GENESIS TO REVELATION | LETTER LESSON

Welcomed as a Beloved Brother

Philemon 1:8-21



YOUR BIBLE READING

Paul appeals for Onesimus to be welcomed as a beloved brother.

Inside: two extended reading pages, a thoughtful reflection, creative activities and a grown-up guide.

AGES 6-10 WITH AN ADULT • 6 COLORFUL A4 PAGES • ENGLISH ONLY

EXTENDED ENGLISH READING • PAGE 1 OF 2

An Appeal Made for Love's Sake

Philemon 1:8-21



Philemon is a personal letter from Paul about Onesimus. Paul writes as an older man and a prisoner for Christ. He could speak firmly about what was fitting, but he chooses to appeal on the basis of love. This is not a scene in which we watch Philemon open the letter or hear his answer. The words we have are Paul's request, preserved for the readers to consider carefully.

Onesimus was a man who had been enslaved in relation to Philemon. Slavery treated human beings as property and placed their freedom under another person's control. That is wrong; no person is less human or less worthy of safety because someone has claimed ownership over them. The letter comes from a world where this injustice existed. Reading it does not require pretending the injustice itself was good or acceptable.

Paul speaks of Onesimus with deep affection, describing him as his child because of their relationship in the faith during Paul's imprisonment. He says that Onesimus has become useful both to him and to Philemon. He is sending him back and describes this as sending his own heart. These words are part of Paul's appeal to see Onesimus personally, with love, rather than reduce him to a position or a label.

Paul had wanted Onesimus to remain with him and help during his imprisonment for the good news. Yet he explains that he did not want to act without Philemon's consent, because he wanted a good response to come freely rather than through pressure. His appeal is moving toward a change in how Onesimus is received: the man Paul loves is to be welcomed in a way shaped by their shared belonging to Jesus.

Remember: A caring welcome recognizes a person's full dignity.

EXTENDED ENGLISH READING • PAGE 2 OF 2

Receive Him as a Beloved Brother

Philemon 1:8-21



Paul suggests that the separation might lead to a lasting relationship: Onesimus should be received no longer merely as a slave, but as more than a slave, a beloved brother. Paul already regards him that way. He asks Philemon to recognize that relationship too, both in ordinary life and in the Lord. The request challenges a view of Onesimus defined only by someone else's power over him.

Paul then makes the appeal personal. If Philemon considers Paul a partner, he should welcome Onesimus as he would welcome Paul. If Onesimus has wronged him or owes anything, Paul offers to have it charged to his own account. The word if matters. This is not proof that Onesimus stole something, and the letter does not give us permission to invent a theft or explain how the earlier separation happened.

Paul writes that he will repay what is owed and asks for a response that will refresh his heart in Christ. He expresses confidence that Philemon will do even more than he says. The passage ends with that expectation, not with a report of the outcome. We are not told here whether Philemon freed Onesimus, how he greeted him, or what either man said when they met. An honest retelling leaves those things open.

The clear center of the letter is the appeal to welcome Onesimus as a beloved brother. Paul uses affection, partnership, and a willingness to take responsibility for a possible debt to support that appeal. Readers can notice the dignity he insists upon without treating slavery as a harmless background detail. The letter asks for a changed reception of a real person, while its unanswered ending leaves us to consider the seriousness of that request.

Pause and think: What would it mean to welcome someone as a person with dignity rather than as a label?

THINK, NOTICE & GROW

A Person Is More Than a Label



No person belongs to another person as property. Children and adults alike deserve safety and dignity. When you read an ancient letter about slavery, it is right to name that injustice clearly. You do not need to imagine that every old custom was good simply because it appears in the world of a Bible passage. Describing a practice and approving it are different things.

Paul asks for a personal welcome rather than a response based only on a label. In ordinary life, you might notice someone reduced to a mistake, a job, or a place they come from. You can use their name, listen to their words, and refuse cruel descriptions. Respect does not depend on being useful to the person with the most power in a group.

The letter does not give us the ending we may wish to hear. We can resist inventing one and still think carefully about the request. What would a welcome that honors someone's dignity require? In a difficult situation, an adult can help distinguish genuine care from pressure to return to harm. A child's safety never depends on keeping an unfair relationship comfortable.

A SMALL STEP FOR TODAY

Paul appealed for Onesimus to be received as a beloved brother, while the letter leaves Philemon's response unreported.

What would it mean to welcome someone as a person with dignity rather than as a label?

Read, Remember & Create

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 Think about the reading

1. How does Paul ask Philemon to receive Onesimus?

2. Does this passage report Philemon's response?

2 Put the ideas in order

Write 1, 2 and 3 for the order these ideas appear in the reading.

- ☐ He offers to cover a possible debt and awaits a response.
- ☐ Paul makes an affectionate appeal about Onesimus.
- ☐ He asks that Onesimus be welcomed as a beloved brother.

3 Draw a meaningful picture

Draw a welcome that uses a person's name and shows equal dignity around a shared table.

Tell someone how your picture connects to the reading.

Read & Grow Together

Read and learn with context

This English edition is designed for ages 6-10 with an adult. Read both extended readings together, or enjoy one each day. Pause at unfamiliar words, invite questions and use the reflection page to connect the story with everyday life. These are retellings and lessons with explanations; read the listed Bible passage for context. Poetry, parables, letters and symbolic visions are identified by type.

Remember this

A caring welcome recognizes a person's full dignity.
Original memory thought, not a direct Bible quotation. Related passage: Philemon 1:16-17

A thoughtful conversation

Name slavery as wrong without inventing either man's actions or claiming the letter explicitly records emancipation. Paul asks Philemon to receive Onesimus as a beloved brother; the response is not preserved. The conditional debt language does not establish theft. Never use the return setting to pressure a child or vulnerable person back into an unsafe relationship.

Activity answers

1. As a beloved brother, with the welcome he would give Paul.
2. No. It preserves Paul's appeal and expectation, not an ending to the meeting.
Sequence boxes, top to bottom: 3, 1, 2. Personal responses and drawings will vary.

Optional prayer

God, help us respect every person's dignity and oppose ways people are used or controlled. Amen.

Print and share

Each pack has 6 pages. Print on A4 at Actual Size (100%). The worksheet is page 5. You may print just that page, or use the separate 150-page activity book. The collection contains 150 packs in Bible book order, 15 volumes and one ZIP. Catalog pack IDs stay the same when new readings are added.

Sources and sharing

English retellings, lessons, reflections and activities by DigiPick (2026), based on Philemon 1:8-21. Source checked with the public-domain World English Bible. Illustration: original symbolic vector artwork by DigiPick.store; a learning aid, not an additional Bible event.
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