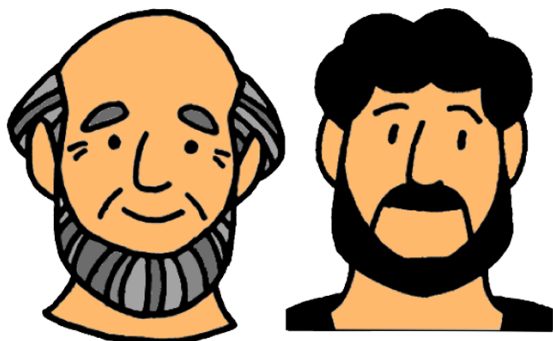


# Parable of a Prodigal Son

Scripture Reference: [Luke 15:11-32](#)



**Suggested Emphasis:** God is happy when we say we are sorry and come back to him.



Background Study



Story Introduction



Telling the Story



Review Questions



Songs



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## Story Overview:

The son in this story convinced his father to give him his portion of his inheritance. He then left his father and squandered all of the money living a wild life. He became so poor that he was willing to eat the food that his father was feeding to pigs. Finally, he came back to his father and told him how sorry he was. His father was thrilled to forgive him.

## Background Study:

Luke 15 contains three different parables. Each is about something that is lost and then found again: a sheep, a coin and a son.

An inheritance was the property that was passed on to a son after the father's death. Usually the first son would receive a double share of the inheritance. Sometimes a father might divide the inheritance between his children before he died but would still receive the income from the property until he died.

In the case of this parable, the father still had his estate intact. He had not divided it and it seems he was still actively making a living. His younger son asked him to divide the estate and to give him what he had determined was "his share". By giving the son a portion of the estate he was giving away more than just the property. He was

giving away the income he might have received from it until his death.

The son took the money and left home and found the worldly pleasures that he was looking for. When the money was all spent he found himself with no friends and nowhere to go. A famine forced him to find the only work he could - feeding pigs. This job tells us how desperate the man was. No Jew would choose to be around unclean animals like pigs (Leviticus 11:7-8).

Verse 17 states that the son "came to his senses". He must have finally realised the enormity of what he had done. He was a failure. He began to think about his father and home. When he had left home the first time he had only thought about what he felt he deserved. Now he saw things in true perspective. He never should have asked his father for anything. His father owned his estate and could divide it when and how he pleased. Now, the son did not go back to ask for what he deserved. He went back to ask his father's mercy.

The father met the son with his arms wide open. He ran to meet him before the son had even repented. The father forgave his son, not because the son deserved it but because he loved his son and wanted to forgive him. He did not make the son a servant, as the son felt he deserved. Instead, he celebrated and accepted him back as a son.

The older brother was jealous and did not understand his father's complete forgiveness. How could his father simply forget it as if it had never happened? He had always tried to treat his father well and he had watched his younger brother squander his father's money. Now, the father was giving all of the attention to the younger brother. The older brother refused to join in the celebration.

The father reminded him that he loved him and that his inheritance was secure. He tried to explain that the son had been "dead" but was now "alive". The Scripture does not say whether or not the older son relented.

This parable is a simple story that reveals a deeper meaning. Our Heavenly Father is like the father in the story. He is happy to forgive us when we repent and turn back to him. He forgives us completely. He "throws a party" when we return. There is even rejoicing in heaven (Luke 15:7).

The older brother is like the Jews who had been God's people all along. They felt they deserved God's love more than anyone else. Later on, in Acts, we find that many of them could never accept the fact that God welcomed the Gentiles to him and treated them like they had been his children all along. We can also be like the older brother when we think that God "owes us" special favour because we have been faithful to him and done the things he has asked. In truth, none of us could do anything to deserve God's favour. We all live only by his mercy.

Finally, it is important to note that the younger son went back to the father. This should encourage us to do our teaching job well. Even if the children we teach go astray later in life, we should teach them where "home" is and who their father is! Read Psalm 145:8.



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# Way to Introduce the Story:

For a few days before class save your kitchen scraps in a container such as an ice cream tub. Tell the children that you have something in the container that somebody in one of Jesus' parables really wanted to eat. Let them guess what it is. After they have guessed then open the container and let them see (and smell). "This is food like you would feed pigs! Why would someone want to eat this? Let's listen to the lesson and find out . . ."

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## The Story:

Jesus told a parable about a man with two sons. He told a parable because a parable is a simple story to help people understand something that is hard to understand - something that is important to understand.

In this parable there was a man who had two sons. The father knew that someday he would get very old and die. When he died, all of his money and his house and farm would be given to his two sons. The money and property that children receive from someone who dies is called an "inheritance".

The younger son was very impatient. He did not want to wait for his father to die to get his inheritance. He wanted his father's money soon so he could go and spend it. He asked his father to divide all of the money up and give him his part. The father wanted his son to be happy so that is what he did.

The younger son took all of the money and he left home. He went to live in another country that was very far from his home. He bought everything that he wanted. He spent money on parties. People liked him because he had lots of money.

The problem was that soon the money ran out. He had no more money for parties. People stopped liking him. They weren't real friends. They only liked him when he bought them things. Now they did not even want to be around him.

There was a famine in the country where the son lived. That meant that there was hardly any food to eat. The son got a job working for a man who owned some pigs. His job was to feed the pigs. The son was so hungry that he wished he could eat the food the pigs were eating.

Finally, the son began to think about what he had done. He knew that he had been wrong to ask his father for the inheritance. He wanted to go home but he thought his father would never forgive him. He couldn't even blame his father for that because he knew he didn't deserve to be forgiven.

The son went back home. He wanted to say he was sorry. He would not ask his father to let him live in the house. He would just ask if he could work for him like one of the other workers.

As the son got close to his father's house he noticed his father running to meet him. He could not believe it! His father was not even angry. Instead, he was so happy to see his son that he threw his arms around him and gave him a big hug and a kiss.

The son said he was sorry for what he had done. He told his father that he did not deserve to be his son. But the father loved him so much and was so happy to see him again that he wanted to celebrate. He was happy to forgive his son. He told the servants to cook a big dinner. He put a beautiful robe on his son. He put a ring on his finger and special sandals on his feet.

The father and the youngest son were very happy but the father's older son was jealous. He had never left home and spent all the money but nobody had a party for him.

But the father went to the older son and told him that he loved him too. He explained to the son why he was so

happy. "Don't you understand son? I am so happy because my son has come home. I thought he was dead but now I know he is alive! Please, let's all be happy together."

Jesus told this parable so that people would understand something about God. Sometimes we are like the young son in the parable. We do things that are wrong. We start to feel very bad. We might think that God would never forgive us.

But God does forgive us! When we tell God we are sorry, he is so happy. He is happy because he loves us and he always wants us to do the right thing.

Do you think God will love you and forgive you if you tell him you are sorry for something? Do you need to tell God you are sorry? If you do, let's have a prayer right now.

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## Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using a variety of methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection, student interaction and/or emotion.

[Click here for visual aids and story-telling methods.](#)

[Click here to download these illustrations and slideshow.](#) Be selective. Each teacher is unique so only use the illustrations that best relate to the way YOU are telling the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

## Review Questions:

1. In the Parable of the Lost Son (Prodigal Son), what did the man's youngest son ask his father to give him? His inheritance.
2. What did the youngest son do when he left home? He went to another country and spent all of his money.
3. After the son spent his inheritance, what did he do for a job? He fed pigs.
4. When the youngest son was feeding the pigs, what did he want to eat? Pig food.
5. In the Parable of the Lost Son, did the father forgive his son when he came back home? Yes

## Song Suggestions:

- [Yes! Jesus Loves Me](#)
- [I'm All Wrapped Up, Tied Up, Tangled Up Song](#)
- Refer to the [Song Page](#) on this website for more options.

## Learning Activities and Crafts:

[\(How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation\)](#)

*Activities:*

- Use puppets to let the three main characters (father and two sons) tell the story. One way to make puppets is to draw simple faces on the children's fingers (You could tie on a small piece of fabric for a headpiece).
- Give the children examples of times when someone might repent. Role play situations and let children play

the part of the one who forgives.

- Have a chain prayer and let each child ask God's forgiveness. Do this by joining hands and sitting in a circle. One child begins the prayer and then squeezes the hand next to him/her to signal the next person's turn to pray. The last person finishes the prayer.

Check the [Teaching Ideas](#) page on this website for ideas that are adaptable to any lesson.



[Click here for "Parable of a Prodigal Son" printables to print on A4 size paper](#)  
[Click here for "Parable of a Prodigal Son" to print on Letter size paper \(USA\)](#)  
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## Other Online Resources:

- [Colouring page and worksheets about the parable of the prodigal son \(Calvary Curriculum\)](#)
- [Colouring page and worksheets about parables in general \(Calvary Curriculum\)](#)
- [Worksheet showing the prodigal son's journey \(biblewise.com\)](#)
- [Anagrams/word scrambles \(dltk-bible.com\)](#)

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