

**YOUR WORST SITUATION IS WORKING FOR
YOU - BE CHEERFUL.**

**THE STORY OF ONESIMUS IN THE BOOK OF
PHILEMON**

Onesimus represents you and me, Philemon represents God and Paul represents Christ. How does the story flow? Here is the exposition.

Background Information

The book of Philemon was written in A. D 60. It is referred to as a prison letter because Paul wrote it when he was a prisoner. However, he did not give an excuse for not doing good service to others because he was in prison. Although he had been arrested, he still did his best to help Onesimus by writing a diplomatic letter to Philemon. This teaches us, even in our sorrowful and difficult moments, we can still be of great help to someone.

The name Philemon means affectionate. Philemon was always refreshing the hearts of other people demonstrating love and affection. It is also believed he hosted the church of Colossae in his house.

You will be made more useful

The name Onesimus in Hebrew or Greek language means useful or beneficial. He was useful to Philemon his boss because he worked as a slave but a situation arises and his usefulness seems useless. He wrongs Philemon his boss and out of fear of his actions he runs away. However, God turns his situation around by making him even more useful. How does God change his situation?

When Onesimus runs away, he meets Paul who ministers to him. Finally, Onesimus is converted and his level of usefulness becomes even better (now as a believer). Paul, therefore, writes to Philemon asking him to forgive and receive back Onesimus not as a slave he was but now as a brother.

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Many times we think the situations in our lives are meant to destroy us. But they aren't. Like Onesimus, who was a slave for unspecified number of years, you might be in a situation which looks stagnant. In the course of the stagnation, things seem to be getting even worse. However, keep your head held high because God turns around situations in our lives for our good.

I always believe, "good things don't happen to the good people, but all things happen for the good of those who love God".

Someone might wonder what and why Onesimus stole. However, I believe the Bible is silent on such details to allow you and me associate with Onesimus. If the Bible would say he stole sheep, food or clothes, today, people would consider stealing such items a worse sin. However, all we know is, that Onesimus did a mistake the same way we do every day.

Working as a slave might not have given Onesimus a lot of rights and, therefore, when he stole, he felt inadequate to seek forgiveness and resolved to run away. Interestingly, we feel the same today when we sin. We feel inadequate to seek forgiveness and end up doing crazy things to cover up our sins. Therefore, we become a run-away sinner like Onesimus.

Sometimes we enter the church door on Sunday and feel dirty for what we did throughout the week or even boycott church services because we feel dirty. Sometimes we think asking forgiveness for a grave sin we committed is not reasonable and, that God would not show us mercy.

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However, to God no sin is greater or lesser, all sins are equal. Although we may be tempted to freely ask for forgiveness for abusing someone and feel hesitant to ask for forgiveness for killing, God works differently. He is not like man who considers one sin bigger than the other.

Broken Relationships Comfort Others

Let us think beyond the box and imagine what Onesimus would share with the other slaves working for Philemon when he was restored. I think his stories were about how God can transform your life, how you can be forgiven and how life can still get better even in hopeless situations. Imagine how the other slaves felt? I think they felt uplifted and comforted.

I have had friends whose relationships have broken. They have ended up hurt and some wetting their pillows every night because of their relationships. However, did you realize how real a person who has gone through breakup is when he or she is comforting a person in a distressful relationship? If you have gone through a breakup, it is time to spread the comfort to others who are ailing in stressful relationships.

Philemon vs. Paul, God vs. Christ

Onesimus represents you and I have at one time wronged God. Paul on the other hand represents Christ who plays a diplomatic role to request Philemon to receive Onesimus back. In his request, Paul says, 'whatever he wronged you put it in my account'. He is ready to pay everything Philemon would ever demand from Onesimus as a payment for his sin just like Christ on the cross. Philemon represents God who has been wronged.

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Like Paul who was ready to pay everything Onesimus owed to Philemon, Christ has already paid all we owed to God for sinning against him. You should thus feel confident, that Christ has already paid your sins on the cross. You need no other argument, you have been made more useful and God is ready to accept you back. Not as a slave any more, but as a son.

No one is too sinful, that God cannot accept him or her. Jesus came for the lost and the sick. He is available for the tempted and the tried. Like Onesimus, we should always be ready to go back to God because Christ has already paid the price for our sins.

Run-away sinners

God has a special place in his heart for run-away sinners. Let's look at Jacob whose name means trickster due to his acts of trickery and see how God treats run-away sinners. He stole the birthright from his brother Esau through trickery and ran away. On his way to Laban's home his uncle, he had an encounter with God at Bethel. His name was changed from Jacob the trickster to Isreal which means 'led by God'.

God also turned around the frustrated situation of the disciples when Jesus was crucified and they felt like the ministry is over. Led by Peter, they resolved to go fishing but caught nothing. In the morning when the fishermen would take home what they had in their nets, the disciples had nothing. But Jesus turned around their situation into a great bountiful catch.

Conclusion

Do not feel like throwing in the towel. Hold on. God loves you. He is turning around your worst situation into a great miracle.

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