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Forgiving the Runaway

Key References: Philemon 1-22; *The Acts of the Apostles,* chap. 43, pp. 456-460; *The Bible Story* (1994), vol. 10, pp. 152-155; Our Beliefs nos. 10, 11, 14















power**text**

"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23, 24).

Sabbath

DO Do the activity on page 47.

power**point**

We serve God when we reflect His unselfish love to others.

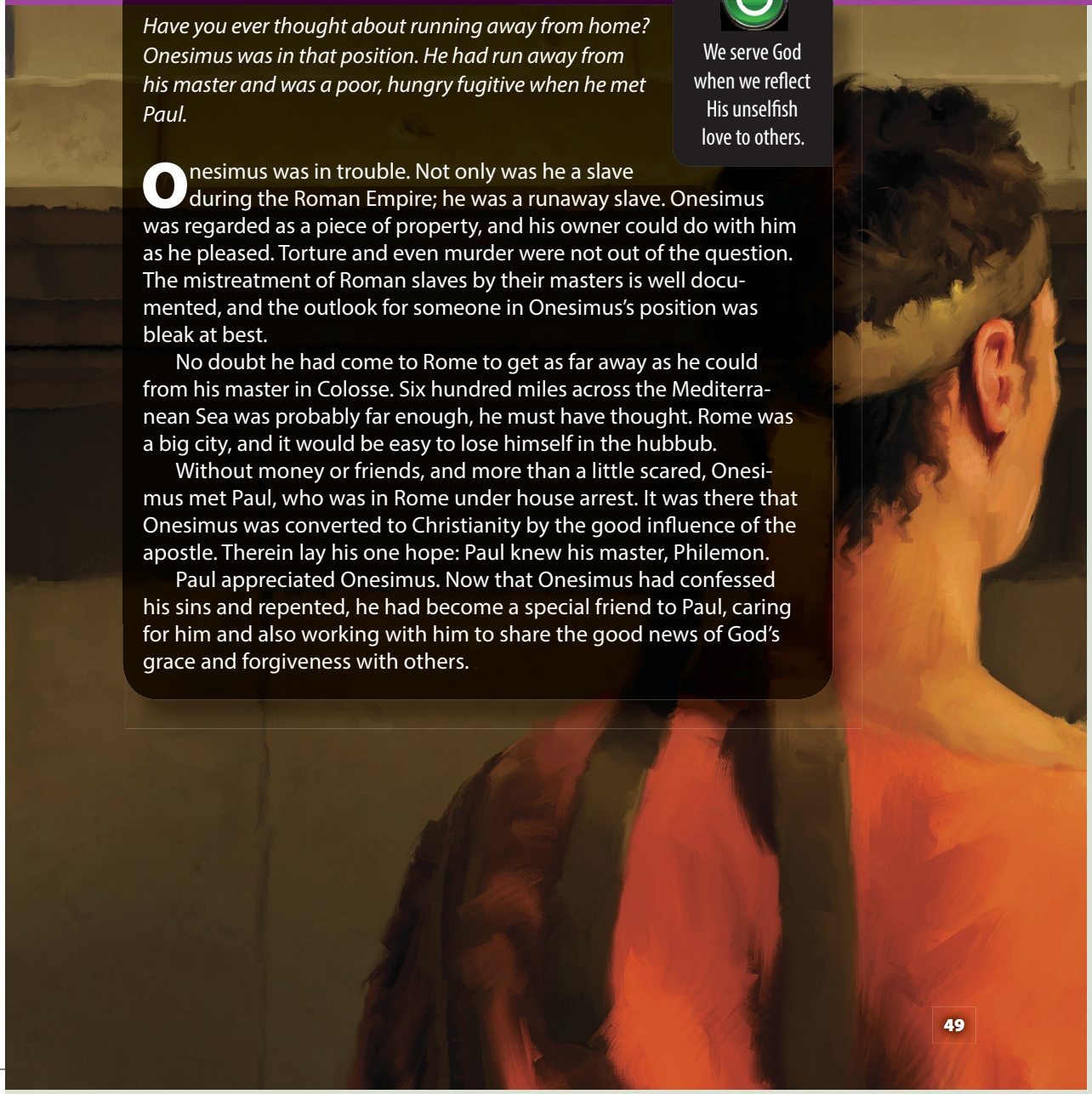
Have you ever thought about running away from home? Onesimus was in that position. He had run away from his master and was a poor, hungry fugitive when he met Paul.

Onesimus was in trouble. Not only was he a slave during the Roman Empire; he was a runaway slave. Onesimus was regarded as a piece of property, and his owner could do with him as he pleased. Torture and even murder were not out of the question. The mistreatment of Roman slaves by their masters is well documented, and the outlook for someone in Onesimus's position was bleak at best.

No doubt he had come to Rome to get as far away as he could from his master in Colosse. Six hundred miles across the Mediterranean Sea was probably far enough, he must have thought. Rome was a big city, and it would be easy to lose himself in the hubbub.

Without money or friends, and more than a little scared, Onesimus met Paul, who was in Rome under house arrest. It was there that Onesimus was converted to Christianity by the good influence of the apostle. Therein lay his one hope: Paul knew his master, Philemon.

Paul appreciated Onesimus. Now that Onesimus had confessed his sins and repented, he had become a special friend to Paul, caring for him and also working with him to share the good news of God's grace and forgiveness with others.



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Sunday

READ Read Philemon 1-11 and this week's lesson, "Forgiving the Runaway."

DRAW Draw a running shoe and write the power text on it. Begin to learn the power text, Matthew 5:23, 24.

PRAY Pray for insights into the messages of this story.

Monday

READ Read Philemon 12-25.

INVESTIGATE Investigate what it was like to be a slave in the Roman Empire.

DISCUSS Discuss with an adult the difference that respect makes in building positive relationships.

REVIEW Review the power text.

PRAY Ask God to teach you true Christian courtesy.

Tuesday

READ Read Luke 6:27, 28.

IMAGINE Imagine the scene that occurred when Onesimus returned to Philemon.

EXPRESS Draw a series of small pictures or write a dialogue of what you feel the meeting was like.

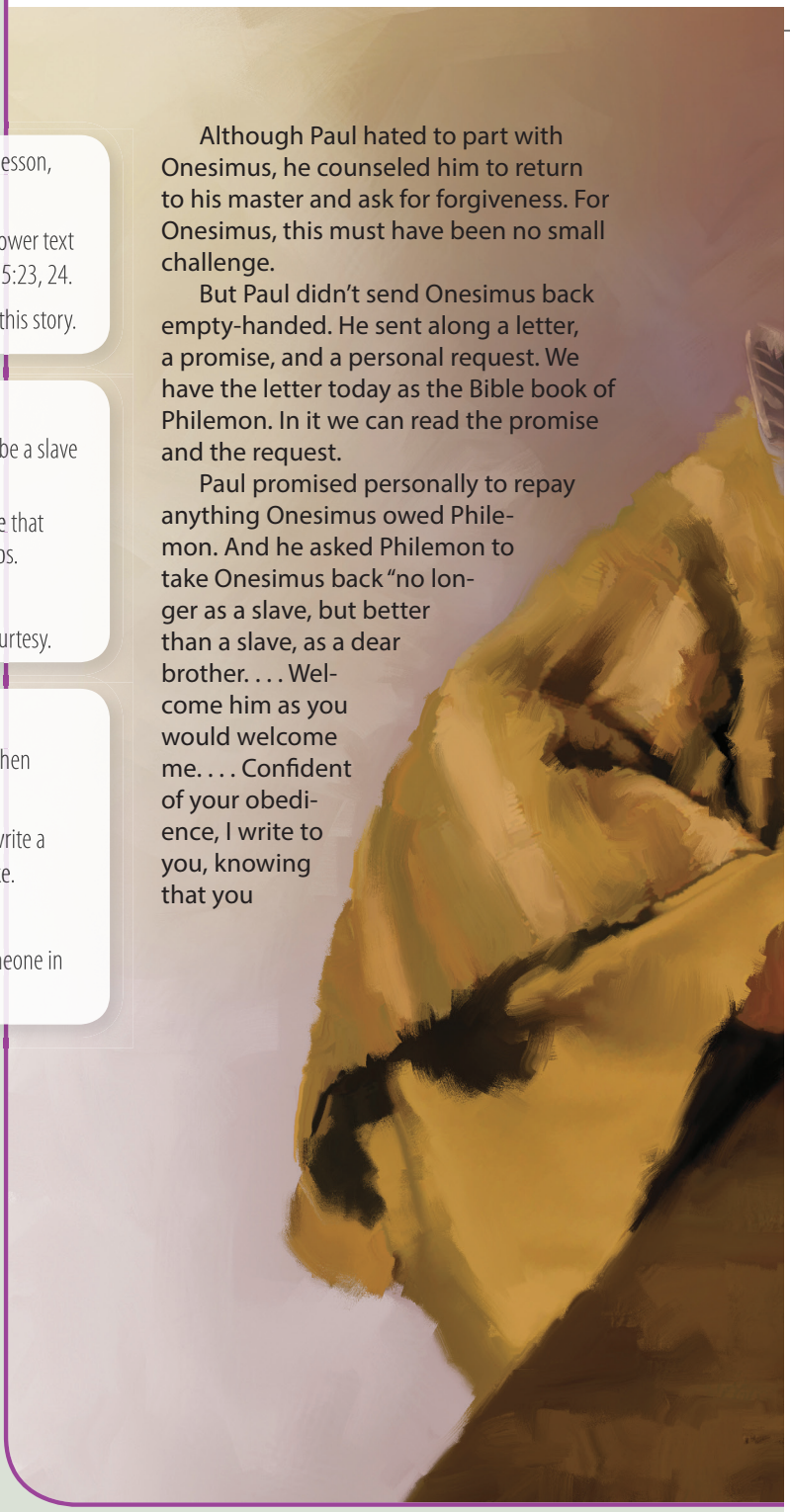
REVIEW Review the power text.

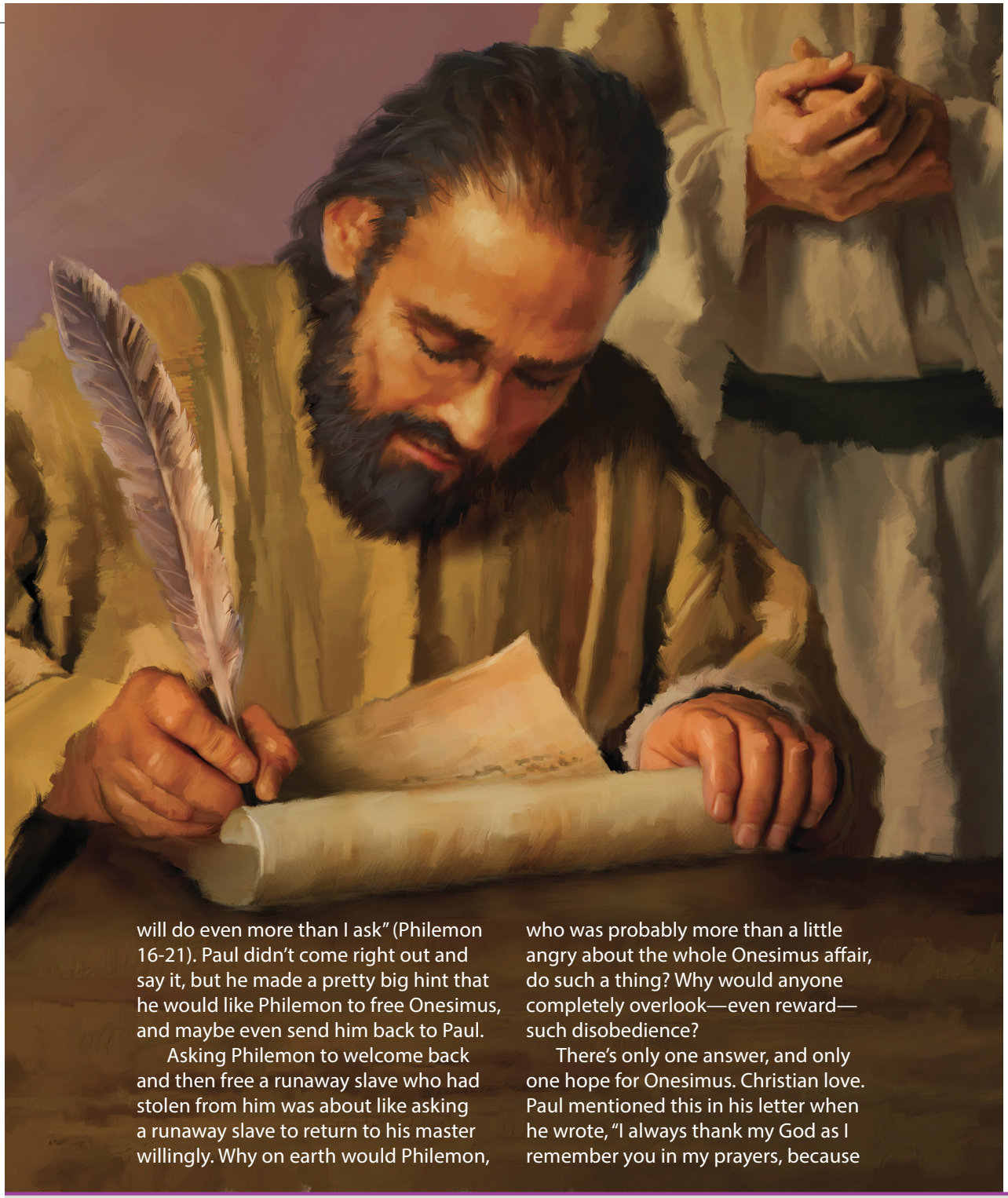
PRAY Pray for a better relationship with someone in your life.

Although Paul hated to part with Onesimus, he counseled him to return to his master and ask for forgiveness. For Onesimus, this must have been no small challenge.

But Paul didn't send Onesimus back empty-handed. He sent along a letter, a promise, and a personal request. We have the letter today as the Bible book of Philemon. In it we can read the promise and the request.

Paul promised personally to repay anything Onesimus owed Philemon. And he asked Philemon to take Onesimus back "no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. . . . Welcome him as you would welcome me. . . . Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you





will do even more than I ask" (Philemon 16-21). Paul didn't come right out and say it, but he made a pretty big hint that he would like Philemon to free Onesimus, and maybe even send him back to Paul.

Asking Philemon to welcome back and then free a runaway slave who had stolen from him was about like asking a runaway slave to return to his master willingly. Why on earth would Philemon, who was probably more than a little angry about the whole Onesimus affair, do such a thing? Why would anyone completely overlook—even reward—such disobedience?

There's only one answer, and only one hope for Onesimus. Christian love. Paul mentioned this in his letter when he wrote, "I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, because

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Wednesday

READ Read John 15:12-17.

COMPARE How does Paul's willingness to pay for Onesimus's debt compare to the price Christ paid for our sins?

WRITE Write a verse or poem based on this comparison.

REVIEW Review the power text.

PRAY Pray for an understanding of Jesus' sacrifice for you.

Thursday

READ Read Psalm 130:4.

WRITE Look through the Psalms (or a Bible concordance) for the words "forgive," "forgave," "forgiven." List the texts you find in your Bible study journal.

REVIEW Review the power text.

PRAY Ask God for help to forgive those who hurt you.

Friday

READ Read Ephesians 6:5-9 with your family for worship.

DISCUSS Discuss with your family what would eventually happen in a society if all slaves and masters obeyed Paul's counsel for a while. Why do you think slavery would not continue to be practiced in that culture?

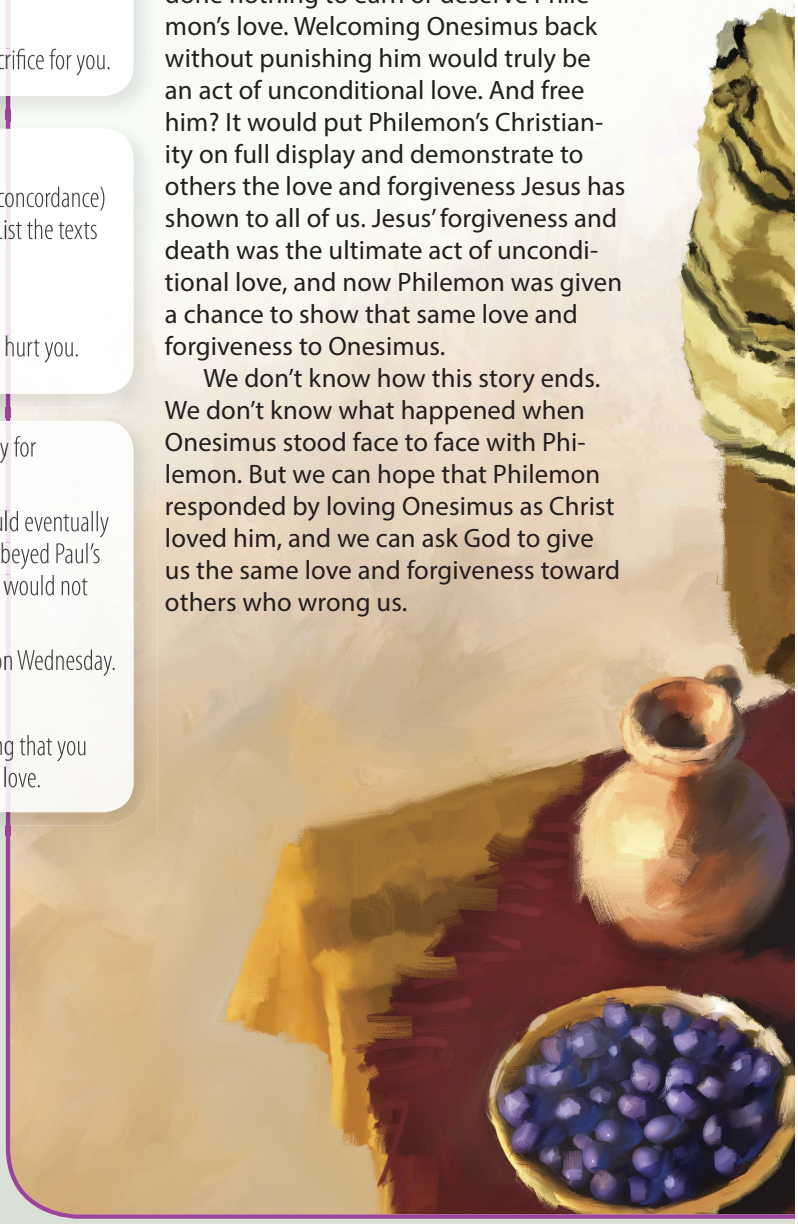
SHARE Share the poem or verse you wrote on Wednesday.

REVIEW Review the power text.

PRAY Pray that God will show you something that you can do to improve your society with Christian love.

I hear about your love for all his holy people and your faith in the Lord Jesus" (verses 4 and 5). That love must include love for his runaway slave, who was a brother in Christ. Onesimus had certainly done nothing to earn or deserve Philemon's love. Welcoming Onesimus back without punishing him would truly be an act of unconditional love. And free him? It would put Philemon's Christianity on full display and demonstrate to others the love and forgiveness Jesus has shown to all of us. Jesus' forgiveness and death was the ultimate act of unconditional love, and now Philemon was given a chance to show that same love and forgiveness to Onesimus.

We don't know how this story ends. We don't know what happened when Onesimus stood face to face with Philemon. But we can hope that Philemon responded by loving Onesimus as Christ loved him, and we can ask God to give us the same love and forgiveness toward others who wrong us.





PUZZLE 6

FORGIVE US OUR SINS

Instructions: Consider the following Bible verse:

"Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us" (Luke 11:4).

Can you forgive a brother's or sister's "sins" by striking out the word "sins" every time it appears below? The leftover letters spell out another Bible verse.

"Besinsarwsinsisinssinstsinsheasinschosinssinssinsthesinsransinsdfosinssinsrgisinsveosinsneasinsnotsinssinshesinsrifsinssinssinsansinsyosinsfyosinsuhsinsassinssinsasinsgrisinsevsinsancsinssinseasinsgasinsinssinstssinsosinsmesinssinssinsonsinse. FsinsorsinsgsinsivsinseassinstsinsheLsinssinsosinsrsinsdfsinsosinsrgsinsavsinseysinssinsosinsu"

(Csinsolsinsosinssinsssinsssinsiasinsnssins 3:13).