

## Paul and the Runaway

Form a group of any size, but preferably smaller than seven people. As a group, read through the Epistle to Philemon. Don't worry. It's short. Paul packs an enormous amount of practical application of his theology into this short book. After you read through the letter, take a few minutes to discuss the following prompts with your group.

**Philemon is one of the only letters that Paul does not open with being “a servant of Jesus Christ.” The Greek word (*doulos*) does appear in verse 16, describing Onesimus.**

- Why would Paul make this choice, given the circumstances of the letter (see also Colossians 4:1)?
- From your reading of Philemon, what impressions do you get of Onesimus's relationship to Philemon *before* Paul wrote this letter?

**Paul also never uses the title “apostle.” He chooses instead to describe himself as a prisoner, and when writing to Philemon, he interacts as a peer and brother.**

- Paul calls two other people in Colossae his brothers (Col 4:7 and 9). Do you notice what Paul *does not* call Onesimus in Colossians?
- What makes someone a brother or sister (v 2) in Christ? How does this relationship alter how we see/treat each other?
- We'd all agree Onesimus probably did something pretty serious. Is Paul justified in his request that Philemon treat Onesimus as a “beloved brother” (v 16)?

**Philemon seems to have had a reputation for being a good host, welcoming weary believers into his home (v 7). “Comfort” in verse 7 is a translation of the same Greek word as “appeal” in verses 9 and 10. The word is *parakalō*, which means “the come alongside” or “to encourage.”**

- How do you see Paul “coming alongside” Onesimus in his appeal to Philemon? What is he willing to do for him (v 18) and what does that mean for Onesimus's relationship to Philemon?
- Why does Paul feel Philemon should likewise “come alongside Onesimus”?

**Onesimus had become “useful” (v 11) and “more than a servant” (v 16) to Philemon as a Christian brother. It seems that Paul's expectation was for Onesimus to be welcomed *back into service*.**

- How could it be possible that Onesimus could remain a slave (Col 3:22–25) and be Philemon's Christian brother?
- Does our union in Christ as the church (Col 3:15) remove our earthly obligations to one another? What *does* our brotherhood/sisterhood in Christ require of us in those relationships?

**The Letter to Philemon deals a situation we do not encounter today, at least in its specifics. Still, it has a lot to tell us about our relationships within the church.**

- What are two or three *practical* pieces of wisdom you have drawn from this letter?

## Paul and the Runaway

Form a group of any size, but preferably smaller than seven people. As a group, read through the Epistle to Philemon. Don't worry. It's short. Paul packs an enormous amount of practical application of his theology into this short book. After you read through the letter, take a few minutes to discuss the following prompts with your group.

**Philemon is one of the only letters that Paul does not open with being “a servant of Jesus Christ.” The Greek word (*doulos*) does appear in verse 16, describing Onesimus.**

- Why would Paul make this choice, given the circumstances of the letter (see also Colossians 4:1)?
- From your reading of Philemon, what impressions do you get of Onesimus's relationship to Philemon *before* Paul wrote this letter?

**Paul also never uses the title “apostle.” He chooses instead to describe himself as a prisoner, and when writing to Philemon, he interacts as a peer and brother.**

- Paul calls two other people in Colossae his brothers (Col 4:7 and 9). Do you notice what Paul *does not* call Onesimus in Colossians?
- What makes someone a brother or sister (v 2) in Christ? How does this relationship alter how we see/treat each other?
- We'd all agree Onesimus probably did something pretty serious. Is Paul justified in his request that Philemon treat Onesimus as a “beloved brother” (v 16)?

**Philemon seems to have had a reputation for being a good host, welcoming weary believers into his home (v 7). “Comfort” in verse 7 is a translation of the same Greek word as “appeal” in verses 9 and 10. The word is *parakalō*, which means “the come alongside” or “to encourage.”**

- How do you see Paul “coming alongside” Onesimus in his appeal to Philemon? What is he willing to do for him (v 18) and what does that mean for Onesimus's relationship to Philemon?
- Why does Paul feel Philemon should likewise “come alongside Onesimus?”

**Onesimus had become “useful” (v 11) and “more than a servant” (v 16) to Philemon as a Christian brother. It seems that Paul's expectation was for Onesimus to be welcomed *back into service*.**

- How could it be possible that Onesimus could remain a slave (Col 3:22–25) and be Philemon's Christian brother?
- Does our union in Christ as the church (Col 3:15) remove our earthly obligations to one another? What *does* our brotherhood/sisterhood in Christ require of us in those relationships?

**The Letter to Philemon deals a situation we do not encounter today, at least in its specifics. Still, it has a lot to tell us about our relationships within the church.**

- What are two or three *practical* pieces of wisdom you have drawn from this letter?