



Philemon

(based on Philemon 8–21)

Just after the time of Jesus, there was a group of people who gathered to pray and worship God. Philemon (fih-LEE-muhn) was the leader of this little church. He had a slave named Onesimus (o-NEH-sih-muhs) who worked hard all day long. In Paul's time, a slave was often a person who owed a debt and worked to pay it off.

One day, something happened, and Onesimus ran away from home. At that time, people often punished their slaves when they found them. Onesimus was very scared. He decided to go to Rome to ask Paul for help.

Paul was a church leader who went to many places to tell the people about Jesus. Sometimes Paul got into trouble for doing this. At the time Onesimus ran away, Paul was in jail. The young man went to see Paul and told him the whole story.

"Please let me stay here with you," Onesimus begged. "I can help look after you."

And that's what Onesimus did. He brought Paul fresh food and clean clothes to wear. He made sure Paul had scrolls and pens to write his letters. He visited Paul and told him all the news.

Paul was happy for Onesimus, but Paul knew that the young man needed to go back home. Onesimus' place was with Philemon.

"You have to go back," Paul said. "You have to make things right with Philemon."

After a while, Paul wrote a letter and persuaded Onesimus to take it back to Philemon. Onesimus took the letter and went back home. He felt worried. What would happen to him?

Philemon was very surprised to see Onesimus again. The young man held out the letter from Paul. Philemon opened the letter and read it aloud.

To Philemon, . . . and the church that meets in your house: . . .

When I remember you in my prayers, I thank God. I hear about the ways that you welcome others and show God's love. For this reason, I am asking you to welcome back Onesimus. I wanted to keep him here with me, but I am sending him back to you. He is a follower of Jesus like you, so please welcome him back as a friend. Please do this favor for me.

From your friend,

Paul

When Philemon finished reading, he looked at Onesimus. The young man held his breath.

The Bible doesn't tell us what happened to Onesimus and Philemon, but we can imagine the end of the story.



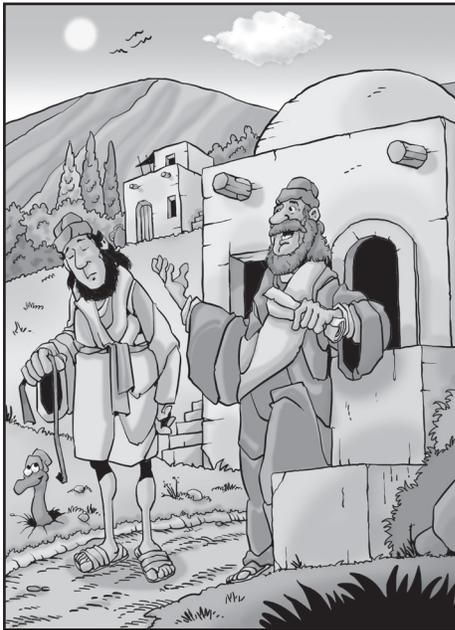
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Use one or more activities from each section to explore grace and gratitude with your children this week.

Recognizing God's Grace

- Read and enjoy the story with your children—imagine and wonder.
- Ask your children if they have ever felt like running away. Explain that coming back together is called reconciliation. How did reconciliation come about in their story?
- Tell your children about a time when you started down a wrong path and decided to make it right. How did it work out?



Responding to God's Grace

- Project Innocence uses DNA technology to free people who were wrongly put in prison for crimes they did not commit. Visit their website, and read stories of cases that where people have been set free. Wonder if Project Innocence extends God's grace.
- Ask your children to imagine possible outcomes for today's story. What grace do they hope Philemon extended to Onesimus?
- Identify a person in need, or an organization that serves people in need. Extend grace by giving clean clothes and fresh food to them.

Celebrating in Gratitude

- Ask your children to think of the servants in their lives—there are many. Wonder if being considerate of people who serve us can be a way of showing gratitude.
- What are your family's summer traditions? Summer is drawing to a close; take this opportunity to see if there's anything you need to plan before fall.
- Pray:

*God, help us to see people who need grace,
and to extend it to them when we see the need.
Amen.*