



Rewarding the Runaway

SERVICE We serve by obeying and helping.

Power Text

“Leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 5:24, NIV).

Key Text and References

Philemon 1-22; *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 456-460; student story on page 62 of this guide.

Objectives

The students will:

Know the value of unselfish love as a means of serving.

Feel appreciation for Christ’s love working through them to others.

Respond by choosing to reflect God’s unselfish love to others.

Power Point



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

Getting Ready to Teach

The Bible Lesson at a Glance

Onesimus, a former slave of Philemon, has run away from his master, but is converted when he meets Paul at the prison. Paul appeals to Philemon to take back the former slave with unselfish love and to forgo vengeance.

This is a lesson about service.

Onesimus offers a picture of humanity. Like the runaway slave, we have all run away from God. Through Jesus, God accepts us unconditionally and reconciles with us, no matter what we have done. In turn, God will help us to serve Him by unselfishly accepting others and showing true love, forgiveness, and a spirit of reconciliation.

SIX

Program Notes			
Lesson Section	Minutes	Activities	Materials Needed
Welcome	Ongoing	Greet students at door Hear pleased/troubled	
1 Readiness	10-15	A. <i>Looking for Love</i> B. <i>Hearts of Love</i> C. <i>Random Acts of Love</i>	Hymnals/songbooks, board, marker, Bibles Red construction paper, scissors, markers, tape, Bibles Newspapers, scissors, Bibles
* Prayer and Praise*	15-20	See page 58. *Prayer and Praise may be used at any time during the program.	Service offering box, God box
2 Bible Lesson	15-20	Introducing the Bible Story	Bibles
		Experiencing the Story	Bibles
		Exploring the Bible	Bibles
3 Applying the Lesson	10-15	<i>Heart over Mind</i>	
4 Sharing the Lesson	10-15	<i>Love Notes</i>	Stamped postcards OR stamped envelopes, writing paper

Teacher Enrichment

"How fitting an illustration of the love of Christ for the repentant sinner! The servant who had defrauded his master had nothing with which to make restitution. The sinner who has robbed God of years of service has no means of canceling the debt. Jesus interposes between the sinner and God, saying, I will pay the debt. Let the sinner be spared; I will suffer in his stead" (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 458).

"Paul's letter to Philemon shows the influence of the gospel upon the relation between master and servant. Slave-holding was an established institution throughout the Roman Empire, and both masters

and slaves were found in most of the churches for which Paul labored. In the cities, where slaves often greatly outnumbered the free population, laws of terrible severity were regarded as necessary to keep them in subjection" (*ibid.*, p. 459).

"It was not the apostle's work to overturn arbitrarily or suddenly the established order of society. To attempt this would be to prevent the success of the gospel. But he taught principles which struck at the very foundation of slavery and which, if carried into effect, would surely undermine the whole system" (*ibid.*, pp. 459, 460).

In what ways do I reflect God's unselfish love to others?

Teaching the Lesson

Welcome

Welcome students at the door. Ask how their week has been—what they’re pleased/troubled about. Ask if they found any stories of people who put others first.

Direct the students immediately to the Readiness Activity you have prepared.



Readiness Activities

Select the activity or activities that are most appropriate for your situation.

A. Looking for Love

You Need:

- hymnals OR songbooks
- board and marker
- Bibles

Give each student or two a hymnal or songbook. Say: **Take a few minutes to go through the hymnal and describe “love to God and others” using only what you find in hymn lyrics. For example, you might find a hymn that defines it as “I’ll go where You want me to go.” See how many ways love is described, and I’ll write them on the board as you call them out.**

Debriefing

Ask: **Why do you think love is described in so many ways? Which descriptions do you like the best? Why? Are there any other descriptions that you would like to add to the list?**

Say: **God loves us with what is described as “unconditional love.” Let’s look at our power text, Matthew 5:24. Often “reconciling” with those whom we feel have hurt us in some way is difficult and can only be done with unselfish love. Let’s also find John 13:34.**

Ask: **What is Jesus asking us to do in this text?**

Say: **Today we are learning how we can serve God by reflecting His unselfish love to others.**



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

(Adapted from *No-Miss Lessons for PreTeen Kids* [Loveland, Colo.: Group Publishing, Inc., 1997], pp. 36, 37.)

You Need:

- red construction paper
- scissors
- markers
- tape
- Bibles

B. Hearts of Love

Ask students to each cut out a large red heart. Say: **On your heart, write “Unselfish love is . . .” and complete the sentence with something you have done to love someone unselfishly.** (Example: “Unselfish love is helping my little brother with his homework even after he spilled juice on mine.”) Have students display their hearts in the room.

Debriefing

Ask: **Take a look at all the different ways you each have re-**

flected unselfish love to others. Read some or all of the sentences on the hearts. **How difficult do you think it was to love others in these ways? Why is it difficult to love unselfishly?**

Say: **God wants us to serve Him by reflecting His love to others. That would be impossible to do without asking Him to work through us.**



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

(Adapted from *Group's Best Junior High Meetings* [Loveland, Colo.: Thom Schultz Publications, Inc., 1989], vol. 2, pp. 107, 108.)

C. Random Acts of Love

Ask the students to search the newspapers, magazines, or selected stories you brought to find a story headline in which someone showed unselfish love to someone else. Instruct them to cut out the headline or story. Once each has found an example of unselfish love, divide students into groups of three and ask each member of the group to share their chosen story with the other two. When everyone has had an opportunity to share with their group, call them back together.

Ask: **How did you feel as you heard these stories of unselfish love? God knows what is best for us and He asks us to love others the way He loves us. We are learning today that**



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

You Need:

- newspapers
OR selected stories
- scissors
- Bibles

Prayer and Praise



Fellowship

Report the students' joys and sorrows (pleased and troubled) as reported to you at the door (as appropriate). If they have given you permission, share one or two special items from students' Bible study during the week. Acknowledge any birthdays, special events, or achievements. Give a special, warm greeting to all visitors.

Suggested Songs

"I Will Sing of the Mercies of the Lord" (*He Is Our Song*, No. 15)

"Spirit Song" (*He Is Our Song*, No. 72)

"Take These Hands" (*He Is Our Song*, No. 127)

"I Want to Be Like You" (*Praise Time*, No. 90)

"Your Everlasting Love" (*Praise Time*, No. 7)

Prayer

Say: **When Jesus was here on earth, He prayed for His disciples, asking God to help them love each other. He taught them that they were to reflect His unselfish love to everyone. His Word tells us in John 13:35 that we are to love each other the way He loves us. Think of someone specific to whom you can offer unselfish love this week.**

Pray for each student by name, that they will be able to reflect unselfish love to that "unnamed" person. Thank God for working through us to show His love to others.

Use *Teen Mission* or other mission report available to you.

Offering

You Need:

- service offering box
- God box

Continue using the service offering box from last week, and this week, add a "God box." Create a small container with the word *GOD* boldly printed on it.

Say: **There are many ways we offer "gifts" to God. One way is with our tithes and offerings. When we offer our money, it serves to spread the gospel all over the world. This morning, we are learning about reflecting God's unselfish love to others. We can't do that without His help. When we offer ourselves to His service, He uses us to reflect His love to others. As you bring your money offering, if you also want to offer yourselves to God's service, put your name on a slip of paper and place it in the "God box."**

After the offerings are taken, ask God's blessing on the gifts of money as well as the gift of each child's willingness to be used in His service. Ask Him to love others through them, unselfishly, this week.

* Prayer and Praise may be used at any time during the program.

2

Bible Lesson

Introducing the Bible Story

You Need:

- Bibles

Ask: **Think of a time when you were treated unfairly, unkindly, or a time**

when someone was mean to you or stole something from you. How did you feel? What did you do? (Allow time for a few responses.)

In our lesson today we will learn about a slave named Onesimus and his master Philemon. In this story, folks were treated unkindly, unfairly and even had things stolen from them. Let's see what happened and what the apostle Paul encouraged them to do to make it right.



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

Experiencing the Story

You Need:

- Bibles

Divide the class into three groups. Ask each group to read the story in Philemon 1-25 and complete one of the following questionnaires that you have created on a sheet of paper.

Philemon:

Who was he?
 How did Paul know him?
 What did Paul feel about him?
 What unfair thing happened to him?
 What unkind thing do you think he might have done?
 What did Paul ask him to do, in order to reflect God's unselfish love?
 How hard do you think it was for Philemon to hear what Paul wanted him to do? Why?

Onesimus:

Who was he?
 How did Paul meet him?
 How did Paul feel about him?
 What dishonest thing did he do?
 What did Paul ask him to do, in order to reflect God's unselfish love?
 How hard do you think it was for Onesimus to hear what Paul wanted him to do? Why?

Paul:

Who was he?
 How did he know Philemon?
 How did he know Onesimus?
 How did Paul feel about Philemon and Onesimus?
 What did Paul want Onesimus to do? Why?
 What did Paul want Philemon to do? Why?
 How did Paul reflect unselfish love to Philemon?

After the groups have completed their questionnaires, ask each group to share what they learned about their person. Take notes about each on a white board for all to see.

After each group shares, ask: **What do you think we can learn about unselfish love from Paul's example? How difficult is it to love unselfishly? What do you think happened if Philemon and Onesimus did what Paul asked of them? Following God's plan is not always easy. God promises us that He will work through us to serve and love others the way He asks.**



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

Exploring the Bible

You Need:

- Bibles

Divide the students into six groups and assign each group one of the following texts. Say: Look up your text and find out who had been wronged by someone else. Then notice their response.

1. Luke 10:30-37 (good Samaritan)
2. Genesis 37:23-28; 45:1-8 (Joseph)
3. Luke 23:32-34 (Jesus)
4. Daniel 1:1-4; 6:3, 4 (Daniel)
5. Job 1:7-2:10 (Job)
6. Numbers 12:1-13 (Moses)

Debriefing

Say: **Check out your Bible verse and discover someone who was treated unfairly as well as how they responded.**

Ask: **Who did you read about? Did they respond with unselfish love or not? How well did each serve God? What can we learn from the choices of others?**



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

3

Applying the Lesson

Heart Over Mind

If you made the hearts in Readiness B, use them here, asking the students to retrieve them and print on the backside “Reflect God’s Unselfish Love”; otherwise have students cut out large red hearts and print “Reflect God’s Unselfish Love” on one side of the heart.

Read each of the following scenarios to the class. After the question, ask them what they would want to do in each scenario. Say: **It is very natural to feel hurt and want to hurt others who have caused us pain. It is impossible for us to love the way God does, without His help. When we ask Him to use us to love others, He promises He will help us reflect His love to others. So even though you may feel like “hurting” others in response to their unkindness, when you ask for God’s help, what will He use you to do?**

Ask students to lift their hearts revealing the words “Reflect God’s Unselfish Love” and all shout together “SHOW US

GOD’S UNSELFISH LOVE.” Repeat this after each scenario is read.

1. Someone has told lies about you. It feels as if they have stolen your good reputation. Some of your friends do not want to be friends with you any more. How would you feel? What would you want to do?

2. Your best friend borrowed your latest CD. When they give it back, it is damaged. You ask them what happened and they lie and say that you must have done it yourself, as it was fine when they returned it. How would you feel? What would you feel like doing in response to such a lie?

3. Your grandfather gave you his special watch, just shortly before he died. Someone stole your watch from your locker. You put it there to keep it safe during a hockey match. How would you feel? What would you feel like doing?

Debriefing

Ask: **How might it change things for you, when you choose to reflect**

**God's unselfish love to others?
What benefits do you think there
are to loving others the way God
asks?**



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

4

Sharing the Lesson

Love Notes

Provide stamped postcards or stamped envelopes and writing paper for each student. Ask each student to write his name and address on a piece of paper and place it in a container. After each student has placed their name in, pass the container around the room and ask each student to draw out a name. (If they draw their own name, they should draw another, and then replace their own name back into the container.) Ask the students to keep the name confidential. Using the writing paper or postcard ask each student to work in private and write the following on their postcard:

Dear (name that they drew)

This week I am praying that God will use you to love everyone with His unselfish love.

See you next Sabbath.

Your friend,
(name of student)

After everyone is finished, ask them to address the postcard/envelope, seal it if necessary, and place it in a designated container.

When all have completed their "letters," say: **This week we have the awesome privilege of praying for each other as we look for opportunities to reflect God's love to others. I will take all these letters you have written and mail them on Tuesday. Each of you will receive a "surprise" note of encouragement from one of your class members this week. I know it will remind you to look for ways to reflect God's unselfish love to others.**

You Need:

- stamped postcards
OR
stamped envelopes
- writing paper



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

Closing

Close with a prayer that each student will feel empowered by God's grace to reflect His unconditional love to others throughout their week. Thank Jesus for His unconditional love that teaches us how to love others.

Note: Select five students to do the skit for "Experiencing the Story" in Lesson 7 next week. Give them copies of the skit so they can practice reading it.

STUDENT LESSON

Rewarding the Runaway

Key Text

Philemon 1-22

Power Text

“Leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift” (Matthew 5:24, NIV).

Power Point

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

Have you ever thought about running away from home? What would it be like? Where would you go? What could you do? 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. Worse than that, he was a runaway slave who had stolen from his master. 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. And likely it had taken all he had stolen from his master to get there.

Without money or friends, and more than a little scared, Onesimus met Paul. Paul was in Rome under house arrest. It was there that Onesimus was converted to Christianity. And therein lay his one hope: his master, Philemon, was a Christian who knew Paul. It’s interesting to note that although he served a Christian master, apparently conditions in Philemon’s household were bad enough to cause a slave to run away. And Onesimus was converted not by the influence of his master, but by Paul, imprisoned hundreds of miles away in Rome.

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.

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, NIV). Paul didn’t come right out and say it, but he dropped 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 hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints” (verse 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.

Sabbath

- Do this week's activity on page 56.

Sunday

- Read "Rewarding the Runaway."
- Draw a running shoe and write the power text on it. Put it somewhere you will see it during the week.
- Begin to learn the power text.
- Pray for insights into the messages of this story.

Monday

- Read Philemon 1-25.
- Investigate what it was like to be a slave in the Roman Empire.
- Discuss with a parent or another adult the difference that respect makes when used by people in authority.
- Pray for understanding of true Christian courtesy.

Tuesday

- Read Luke 6:27, 28.
- Map out the distance between Rome, where Paul and Onesimus were, and Colosse, where Philemon was. What would be the best route to go between Rome and Colosse? Why?
- Imagine the scene that occurred when Onesimus returned to Philemon. Draw a series of small pictures or write a dialogue of what you feel the meeting was like.

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

Wednesday

- Read John 15:12-17.
- Compare Paul's willingness to pay the debt that Onesimus owed to Philemon with Christ's willingness to pay the price of our sins.
- Write a verse or poem comparing the two.
- Pray for a better understanding of what Jesus did for you.

Thursday

- Look through the Psalms (or a Bible concordance) for the words *forgive*, *forgave*, *forgiven*.
- List the texts you find in your Bible study journal.
- Create a poster with your favorite texts.
- Pray for the ability to forgive someone who has offended you.

Friday

- Read Ephesians 6:5-9 with your family for worship.
- Discuss with your family what would eventually happen in a society if all slaves and masters obeyed Paul's counsel for a while. Do you think slavery would continue to be practiced in that culture?
- Share the poem or verse you wrote on Wednesday.
- Pray that God will show you something that you can do to improve your society with Christian love.