

Return of the Runaway

Philemon; *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 456–460

How would you like it if someone lived at your house and made your bed for you every day? And cleaned your room? If you had a servant, that would probably happen.

Years ago a young man was such a servant. But he became unhappy, and he ran away. Then he met Paul. It might have happened this way . . .

Paul looked up as a tall young man came and stood beside him.

The young man was dressed for travel and carried a backpack over his shoulder. Paul smiled, then looked down at the letter he had just written. He signed it, rolled it up, and handed it to the young man.

“Here, Onesimus,” he said, “this is the letter I promised you. It is addressed to your master, Philemon. Give it to him as soon as you get home.”

Paul stood and put his arm around the young man’s shoulders. “I told him that you are like a son to me. I know that in the past you were not as useful to him as you have been to me these last few months. But now you have accepted Jesus, and love Him. I know that you will serve Philemon just as well as you have served me.”

The young man smiled shyly.

Paul continued. “We all know that he has the right to be angry with you for running away. But I told him that you have been helping me just as he would help me if he were here. I hope he will think about that. I also told him that, even though you are still his slave, you are also his brother in Christ; you have become a Christian.”

Onesimus put his arm around Paul’s shoulder. Then he released Paul and put the letter in the bag he had slung over his shoulder. While his head was bent, he brushed a tear out of his eye. He hoped no one would notice.



The Message

I can serve Jesus at home.

Memory Verse

*“Serve wholeheartedly,
as if you were serving
the Lord, not men”*

(Ephesians 6:7, NIV).

“One more thing,” Paul continued, as the two walked toward the door. “I will pay whatever amount you might owe your master Philemon. He actually owes me his life, since I was the one who told him about Jesus.” Paul smiled as he stopped in the doorway.

“I can never thank you enough!” Onesimus exclaimed. He threw his bag over his shoulder, lingering a moment.

“Just go back home and serve Philemon as well as you have served me. That is what Christians do, son. They serve one another right where they are. Now that you are a Christian too, I know that the two of you will get along a lot better.” Paul gave Onesimus’s shoulder a pat as the young man finally turned to go.

“I’d keep you here to help me if I could. But you have to go back home and be willing to serve Philemon first. Maybe someday he will let you come back to me.”

Paul waved as Onesimus started down the path. “I have asked Philemon to prepare a room for me,” he called after the young man. “I am trusting that God will answer my prayers, and I will be able to come and see you both before long.”

Onesimus gave one last wave over

his shoulder; then didn’t look back. He was a little afraid to go back to the master he had run away from. But now he was a Christian, and his heart was full of the love of God. He was ready to try again to serve Philemon the way he should. After all, Paul had taught him that being of service at home was a big part of being a Christian.



S A B B A T H

DO Take a walk with your family. Find a quiet place and share your lesson together. Imagine that you are Onesimus. Tell your family what you think will happen when you get to Philemon's house. Ask them what it was like to be a slave in Roman times.

READ Read Ephesians 6:7 and tell your family what it means to you.

In the Roman Empire
three people out of every
four were slaves!



S U N D A Y

READ During family worship read and discuss the beginning of Paul's letter in Philemon 1-7.

DO Give a family member the balloon you decorated in Sabbath School. Or write an act of service for a family member on a balloon. Write their name on paper and put it inside. Then blow up the balloon and give it to the person as a happy surprise.

DO Say your memory verse as you pretend to walk home to Philemon. Pray for people who don't have freedom to attend church.

M O N D A Y

READ Read and discuss Philemon 8-11 with your family.

DO Write your memory verse on a paper napkin, leaving plenty of space between words. Cut between the words. Put the napkin puzzle parts together in the right order. Why use a napkin for your memory verse?

SING Sing "Love at Home" (*Sing for Joy*, No. 137). Then ask Jesus to help you serve others today.

T U E S D A Y

READ With your family, read and discuss Philemon 12-14.

DO Plan to be a secret servant today at home. Do something to help a member of your family without letting them know.

DO Say your memory verse without help. Then pray for each family member.

W E D N E S D A Y

READ Read and discuss Philemon 15-17 for family worship. How did you serve at home today?

SHARE Paul sent letters by messenger. Name some ways you can get messages to people who live far away. Use two ways today to tell someone that Jesus loves them.

SING Make up a tune for your memory verse and sing it.

THURSDAY

READ With your family read and discuss Philemon 18-25.

DO Find the names of two servants by reading the following Bible verses:

He took care of the family sheep.
(1 Samuel 16:10-13) _____

He served God in Eli's home—his other home. (1 Samuel 1:20 and 2:11) _____

DO Ask your family: How is being a servant today different from Paul's time?

DRAW Draw a picture to show what your memory verse means to you. Explain it to your family.

FRIDAY

DO Today is a good day to be a servant at home. What can you do to help your family prepare for Sabbath?

DO For family worship, act out Paul writing the letter to Philemon. In your own words write what was in the letter. Pass the letter to someone in your family who will represent Onesimus.

READ Read Galatians 5:13. How can your family live this text at home?

DO Say your memory verse together.

SING Sing together "This Is My Prayer" (*Sing for Joy*, No. 106).

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PUZZLE

Directions: Review your memory verse. Then look at the lines arranged inside the house. The first letter is an "s." Now find the first word of your memory verse by crossing out the extra line in each letter.

