

— SERMON SERIES —

Rising Again

Finding Strength After Failure

God's grace gives
a second chance.



We Are All Onesimus (October 11, 2026), Shalom Ministries International Worship

I am an Ambassador for Christ by Paul Musembi

[Verse 1]

In Christ I'm made a brand-new creation,
The old has passed, behold transformation;
God reconciled me through Christ His Son,
And gave me a message for everyone.

[Chorus]

I'm on a mission, committed to the Vision,
On earth I represent Jesus with conviction;
I proclaim salvation, His name I adore,
I'm Christ's ambassador, empowered evermore.

[Verse 2]

God made Him sin who knew no sin,
That in Him God's righteousness we'd win;
As though God Himself were calling through me,
"Be reconciled to God," come and be free.

[OUTRO]

I am an ambassador, an ambassador for Christ!
I am an ambassador, to proclaim His life!

[Bridge,]

We have a ministry of reconciliation,
To bring the world to Christ, the Hope of salvation.

Intercessory Prayer



Paul's Plea for Onesimus



- Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker— also to Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier—and to the church that meets in your home....
- Although in Christ I could be bold and order you to do what you ought to do, yet I prefer to appeal to you on the basis of love. It is as none other than Paul—an old man and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus— that I appeal to you for **my son Onesimus**, who became my son while I was in chains. Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has **become useful** both to you and to me.
- I am sending him—who is my very heart—back to you. I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do would not seem forced but would be voluntary. Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever— no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord (Philemon 1:1-2, 8-16).

The Biblical Context of Onesimus's Story

- Paul under house arrest
 - During Paul's imprisonment in Rome, he was under military custody for 2 years.
 - Open visitor policy: For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance (Acts 28:30-31).
- The divine intersection
 - Onesimus was an enslaved man who had fled from his master, Philemon, a Christian leader in Colossae and a close friend of Paul.
 - I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains (Philemon 1:10).
 - Onesimus visited Paul regularly enough not only to hear the Gospel and be converted, but to become a vital helper to Paul during his house arrest.
- The intercession
 - Paul sent Onesimus back to Philemon not in chains, but carrying a letter (Philemon).
 - No longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord (Philemon 1:16).

Grace, Substitution, and Adoption

- What were Onesimus' problems?
 - Severe legal penalties: Under Roman law, master ownership rights were absolute on captured runaways including branding the forehead with the letter F (for *fugitivus*), flogging, or execution by crucifixion.
 - Financial theft (he may have stolen money or caused financial loss to Philemon to fund his journey to Rome): If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me (Philemon 1:18).
 - Social/spiritual alienation: As a fugitive, Onesimus lived as an outlaw without legal protection, family support, or income.
- How did Paul solve these issues?
 - Spiritual transformation: Paul led him to faith in Christ.
 - Writing a letter of intercourse, appealing Philemon as a Christian brother.
 - Legal substitution and debt guarantee.
 - Sending Onesimus back accompanied by Tychicus: Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord... He is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here (Colossians 4:7-9).

What Happened to Onesimus?

- Did Philemon forgive him? YES
 - The letter survived: Philemon cherished the letter, shared it with his home church and allowed it to be preserved for the entire Christian tradition.
 - Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask (Philemon 1:21).
- What happened to Onesimus later?
 - It is widely held by church historians that Philemon granted Onesimus his formal freedom and sent him back to assist Paul in ministry.
 - Bishop of Ephesus: St. Ignatius of Antioch wrote a letter to Ephesians in AD 110. Ignatius explicitly praises their beloved, highly capable leader, saying “I received, therefore, your whole multitude in the name of God, through Onesimus, a man of inexpressible love, and your bishop in the flesh, whom I pray you by Jesus Christ to love.”
 - Preserving Paul’s letters: Bishop Onesimus was the key figure responsible for gathering and publishing the first compiled collection of Paul’s letters, including the personal letter about his own past (Philemon) as a testament to God’s transformative grace in his life.
 - Onesimus was eventually arrested for his faith, taken to Rome, and imprisoned, where he ultimately suffered martyrdom (traditionally believed to be stoned to death).

Onesimus: God's Second Chance

- He went from "Useless" to "Useful"
 - Unprofitable runaway (Philemon 1:11) -> Trusted messenger, partner in Paul's ministry (Colossians 4:9) -> Bishop of Ephesus & martyr for the faith (Church tradition).
 - The name Onesimus literally means useful or profitable. A second chance transforms our identity and our purpose.
 - Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me (Philemon 1:11).
- It illustrates substitution and grace
 - Paul's offer to pay Onesimus's financial debt and absorb his wrong is a stunning picture of Jesus Christ.
 - If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me (Philemon 1:18).
- It requires reconciliation, not just forgiveness
 - God's second chance doesn't just change our status before God; it heals our broken relationships with others.
 - Onesimus had to face his past, return to the place he wronged, and trust in grace.

God's Second Chance in Two Ways

King Manasseh (National, Political)

- The peak of power;
- Systemic and idolatrous;
- Geopolitical exile
- Corporate restoration

Onesimus (Personal, Relational)

- The bottom of society;
- Interpersonal & criminal;
- Internal/Moral Flight
- Relational Reconciliation

- Both started with desperate running and ruin -> Both discovered that we can never run farther than God's grace can reach.
- Both experienced underserved, radical mercy.
- Both had their identities and future completely reserved -> A biblical second chance never leaves us; it redeems our past to shape our future.
- No matter how big our sphere of influence is, no matter how small or hidden our mistakes feel, God's second-chance grace covers it all.

Lessons We Need to Learn

- See every moment as a divine appointment
 - Paul was under house arrest in Rome and restricted to his rented quarters. Yet he did not view his imprisonment as a dead end; he viewed it as his current assignment.
 - Stop waiting for better circumstances to engage people. Every person who steps into your place is a potential divine appointment.
- See others through the lens of who they can become
 - Paul looked past his past mistakes and saw a future brother in Christ, calling him my son (1:10), has become useful (1:11), a dear brother (1:16).
 - Never look at people through the lens of their past scars, failures, or mistakes. Instead, look at them through the eyes of God's grace, seeing the incredible potential and vision He has placed inside them.
- We are all Onesimus
 - We were spiritually insolvent, unable to erase our past mistakes or pay our own debt (for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, Romans 3:23).
 - Onesimus could not safely return to Philemon on his own strength; he needed Paul to step into the gap, intercede for him, and guarantee his debt.
 - Through Christ's intercession, God no longer views us as spiritual fugitives to sin but adopts us into His family as full heirs and beloved children.