



Faith Adventures for Children Together



Free to use – please acknowledge when using beyond local church children's and youth work so others can find and use the resource themselves.

*Committed to URC Children Together:
enabling everyone to grow more like Jesus
together in the home, church and beyond.*

For guidance on the purpose of the resource and how to use it as a launch pad for your engagement with children and families, please use this link: www.bit.ly/FACT-how-to-sheet

Title: Philemon 1: 15–17

Theme: Speaking out and standing up

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Introduction: What would be helpful to know in my planning? Please use this section as a reference and information guide for leaders only – we don't expect it to be read out to the children.

The book of Philemon is a short letter written by Paul to his friend – and to the church community that meets in his home. It begins with warm greetings and praise for all the good work Philemon is doing but quickly moves onto Paul's main reason for writing; his concern for Philemon's former slave, Onesimus. After escaping from the household he served, Onesimus met Paul and became a Christian. As a slave, returning to a house you had run away from was extremely dangerous. Paul uses the letter to stand up for Onesimus; speaking out to urge his friend to do the right thing. He reminds Philemon that Jesus has shown them a different way to be a family.

Despite being very short, the letter is full of challenging themes. The correspondence discusses slavery – and yet it appears to ignore the horrors of daily life for slaves by encouraging Onesimus to return home, and urging Philemon's household to welcome him. Older groups may have questions about the topic which may spread beyond this week's activities – it may be necessary to check in with children and young people in subsequent sessions, as they may have further questions once they have had time to reflect.

It will be important to be aware of the ways that this passage may affect those who have faced discrimination – particularly as a result of their race. It could also be challenging for those who have experienced domestic violence, or who feel unsafe at home.

Together – prayer and games

How do I help my group to come together and get started with the theme?

Gathering prayer

Jesus, our friend,

(use alternate index fingers to point and tap the middle of opposite palms)

Be with us today

(two hands, palms up in front of you, move up and down twice)

As we share together,

(two hands, palms up in front of you, move one forward and one back and alternate twice)

Pray together,

(hands together, palm against palm, as though praying)

Play together,

(hands to each side, palms up, make two small circles outwards)

And get to know you better

(point up with one hand)

As children together in your family.

(one hand out, palm down in front of you, move it sideways and up in three 'steps' as though to indicate children of three different heights)

AMEN.

(two thumbs up, and bring fists slowly together to meet in front of you)

OR

Thank you, God, for bringing us together today.

Help us to grow closer to you in all we do.

**Help us to speak and to listen, to learn and to grow together,
adventuring together with you wherever we may go.**

Amen

Active game – Stuck in the mud

Paul had observed injustice and felt he could step in on behalf of Onesimus. This game introduces the idea of being observant.

Choose one person to be the tagger; those gathered then run around the space trying to avoid being tagged. If tagged, they need to stand still, "stuck in the mud" with their arms out.

The tagger is trying to get everyone “stuck in the mud”. Those running around need to be observant and try to free those stuck by running under their arms.

Quieter game

A quiet observation game

You will need:

pack of playing cards

Have two jokers or decide on a particular card(s) within a pack of cards. Then deal them face upwards onto a table. Who is the most observant and the quickest to spot the joker or selected card?

Experience – Bible story and songs

Hear, watch and sing the Bible story

When planning the session, the team of writers read many different Bible versions to find the one that is most suitable for the age range. We also look at vocabulary and how God/Jesus is described. We are aware that a lot of churches stick with one Bible version. We appreciate it can be difficult to have many different Bible versions and that access to them online isn't always easy. Therefore, we have provided the passage in the recommended version for your convenience.

For this story we recommend using the Contemporary English Version

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philemon%201%3A%2015%20-%2020&version=CEV>

¹⁵ Perhaps Onesimus was taken from you for a little while so you could have him back for good, ¹⁶ but not as a slave. Onesimus is much more than a slave. To me he is a dear friend, but to you he is even more, both as a person and as a follower of the Lord.

¹⁷ If you consider me a friend because of Christ, then welcome Onesimus as you would welcome me.

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Where can I find the story online?

Under-fives: Philemon, by Trueway Kids

<https://youtu.be/twchhnBjjCQ?si=uhyOiNxe1DA2kGkJ>

Five-to-elevens: God's people: Philemon, by Crossroads Kids' Club

https://youtu.be/bTyU5gxgTEM?si=F_FA3wys77gtf70B

Songs to support the story

Under-fives: Jesus is my best friend, by Grace Kids

<https://youtu.be/tER4Jx6LyZk?si=cZ3bpy2rgcAacHWp>

Five-to-elevens: Stand Together, by Lifetree Kids

<https://youtu.be/8T0HWO8yQAI?si=MCNG1qTPgAKROCIj>

Explore – ways into the theme

Ideas and activities to explore this week's Bible passage together

A new way to explore the theme

The story script can be found here: <https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/the-person-who-shouted-on-cloth-2.pdf>

OutoftheBox is a way of storytelling that encourages us to be with one another in a brave and playful way. This storytelling method is suitable for children and young people of all ages. Before sharing the story, sit quietly together in a circle and notice how you and everyone else is feeling. Check in with each other by asking a simple question such as, "What has made your heart sing today?"

Tell the story. At the end of the story ask the wondering questions:

- I wonder what you liked about that story
- I wonder what you didn't like
- I wonder what it reminds you of

Depending on how much time you have you may wish to engage in some community play. Choose questions that fit with the age of the children and young people in your group.

To learn more about OutoftheBox storytelling visit <https://outofthebox.org/>

Modern parables

Jesus used stories to help people understand the things of God, even though they weren't necessarily overtly Christian stories. Lots of children's books can be used in a similar way as a conversation starter on the week's theme. Examples are shared here but you may think of others too. If you are to use the modern parable, consider buying a copy or borrowing it from the library so children see the actual book and can explore the illustrations more (and support the author).



The Lion Inside by Rachel Bright and Jim Field (2016: Orchard Books) ISBN 9781408331606

In Philemon, Paul is brave and speaks out for Onesimus, showing us the importance of standing up for others. In *The Lion Inside* the smallest creature, the little brown mouse, decides to be brave and learns that to change things you first have to change yourself. So, he approaches the lion with his mighty roar and asks for his help. The mouse discovers that the lion is afraid of him! They become friends and learn that they are stronger together.

- What or who might help you to be brave to speak out when you are feeling small?

Talking together: How might we talk about the Bible story together?

- I wonder what made Paul write the letter to Philemon
- I wonder how Onesimus felt being sent back to his slave master
- I wonder how Philemon felt being told to allow Onesimus back
- I wonder how Paul felt about how Onesimus had been treated by his slave master

Wondering: ways to reflect on the theme

- If you were to write a letter to speak out about something, who would you be writing to?
- I wonder who you relate to in the story

What's in the box? (for under-fives)

Use the special box or bag and sing, "What's in the box/bag? What's in the box/bag? Let's see, let's see, what's in the box/bag" (to the tune of The Farmer's in the Dell). Pull out the things one by one and then let the children play with them, talking about the theme or the story in simple terms.

This week's box could include:

- A tactile cross of wood or fabric (a cross shape reminds us of Jesus. Jesus/God loves us and it's always in the box because Jesus/God always loves us!)
- A set of play people to act out the story, or random shapes/bits you can move around to make pictures from the story as you tell it (e.g. stones, felt, twigs etc.)
- Umbrellas – talk about how umbrellas can protect us from the weather. In the story today Paul is trying to protect his friend Onesimus
- Tannoy or microphone – Paul was speaking up for someone else; he was using his voice to speak up for Onesimus. Have you seen a microphone or a tannoy being used?
- Alarm (bike horn) – talk about how we can get other people's attention when we need to speak to them
- Pen, paper and envelope – talk about letters. Who might we write a letter to? If we didn't use a pen and paper, how might we write a letter today?
- Pop-up tent – talk about Paul being a tent maker. That's how he earned his money
- Books about letter writing e.g. *The Jolly Postman* by Allan Ahlberg or *Herman's Letter* by Tom Percival – talk about the stories, which are written around writing letters. Paul was writing a letter in today's passage

Express – prayer and creative activities

Praying together: enabling your group to respond spiritually

Prayerful activity – Origami Shelters

This week's Bible passage introduces Onesimus – Paul is encouraging his community to welcome Onesimus back with open arms. Paul wants Onesimus to feel safe as he returns to his community. These origami shelters can prompt prayers for those who feel excluded or unwelcome.

You will need:

- origami paper (or square paper)
- pens and pencils



- Write prayers on the plain side of the origami paper
- Follow the instructions in the video below to fold your paper into a tent

How to: Origami Tent, by (How to) Creative with paper

https://youtu.be/S_ykYR0lbP4?si=181K6gelvsC9tFDJ

If members of your group need a simpler tent design, follow these instructions for an easy shelter:

Fold your paper diagonally, open the paper and fold the opposite diagonal. When you open your paper, you should see fold lines from each corner

Choose one triangular section – fold inwards from the centre point so that the two sides meet

You should have a three-sided shelter!

Fold up each corner of the base to help make your shelter more stable

During a moment of quiet, or with some music playing, encourage the group to arrange their prayer tents into a camp. You could close the time of prayer with a spoken prayer, or by saying **Amen** together.

Spoken prayer

Everyone says the words in bold typeface, starting quietly but getting louder each time we respond.

Protector God,

We ask you to show us where people need help in their lives.

Help us to stand up for others.

We thank you for helping us and showing us how to be good friends to everyone.

Help us to stand up for others.

We are sorry for times when we may be unkind, or unhelpful,

Help us to stand up for others.

We ask you to help us to be like Paul who wrote a letter asking Philemon to be welcoming to Onesimus.

Help us to stand up for others. Amen

Responding together

Here are some suggested crafts and activities, and there is a colouring sheet at the end of this resource. You could also use small play toys and/or have a basket of resources available so children can choose their own way to respond.

With an online group, plan whether to deliver any resources in advance or how you will encourage them to use what they've got to hand in their response.

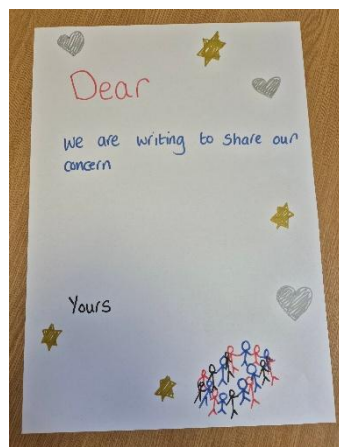
However you do it, it is good for the adults to engage in the response too, and all chat together.

Letter writing

Write a letter to your MP or a local councillor, raising an issue you want to speak about. Who is excluded in your community? Are there things that seem really unfair – things that make it harder for some people to get to school, or to take part in fun activities. Are there local issues that are affecting your community's health and wellbeing?

- decide on an issue as a whole group, or in pairs
- write to your MP or councillor, letting them know why you are concerned (*you can find out names of local politicians, and their office addresses, online*)
- you could decorate your letter with coloured patterns or stickers
- post your letter – hopefully you won't have to wait long for a response!

This could be one joint letter written on a large A3 piece of paper and decorated by all in your group. A large letter stands out and gets noticed and with everyone contributing to the design allows for everyone to have played a part.



Everyday with Jesus – Walking the Way

What could we do this week to carry on what we've learned? Maybe members of the group could come up with a suggestion. If not, get them to choose from these two challenges:

- Talk to someone older or younger than you and ask them to tell you something you might not already know about Jesus.
- Paul spent a lot of time noticing things, noticing how Onesimus had been treated and noticing how the people associated with Philemon were living. Paul spoke out on behalf of Onesimus – could you notice things this week? Could you speak out on behalf of someone else?

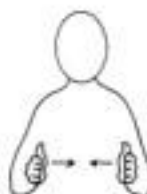
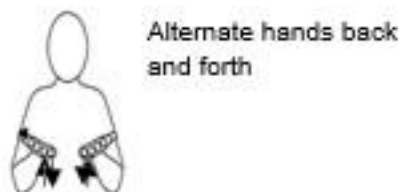
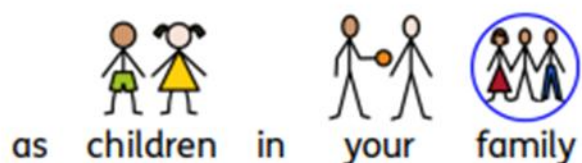
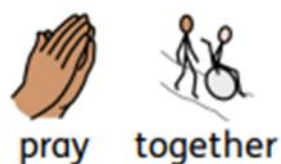
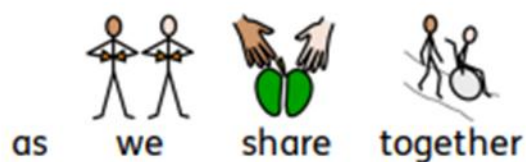
We hope you enjoyed exploring the story of the **letter to Philemon** with us.

Please let us know what you liked or what you would find useful by emailing **sharon.lloyd@urc.org.uk**

Please join the Faith Adventures Facebook Group **bit.ly/FACT_FB**

Why not have a look at next week's resource on **Josiah the boy king**





 The Lord's Prayer

 Our  Father,  who art  in  heaven,  hallowed be  thy  name.

 Thy  kingdom  come,  thy  will  be done

 on earth  as it is  in  heaven.

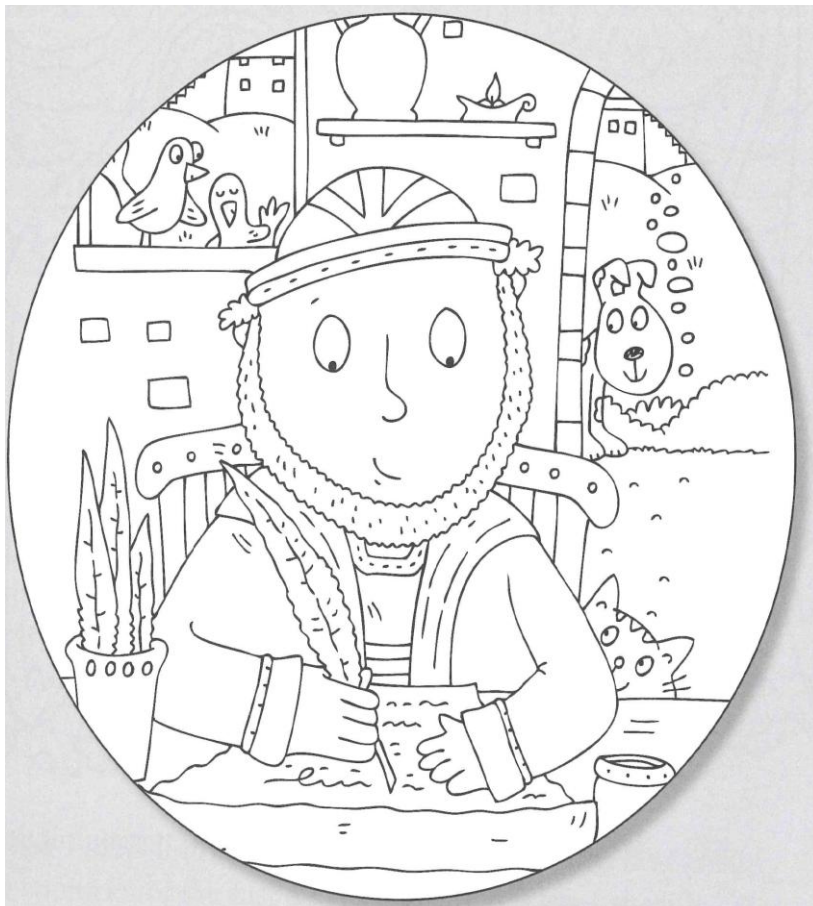
 Give  us  this day  our  daily  bread

 and  forgive  us  our  sins  As  we  forgive  those  who  sin  against  us

 Lead  us  not  into  temptation  but  deliver  us  from  evil

 For  thine  is the  kingdom,  the  power  and  the  glory

 For ever  and  ever  Amen



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