



Philemon Bible study guide

A clear 1-session guide for personal study, small groups, and churches

Read Philemon as a whole before working through the sessions. Let its own structure set the agenda.

Every question sends you back to the biblical text. The guide helps you observe the passage, follow the author's argument, interpret it in context, and respond faithfully.

CHOOSE YOUR DEPTH

- Short: Read the book overview and discuss the first and final question in a session.
- Study: Work through all 1 sessions and answer each question from the passage.
- Deep: Open the free chapter commentary and dictionary links while you study.

protos-app.com/commentary/philemon

Philemon at a glance

BIG IDEA

This brief letter, the shortest and most personal of Paul's letters, shows how attitudes and relationships are transformed by Christ. [1]

HISTORICAL SETTING

Author: Paul. Date: Traditionally, AD 60-62, but possibly earlier, around AD 53-56. Setting: Written while Paul was in prison, after he had encountered Onesimus, who was seemingly a runaway slave of Philemon, a Christian leader in Colosse. [1]

HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

Read this letter as sustained pastoral reasoning. Track the argument, audience situation, repeated words, and the move from God's work to the response asked of believers.

MAJOR THEMES

- To encourage Philemon to welcome back his slave Onesimus, who had become a believer
- The book's literary movement and central claims
- Faithful response within the people of God
- Hope, judgment, grace, and obedience in their proper context

INTERPRETIVE CARE

- Follow the letter's argument instead of isolating a familiar verse.
- Distinguish what the writer says God has done from the response asked of believers.

Philemon 1

25 verses. Read it aloud together before anyone talks about it.

Who and what appears

Jesus · Paul · Aristarchus · Mark · Timothy · Brother

Questions

- Try to state the argument in one sentence before anyone reacts to it.
- What does the writer repeat? Repetition is usually the point, not a habit.
- What surprised you, or what did you have to read twice?
- Why does the writer bring Aristarchus into this argument, and what claim does the example support?
- The word brother is doing real work here. What did you assume it meant, and does the passage agree?
- What problem was this letter written to solve, and does knowing that change how the instruction lands?
- Where does this cut against something you already believe or already do?

[Stuck on a word or name? Open the free Bible dictionary.](#)

NOTES AND PRAYER

Sources, method, and reuse

Protos created this guide to help readers understand Philemon in its literary and historical context. Questions are designed to be answered from the passage, not from guesswork or personal opinion alone.

REFERENCES

[1] Tyndale Open Study Notes

Tyndale House Publishers. Book background, purpose, setting, and structural orientation. CC BY-SA 4.0.

<https://tyndaleopenresources.com/>

[2] Protos study guide editorial

Protos. Reading structure, discussion questions, and application prompts. CC BY-SA 4.0.

<https://protos-app.com/free-bible-study-tools>

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Background and context for Philemon [_protos-app.com/commentary/philemon](https://protos-app.com/commentary/philemon)

A Bible dictionary, 1,129 entries [_protos-app.com/bible-dictionary](https://protos-app.com/bible-dictionary)

Printable Bible reading plans [_protos-app.com/reading-plans](https://protos-app.com/reading-plans)

Protos is also available on iPhone and Android, with verse-by-verse study help beside the passage you are reading.

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