Preschool–Grade 6

Paul and Onesimus

Sunday School Lesson for Preschool (Ages 3–5), 20–30 minutes

Main point: Jesus makes us family, so I welcome others.
Bible passage: Philemon. Read Philemon 1:1–25 yourself before class.
Memory verse: "Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved" *Philemon 1:16 (KJV)*. **A brother beloved** means a brother you love.
You need: a Bible, a sheet of paper rolled up and tied with yarn (the letter), crayons, and one take-home sheet for each child.
Before class: put a bookmark in your Bible at Philemon, near the end of the New Testament.

1. Opening game: Welcome Home (5 minutes)

One child steps out of the circle and comes back, knocking on the floor: knock, knock, knock. The whole class says, "Welcome home, brother!" or "Welcome home, sister!" and claps. Give every child a turn. Say: "It feels good to be welcomed! Today we will hear a true story about a man named Onesimus, and a letter that asked his friend to welcome him like a brother."

2. Bible story (5 minutes)

Hold up your Bible open to Philemon. Say: "This story is true. It is in God's Word." Read each line slowly and do the motion. When you see **Say it with me**, the kids say the line back to you.

Paul loved Jesus (Philemon 1:1). *(Point up.)*
Paul was a prisoner because of Jesus (1:9). *(Hold your wrists together.)*
Paul wrote a letter to his friend Philemon (1:1). *(Pretend to write.)*
Paul wrote about a man named Onesimus (1:10). *(Say it slowly: oh-NESS-ih-mus.)*
Onesimus came to know Jesus through Paul (1:10). *(Hug yourself.)*
Paul called him "my son" (1:10). *(Smile big.)*
Paul sent Onesimus back home to Philemon (1:12). *(Walk in place.)*
Paul asked Philemon to welcome him as "a brother beloved" (1:16). **Say it with me: "A brother beloved!"**
Paul said, "I will repay it" (1:19). If Onesimus owed anything, Paul would pay it back. *(Pat your pocket.)*
Jesus makes us family! **Say it with me: "Welcome, brother! Welcome, sister!"**

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3. Questions to ask (3 minutes)

1. Who wrote the letter? *(Paul, Philemon 1:1)*
2. Who did Paul send home? *(Onesimus, 1:10–12)*
3. How should Philemon welcome him? *(Like a brother he loves, 1:16)*

4. Memory verse (3 minutes)

Say: "Paul wrote, 'Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved.' A brother beloved means a brother you love." Teach the motions: shake your head "no" on "Not now as a servant," raise your hand high on "above a servant," and hug yourself on "a brother beloved." Say the verse with the motions three times: in a normal voice, in a whisper, and in a happy loud voice. Then say "Philemon 1:16" and clap three times.

5. What this means for us (3 minutes)

Say: "God loves you! Everyone has done wrong things. That is called sin (Romans 3:23). Jesus is God. He came to earth as a man (1 Timothy 3:16). Jesus died for our sins. He was buried. Then He rose again (1 Corinthians 15:3–4)! The Bible tells us what to do (Acts 2:38). We repent: we tell God we are sorry, and we stop doing wrong. We are baptized in Jesus' name, down under the water, and our sins are washed away. And God gives us the Holy Ghost. That is God's own Spirit in us. When people are filled with the Holy Ghost, they speak in other tongues, words God gives them (Acts 2:4)."
Pray with the kids, and encourage them to talk with their parents and pastor about being baptized in Jesus' name and filled with the Holy Ghost. Never pressure a child.

6. Activity: My Church Family (5–10 minutes)

Give each child a take-home sheet. In the drawing box, help them draw a friend from church they can welcome. While they color, ask: "How can you welcome someone? Can you smile? Can you say hello?" Let each child say to a friend, "Welcome, brother!" or "Welcome, sister!"

7. Prayer

Say each line, and the kids say it after you:
"Thank You, God, for making us family.
Help me welcome others. In Jesus' name, amen."

Tips for little ones: keep the story moving. Let every child hold the rolled-up letter for a moment. Send the take-home sheet home so parents can tell the story again this week.

If a child asks what a prisoner is: say gently, "Someone who is kept in one place and can't go home. Paul was a prisoner because he told people about Jesus, and he still wrote letters and helped people."

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