wrong choices

Suggest scenarios a preschooler might face. In each scenario, the person must make a right or wrong choice. Guide children to give a thumbs-up for a right choice and thumbs-down for wrong. Gently correct any misconceptions.

**SAY** • Onesimus and Philemon were both asked to make good choices that would make Jesus happy. ***How do we live while waiting for Jesus to come back? We follow Jesus and tell everyone about Him.***

## Make a welcome place mat

Distribute a sheet of construction paper to each preschooler. Encourage preschoolers to use markers or crayons to decorate their paper. Write *Welcome!* on each paper. Seal the decorated construction paper between two sheets of contact plastic. As a preschooler works, ask her whom her family could invite to their house for dinner.

**SAY** • **Paul told Philemon to forgive his servant.** Paul asked Philemon to forgive Onesimus and welcome him as a brother in Jesus. He wanted to make peace between his friends. Jesus made peace between God and people. He died on the cross for our sin so we can be part of God's family forever.

## Play with transportation toys

Fill a plastic tub with a few inches of sand. Set the tub on a tablecloth covered table. Allow preschoolers to play with transportation toys in the sand.

- plastic tablecloth
- plastic tub
- sand
- transportation toys

**SAY** • Paul knew Onesimus needed to do the right thing: to go back to Philemon and ask for forgiveness. There were no cars back then so Onesimus would have walked to Philemon's. Paul wrote a letter for Onesimus to give to Philemon. **Paul told Philemon to forgive his servant.** We can forgive others too.

## Take a walk through the church

Before the session, leave a folded note that says “Go back to your classroom” at a designated location in the church. Lead preschoolers on a walk to that location. Open the note and read it to preschoolers. Go back to the room. If desired, children may receive a small reward when they return.

- paper
- pencil
- reward (optional)

**SAY** • Paul sent Philemon a letter. **Paul told Philemon to forgive his servant.** Paul wanted to make peace between Philemon and Onesimus like Jesus makes peace between God and sinners.

## Get ready for a guest

Pretend to clean and prepare your space for a visit from Paul. Use toy food and plates to set a table. Create an area for Paul to sleep with a blanket and pillow.

- toy food
- toy dishes
- pillow
- blankets
- toy broom
- clean washcloths

**SAY** • Paul sent a letter to Philemon. **Paul told Philemon to forgive his servant.** He also told him that he hoped to visit soon.

## Transition to review the story

- countdown video (optional)



# Review THE STORY

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## Review

Point to the giant timeline or big story circle as you review today's Bible story. Ask the following review questions:

1. Whose servant was Onesimus? (*Philemon's*)
2. Did Onesimus do what he was supposed to do? (*No, he ran away.*)
3. What happened while Paul was in prison? (*Paul told Onesimus about Jesus, and Onesimus became a believer.*)
4. What did Paul tell Onesimus he needed to do? (*go home to Philemon*)
5. What did Paul tell Philemon to do? (**Paul told Philemon to forgive his servant.**)
6. *How are we to live while waiting for Jesus to come back? We follow Jesus and tell everyone about him.*

**SAY** • 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.

Sing the unit theme song or key passage song.

## Pray

Invite preschoolers to tell you any prayer requests they have.

**SAY** • Thank You, Jesus, for letting us come together today to learn about You. Help us to forgive people like You forgive us and treat each other as brothers and sisters in You. Amen.

## Missions story

If your preschool ministry is planning a missions activity, introduce the activity and the reasons for it. If you are not participating in a missions activity, talk about how Paul told people about Jesus even from prison. We can tell people about Jesus wherever we are. Ask children to think about places where they could tell others about Jesus. You may also show the “Basketball in Birmingham” video.

**SAY** • Kennedy is using her gifts of leadership and basketball to share Jesus with other teenagers in Birmingham. God has given each of us skills to use for His glory. We can be like Kennedy and tell others about Jesus right here where we live.

- “Basketball in Birmingham” video
- “Missions Prayer Cards” printable, 1 per child

## Play “Duck, Duck, Deliver”

Instruct children to sit in a circle. Choose one child to carry a letter and walk around the outside of the circle while saying, “Duck, duck, deliver.” When she decides to say deliver, she must give another child the letter, and then she must run away as he jumps up and tries to chase her back to his spot. He will deliver the letter in the next round.

**SAY** • Paul told Philemon to forgive his servant in a letter. In this way, Paul acted like Jesus. Jesus made peace between God and people.

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