



Faith Adventures Youth Resource



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

Embedded in Faith Adventures: Children Together, this youth resource is intergenerational in nature and designed to foster God-connection in church, home 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/How-To-FAYR

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

Let's start our time with God and each other well

Use this opening prayer or encourage young people to open the session with a prayer of their own.

All mighty God,

Be with us as we learn more about you through stories and people in the Bible.

Help us to walk in your way and follow your path.

Be with us as we make decisions that affect our lives and the lives of those around us.

Amen

Alternatively, you may join with the widgeit prayer found in Faith Adventures: Children Together, or else the Lord's Prayer found at the end of this session.

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

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

Rhythm Master

You will need:

safe area where the group can run around safely

Have everyone sit in a circle; choose one person to be the detective. Once chosen, the detective should make sure they can't see or hear what's happening in the circle. Next choose one person as the rhythm master.

The rhythm master begins to sound a rhythm by clapping their hands, patting their legs, arms, stomping their feet etc.

Everyone in the circle copies the pattern. The rhythm master can change the pattern; everyone must keep up with and follow the rhythm. You might want to practise this first, so everyone understands.

Ask the detective to come back to the circle and observe as the group continues to make their rhythms. The detective gets three chances to guess who the rhythm master is.

Remind everyone that they should not stare at the rhythm master because they'll give away their identity to the detective.

Experience – Bible story and songs

Hear, watch and sing the Bible story

This link takes you to Philemon 1: 15–17 in the Contemporary English Version

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philemon%201%3A%2015%20-%202020&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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You may wish to research different versions of this reading on www.biblegateway.com Recommended versions to try are NRSV, Easy-to-read, The Message, NIRV

Watch: Philemon, by Bibleproject

<https://youtu.be/aW9Q3Jt6Yvk?si=x3mxBncFwXmsGGL0>

Questions for discussion

- What are your thoughts about Paul's letter? Would you have written or asked for justice for Onesimus in a different way?
- In the Bible story, how did partnership work between Paul, Philemon and Onesimus?
- I wonder what would have happened if Philemon didn't do as Paul asked

Explore

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

A new way to explore the theme

This is a new way to explore the Bible passage and the theme for this week.

Alternatively, you may wish to use the Explore section from this week's Faith Adventures: Children Together to guide your exploration of the theme this week.

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

This section includes references to TV programmes, films, books, TED talks, TikTok etc aimed at this age group that will have been widely seen, or where a clip is available to use as a stimulus for discussion. You may also enjoy the picture book recommended for Faith Adventures: Children Together and explore the relevance of the story to the theme of the session in more depth – young people and adults are often well tuned in to the deeper meanings in materials aimed at younger people and the authors are often very aware of the adults reading the books to or with younger ones.

Dr Who | Defended, by AlchemyProds

<https://youtu.be/hM08y6hI7IQ?si=2Lpq0WbUEamHVe-z>



This clip from *Dr Who* is a montage of the many times the Doctor has stood up for others, helped them and often times saved their lives.

When was the last time someone stood up for you?

Why did Dr Who always feel he had to save everyone?

Group discussion

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

Personal reflection

- I wonder if we feel imprisoned by anything
- I wonder how Paul managed to write and send a letter if he was in prison

Express – prayer and creative activities

Praying together: enabling your group to respond spiritually

Praying together

Prayers Respond to the theme by writing or saying a short prayer. Alternatively, use the creative prayer from Faith Adventures: Children Together for this session, or use the prayer activity below. Alternatively, light a candle and play some music while you listen and talk to God together.

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 prayers

Protector God,

As we read in our story today, Paul protects Onesimus. He helps him by standing up for him by writing the letter to Philemon. Help us to be like Paul. Help us to stand up for those in trouble and to look after those in need. Help us to stand up for what is right and act as Paul does, even though he was not in a great place himself.

We thank you God that you protect us. You stand up for us and help us when we are in trouble. When we run away from things we have done, you help us to see what is right. You protected us by sending your son Jesus who came and died so that we can have a stronger relationship with you.

We are sorry for times when we don't follow you, God; when we think we know how to stand up for people. We are sorry for times when we may stand up for the wrong thing by mistake. We ask that you continue to help us to see what we should be standing up for.

Protector God, this week challenge us to stand up for things that are right. Challenge us to be like Paul and help those who need it. Help us to see the places and people in our world who need someone to stand up for them.

Amen.

Responding together

This is an opportunity for a social justice challenge, some research, craftivism, or a craft or STEM activity. You may have a specific activity chosen but free choice is also an option. Here are some suggestions for this week's theme. Choose whatever will work best for your group.

The Onesimus Project

The Council for World Mission, inspired by Paul's letter to Philemon, started a project called "Onesimus". The aim of the project is to give a space, a voice, for those who have been badly treated or are still being badly treated. Find out a little more about it. [The Onesimus Project – Council for World Mission](#)

Is there any way your group or church could support this initiative? It could be in advertising the project to others. I wonder if there are other similar projects/spaces for people's voices to be heard. How could you ensure people's voices are heard in the spaces you occupy?

Challenge

Discipleship doesn't stop when you walk out of the church door – it is a part of everyday life. Take a challenge with you and try to make it part of your week.

You may think of your own suggestion of what you as an individual or a group might do in the coming week in response to what you have explored today? If not, here are some suggestions:

- Use one of the “conversation starter” questions or the question below to talk with someone of a different generation or from a different setting and share your questions, thoughts and insights together. **I wonder how God wants us to treat each other**
- Research something suggested by JPIT Resources (jpit.uk) or *Commitment for Life* (cforl.co.uk)
- 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?

Thank you for exploring the **Philemon** passage with us.

Please let us know what you liked or what you would find useful by emailing sharon.lloyd@urc.org.uk or by sharing it on www.bit.ly/FACT_FB

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

Forever and ever . Amen

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