

Main Street Church - Life Group Guide

Series: *THE RUNAWAY* - A Story of How the Gospel Changes Lives

Based on the [The Book of Philemon](#)

Message 3: The Road to Freedom - The Story Through Paul's Eyes

Speaker: Shawn Vandop

Date: October 4, 2026



Connect (30min)

- **October Opps: Faith - Fellowship - Focus**
 - >> **Faith** - What is one opportunity for you in your relationship with God this month?
Do you have a Bible reading or devotional plan for October? How can we encourage you?
 - >> **Fellowship** - What is one opportunity for you with family or friends this month?
What are your plans for *Thanksgiving* weekend?
 - >> **Focus** - What is one opportunity for your recreation, hobbies or work this month?
- Read [1 Thessalonians 5:18](#). Give thanks to God and pray for one another.

Message Discussion (45min)

- *THE RUNAWAY* is a journey through failure, forgiveness, reconciliation, and a fresh start. It reveals a gospel that does more than forgive our sins; it transforms who we are, changes how we see one another, and restores what once seemed beyond repair. You may run from your past or from God, but you can never outrun Grace.
[Option: Watch the [Book of Philemon Summary](#) on the BibleProject YouTube Channel. 6min]
1. Read the Book of [Philemon](#) again. (3min)
 - a. How were you encouraged, challenged or changed through Sunday's message?
 - b. Which person in the story do you connect with the most in this season, and why?
Philemon, Onesimus or Paul
 2. Paul knew what it meant to need Grace.
 - a. How might his own past have shaped his appeal to Philemon?
 - b. How does remembering God's forgiveness change the way we respond to others?
 3. Forgiveness tells the truth about the wrong.
 - a. Why is naming what happened, and what it cost, an important step toward healing?
 - b. How is that different from rehearsing an offense to feed bitterness?
 4. Forgiveness releases the claim to get even.
 - a. What are some ways we try to make people pay without realizing it?
 - b. How can we pursue justice without pursuing revenge?

5. **Forgiveness can be a decision you make today and a freedom you grow into over time.**
 - a. How does that help you understand the anger or grief that may remain after choosing to forgive?
6. **Forgiveness and reconciliation are connected, but they are not identical.**
 - a. What is the difference? What needs to happen for trust and a relationship to be rebuilt?
7. **Guardrails for Forgiveness:** *Forgiveness does not mean forgetting. Forgiveness does not mean the pain instantly stops. Forgiveness does not automatically restore trust. Forgiveness does not remove every consequence. Forgiveness does not require a return to an unsafe relationship.*
 - a. Which guardrail around forgiveness did you most need to hear?
 - b. How can boundaries, consequences, and forgiveness work together?
8. **Ananias and Barnabas stood beside Paul, and Paul stood beside Onesimus.**
 - a. How can we help someone take a step toward healing or restoration without pressuring them into a quick reunion?

Application: Let Go of the Rope

Set aside ten minutes this week to bring one painful situation to Jesus, and write down:

- **The wound:** *What happened, and what did it cost me?*
- **The rope:** *How am I still trying to make this person pay?*
- **The next wise step:** *What does grace ask of me now—releasing revenge, seeking support, establishing a boundary, or making amends for harm I caused?*

>> Choose one step to take this week.

You don't need to share private details with the group or contact the person to complete this application.

>> Participate in our [Set Free Retreat](#) this Fall. November 20-21.

Prayer (15min)

- Break into groups of 3-4 people to enhance your sharing and prayer time together.
- Invite each person to **choose, read and pray** one of the 12 **Prayer Points from Philemon** on p.3-4.

Prayer Points from Philemon

1. For a life that reflects Christ

- *Philemon 1:4–7*
- Pray that your faith would become visible through love, generosity, encouragement, and the way you treat others.
- **Prayer:** “Lord, let my faith produce tangible love in the lives of the people around me. Make me someone who refreshes others.”

2. For forgiveness and reconciliation

- *Philemon 1:10–16*
- Paul appeals to Philemon to receive Onesimus not merely as a servant, but as a beloved brother.
- **Prayer:** “Lord, give me grace to forgive those who have hurt or disappointed me. Heal relationships that have been damaged and help me pursue reconciliation where You are leading me.”

3. For a transformed life

- *Philemon 1:11*
- Onesimus's name was associated with being “useful,” and Paul describes how his life had changed through Christ.
- **Prayer:** “Lord, transform every area of my life. Take the things that have been unproductive and make them useful for Your purposes.”

4. For people who have wandered to return

- *Philemon 1:10–12*
- Pray for people who have walked away from God, community, or their calling.
- **Prayer:** “Father, draw back those who have wandered. Restore them, heal what has been broken, and surround them with people who will help them grow.”

5. For grace instead of judgment

- *Philemon 1:8–9*
- Paul could have commanded Philemon but instead appealed to him in love.
- **Prayer:** “Lord, teach me to lead and respond with grace. Help me know when to speak firmly and when to appeal through love rather than pressure.”

6. For Christian relationships to be deeper than status or history

- *Philemon 1:15–16*
- The gospel changes how people see one another.
- **Prayer:** “Lord, help me see people through Your eyes. Remove pride, prejudice, resentment, and assumptions from my relationships.”

7. For the courage to make things right

- *Philemon 1:18–19*
- Paul offers to personally take responsibility for Onesimus's debt.
- **Prayer:** “Give me courage to take responsibility when I have caused harm. Help me make amends where appropriate rather than avoiding difficult situations.”

8. For people who advocate for others

- Paul uses his influence to advocate for Onesimus.
- **Prayer:** “Lord, make me someone who stands up for others, especially people who feel overlooked, rejected, or without a voice. Give me wisdom to advocate with humility and love.”

9. For restoration of purpose

- *Philemon 1:13–14*
- Paul recognizes Onesimus's value and potential while respecting Philemon's choice.
- **Prayer:** “Father, restore the purposes You have placed in people's lives. Help me recognize potential in others and encourage them toward the future You have for them.”

10. For faith that changes how we live

- *Philemon 1:6*
- Paul prays that Philemon's faith would become effective through recognizing what he has in Christ.
- **Prayer:** “Lord, don't let my faith remain only words. Show me how what I believe should change my decisions, relationships, priorities, and actions.”

11. For refreshing others

- *Philemon 1:7*
- Paul celebrates that Philemon has refreshed the hearts of other believers.
- **Prayer:** “Lord, make me a source of encouragement. Help me bring peace, hope, and strength to people who are weary.”

12. For God to work through difficult relationships

- *Philemon 1:15*
- Paul suggests that God may have been working through Onesimus's departure and return.
- **Prayer:** “Lord, help me trust You even when I don't understand what is happening in a relationship. Redeem difficult circumstances and use them for Your purposes.”

A central prayer from Philemon

“Lord, make my faith active through love. Teach me to forgive, reconcile, restore, and encourage. Give me the humility to receive others as You have received me, and the courage to make things right when relationships have been broken. Transform my life so that I become engaged in Your Kingdom and a source of refreshment to others. Amen.”