



# Authorised Mess — PHILEMON

## Your details

Name: Pam and David Stranks

Church: Princetown Church, Dartmoor, Devon

Bible book	Philemon
Theme of session	<p>A fair affair?</p> <p>There is no discrimination in the Christian Church—all are children of God.</p> <p>'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.' Philemon 16, CEV</p>
Notes	We have used some of these ideas in other settings.

## Session details

Categories of activities to get a mix	Activity name	Instructions	Resources needed	Reason for doing this activity
Younger participants	Cornflour gloop	Make the gloop by adding the water to the cornflour slowly, stirring all the time, until the water is no longer absorbed. Pour the gloop into a shallow tray and use your fingers to draw and mould in/with the gloop. The drawings/shapes will disappear after a few seconds.	Cornflour (2 cups), water (1 cup), food colouring (optional), mixing bowl, spoon, shallow tray.	<p>Talk about how the gloop changes completely depending on how you handle it—mistakes just disappear!</p> <p>Things are not always as we think or they seem—just like people! God can change us/remove our mistakes.</p>



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Older participants	Greeting card	Make a card for a friend with a special personalised greeting and include a request so they'll write back!	Coloured card, stickers and decorations, felt tip pens, envelopes.	Talk about how we can strengthen relationships and how we all need each other and God.
Girls	People puppets	Dress wooden spoons as characters from the story.	Wooden spoons, pipe cleaners (for arms), fabric pieces, wool (for hair), sticky tape/glue, felt tip pens (to draw faces).	Talk about how we make the identical spoons into different 'people'.
Boys	'Runaway slave' wanted poster	Get everyone to cut out their picture and make a wanted poster of themselves as a runaway slave, making up a slave name and offering a reward for information.	Digital camera and printer or pre-printed photos, paper, felt tip pens, sheet (for tunic), wanted poster template (optional), children's books about Roman slaves (optional).	Talk about those times when we have done something wrong and someone seeks us out to deal with our wrong doing. God forgives us when we say sorry and ask him for forgiveness.
Word-based	What's in a name?	Find the meaning of your name. Then, make yourself a name badge, including the meaning of your name, and decorate.	Baby name books and/or Internet access, badge blanks, felt tip pens, stickers and other materials to decorate.	Names are important. Onesimus, for example, means 'useful'. God calls us by name.
Food-based	Character cupcakes	Decorate the cupcakes with faces.	Cupcakes (bought or baked), icing, cake decorations.	Talk about how we make the identical cupcakes look different by adding faces.



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Explores global aspect of faith	Chaga and the Chocolate Factory	Read or listen to the story of Chaga, a little boy trafficked on to a cocoa plantation, and think about the plea to buy only fairtrade chocolate.	Download of the story from <a href="http://www.stopthetraffik.org/campaign/chocolate/what-you-can-do/15">http://www.stopthetraffik.org/campaign/chocolate/what-you-can-do/15</a> , samples of fairtrade chocolate.	Talk about the story and the issue of slavery today. 'There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28, NIV).
Opens up great art	El Greco's painting of St Paul	Show the picture and ask everyone what they would like to ask Paul about his feelings towards Onesimus and Philemon.	A good quality print of El Greco's painting from the Internet. For example: <a href="http://schools-wikipedia.org/wp/p/Paul the Apostle.htm">http://schools-wikipedia.org/wp/p/Paul the Apostle.htm</a> .	Talk about how Paul changed from a persecutor of Christians to a great evangelist and church leader. Discuss the questions raised.
Quiet	The same or different?	Complete the puzzles.	Spot the difference puzzles from the Internet or magazines.	Talk about how hard we have to look to spot the differences in the puzzles sometimes. Yet often we only look to see how other people are different from us. But God made us all and loves us all the same.
Really messy	Prison prints	Use sticky poster paints to make a set of your own finger, hand and even foot prints.	Sticky poster paints, trays, large sheets of paper, warm soapy water, paper towels.	Talk about Paul being in prison. Our fingerprints are unique yet, except to an expert, all look the same. God knows the smallest detail about us.



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## Celebration suggestion

**Song:** 'If I were a butterfly' (I just thank you, Father, for making me 'me').

**Story:** A retelling of the letter from Philemon's point of view—this does not need to be learned by heart but practise several times so you can deliver it rather than read it out. Philemon is holding papers (the script) as if he's just received Paul's letter; vaguely Biblical costume can be worn.

Oh... hello. I'm Philemon, how do you do? I wonder... have you ever lost something that cost you a lot of money? And then you've found it suddenly when you weren't really looking for it? Or had it returned to you unexpectedly by someone else? If you have, I guess you were really pleased! No! Delighted, ecstatic, 'dead chuffed', 'over the moon'—and all those other words we use to mean really, really happy.

Well, something a bit like that has just happened to me. I 'lost' something that cost me a lot but wasn't actually much use to me and now I hear I'm going to get it back and I'm not sure that I'm all that happy about it. I'd better explain. I shouldn't really have said I'd lost 'something' and I am getting 'it' back, because 'it' is a person and he didn't get lost... he 'lost' himself. Well, ran away from me to be honest. Stole some of my money and, of course, slaves are expensive items you know. Don't look at me like that—everyone of my wealth and status owns slaves. Not that my money was well spent because he was a useless slave. Bit of a joke he was called Onesimus—it means 'useful' you see. But that was the last thing he was. He didn't listen to instructions, couldn't be left to do anything on his own or he'd mess it up, he took ages to do anything and basically couldn't be bothered and or trusted.

When he eventually ran away I was very annoyed but, if I'm honest, I didn't try too hard to find him or get him back. I didn't employ a professional slave catcher to find him but I did put up some public posters with a description of my escaped slave and offered a reward... but only a small one. No, I just wrote him off to experience and decided that I'd be a lot more careful next time I bought a slave—'Only one satisfied pre-owner' indeed!

And now I've just had a letter from my friend Paul. That's usually a good thing of course. I owe a lot, well, everything, to Paul as it was because of him that I came to know and love Jesus and became a Christian in the first place... and he's been so helpful to me since. Sadly, he's in jail just now—always in some sort of bother is Paul, but if I know him he'll not only make the best of it but keep praising God and trusting him to turn it all to his advantage. But now Paul's put me in a bit of a spot because Onesimus has turned out to be there in jail with him (how, he doesn't



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explain). And he has also become a Christian and is apparently very useful to him. But Paul being Paul, he wants to do the right thing and is sending my property back to me. Reading between the lines I think he'd much rather keep old 'Useful-at-last' there with him.

It's all so much to take in. Can Onesimus really have become a Christian, and his attitude and usefulness changed so completely? Has Paul been taken in? I can't believe that... so... it must be true. But that's not all. Paul is sending him back but doesn't want me to treat him as a runaway slave should be treated—severely punished and branded on the forehead with the letter F, for fugitive. Oh no, he wants me to... 'Welcome Onesimus as you would welcome me,' he says. 'Have him back for good, but not as a slave,' he says. 'Onesimus is much more than a slave, he is a dear friend,' he says; and then adds that to me 'he will be even more than that, both as a person and as a follower of the Lord.'

Then, to cap it all, Paul says that if I'm out of pocket at all because of Onesimus he, Paul, will pay me back... but I shouldn't forget that I owe everything I am now to him! Well... I don't know. So... what would you do?

**Talk:** Well, what would you do? Welcome Onesimus back—not as a slave but a Christian friend and brother? Or tell Paul to keep him, or have him back and punish him as a runaway slave who stole from you? At this point, take responses/votes.

It all depends what you think about forgiveness and whether people can change that much. Somewhere else in the Bible, Paul says that when we become a friend of Jesus—a Christian—we are a new person! 'Anyone who belongs to Christ is a new person. The past is forgotten, and everything is new' (2 Corinthians 5:17, CEV). What an amazing thing! Paul knew Onesimus had changed and become a new person because Jesus was now at the centre of his life. He wasn't a thieving runaway slave any more—he was part of the same Christian family that Paul and Philemon belonged to. He was their 'brother in Christ'. We can all be brothers or sisters of Jesus—part of his family—when we put our trust in him.

**Song:** 'Jesus put this song into our hearts'.

## Meal suggestion

- ✿ A Greek meze table with hot and cold snacks to share or moussaka.
- ✿ A celebration 'welcome home Onesimus' cake to share, or character cupcakes (made in the activity).



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## **Faith in Homes suggestion**

Think of someone in your family or a friend that you haven't seen for some while. You may have contact with them by text, phone or e-mail but why not sit down together at home and write them a family letter adding contributions from everyone, including photos and drawings. Send them your love.

## **Primary School RE idea**

### **Upper KS2 RE/Citizenship:**

- ✿ Discuss the words 'slave' and 'slavery'. How do we use them colloquially every day? What do they really mean?
- ✿ Research Christians' role in the abolition of the British slave trade (for example, William Wilberforce, Hannah More, the Clapham Sect).
- ✿ Talk about slavery today—see the Stop the Traffik website.
- ✿ Discuss how we sometimes treat family, friends, classmates, new pupils at school—perhaps not as slaves but as 'not one of us'.
- ✿ Compare the ideas of respect, human rights and the golden rule: 'Do as you would be done by' or 'Love your neighbour as yourself'.