Preschool–Grade 6

Paul and Onesimus

Sunday School Lesson for Kindergarten to 2nd Grade, 45 minutes

Main point: Jesus makes us brothers and sisters, so we welcome each other as family, like Paul asked Philemon to welcome Onesimus.
Bible passage: Philemon 1:1–25 (the whole letter is one short chapter). Read it before class.
Memory verse: "Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord?" *Philemon 1:16 (KJV)*
You need: a Bible, a sheet of paper rolled up and tied with yarn (the letter), 5 index cards, a marker, paper and crayons for each child, and one take-home sheet for each child.
Before class: write the memory verse on the 5 cards (see part 4). Put a bookmark in your Bible at Philemon, near the end of the New Testament.

1. Opening game: Special Delivery (5 minutes)

Kids sit in a circle. Choose one child to be the messenger. Whisper a name, and the messenger carries the rolled-up letter to that child and says, "Welcome, brother!" or "Welcome, sister!" That child becomes the next messenger. Play until everyone has been welcomed. Then say: "Today we will hear about a real letter in the Bible, and a man named Onesimus it was written about."

2. Bible story: A Brother Beloved (10 minutes)

Hold up your Bible open to Philemon, so the kids can see the story comes from God's Word. Tell it in your own words:

Paul loved Jesus and told many people about Him. Paul was a **prisoner** because of Jesus (Philemon 1:1). Paul and his friend **Timothy** wrote a letter to a man named **Philemon** *(say it: fi-LEE-mon)*. Philemon loved the Lord Jesus, and the church met in his house (1:2, 1:5). Paul thanked God for Philemon in his prayers (1:4).

In the letter, Paul asked Philemon for something special. It was about a man named **Onesimus** *(say it: oh-NESS-ih-mus)*. Paul called him "my son Onesimus" (1:10). Onesimus wasn't really Paul's son. But while Paul was a prisoner, Onesimus came to know the Lord through Paul. That made him like a son to Paul!

Onesimus had been Philemon's **servant**, a worker in his house (1:16). Paul said that before, Onesimus was **unprofitable** to Philemon. That means he wasn't useful to him. But now, Paul said, he was **profitable**, very useful to Philemon and to Paul (1:11)! Jesus had changed him.

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The story continues: Onesimus had been away from Philemon for a while (1:15). Paul would have liked to keep Onesimus with him to help him (1:13). But Paul sent him back home to Philemon (1:12).

Read Philemon 1:16 from your Bible. Say: "Paul asked Philemon to welcome Onesimus back, not just as a servant, but as a **brother beloved**, a brother he loves! Paul even said, 'receive him as myself.' That means: welcome him the way you would welcome me (1:17)."

Then Paul wrote, "If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account." That means: if Onesimus did anything wrong to you, or owes you anything, count it as mine. Paul wrote with his own hand, "I will **repay** it." Repay means pay it back (1:18–19). Paul was sure Philemon would do even more than he asked (1:21).

3. Questions to ask (5 minutes)

1. Who wrote the letter to Philemon? *(Paul, with Timothy, Philemon 1:1)*
2. What did Paul call Onesimus? *("My son," 1:10)*
3. Before, Onesimus was unprofitable. What was he now? *(Profitable, 1:11)*
4. How did Paul want Philemon to welcome Onesimus? *(As a brother beloved, 1:16)*
5. What did Paul say he would do if Onesimus owed anything? *(Repay it, 1:18–19)*

4. Memory verse: Welcome Line (5 minutes)

Write one part on each card: *Not now as a servant, / but above a servant, / a brother beloved, / specially to me, but how much more unto thee, / both in the flesh, and in the Lord? Philemon 1:16.* Explain the old words: **above a servant** means more than a worker, **a brother beloved** means a brother you love, **specially** means especially, **thee** means you, and **in the Lord** means as brothers and sisters in Jesus. Five kids stand in a line, each holding a card. The class reads the verse. Then one card holder sits down, and the class reads it again. Keep going until the kids can say the whole verse with no cards.

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5. What this means for us (5 minutes)

Say: "Jesus changed Onesimus. He can change us too! God loves you very much. But everyone has done wrong things. The Bible calls that sin: 'For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23, KJV). That means none of us is as good as God. Paul said he would pay for what Onesimus owed. Jesus did even more for us. Jesus is God who came to earth as a man (1 Timothy 3:16). Jesus died for our sins, He was buried, and He rose again (1 Corinthians 15:3–4)! The Bible tells us how to obey the gospel, the good news about Jesus: 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.' (Acts 2:38, KJV) To **repent** means we are sorry for our sin and we turn away from it. We are **baptized**, buried all the way under the water, in Jesus' name, so our sins are washed away (Romans 6:4; Acts 22:16). **Remission** means God takes our sins away. And God fills us with the **Holy Ghost**, His own Spirit, and we speak in other tongues, words God gives us, just like the believers did in the Bible (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.
This week: welcome someone like family. Say hello to a new kid, sit with them, or invite them to play.

6. Activity (10–15 minutes)

Choose one: the **Paul and Onesimus word search** (vbshq.com/puzzles/onesimus-word-search), crossword (vbshq.com/puzzles/onesimus-crossword), maze (vbshq.com/puzzles/onesimus-maze) or worksheet (vbshq.com/worksheets/onesimus-worksheet), the coloring page or craft (vbshq.com/bible-stories/onesimus), or **A Welcome Letter:** give each child a sheet of paper. They draw a picture for someone at church they want to welcome, and the teacher helps them write "Welcome, brother" or "Welcome, sister" at the top. Ask: *Who will you give it to?*

7. Prayer

"Dear God, thank You for making us brothers and sisters in Jesus. Help us welcome others like family, and help us make things right when we do wrong. Thank You for loving us and coming to save us in Jesus. In Jesus' name, amen."

If a child asks why Onesimus left, or what he did wrong: the letter doesn't say. Paul only wrote that he "departed for a season" (Philemon 1:15) and "If he hath wronged thee" (1:18). Keep to what the Bible says.

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