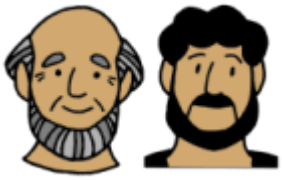
Parable of a Prodigal Son



Scripture Reference: Luke 15:11-32

Suggested Theme: God is our loving Father and we are His children. We can repent and know God will forgive us.

Memory Verse: “But God is being patient with you. He does not want anyone to be lost. He wants everyone to change his heart and life.” 2 Peter 3:9b, ICB

Story Overview:

Jesus told a parable about a man with two sons. The younger son convinced his father to give him his portion of his inheritance early. Upon receiving it, the son left his father and squandered all of the money by living a wild life. When the son came to his senses, he humbly returned to his father and told him he was sorry. His father was thrilled to forgive him and accept him back home.

The older son was jealous of the father’s acceptance because, unlike his younger brother, he had faithfully remained with his father all along. The father loved both sons but celebrated the lost son’s return.

Background Study:

Luke chapter fifteen 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 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 he would still receive income from the property until his death.

In the case of this parable, the father still had his estate intact. He had not divided it, and it seemed 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, left home, and found the worldly pleasures he sought. When the money was all spent, he found himself with no friends and nowhere to go. A famine forced him to see 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 seventeen 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 left home for the first time, he only thought about what he deserved. Now, he saw things from a 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 return to ask for what he deserved. He went back to ask his father’s

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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.

Jesus devoted the last part of this parable to the older brother's perspective, who had faithfully stayed with his father and had not squandered his inheritance. In the parable, the father actively seeks out this older son to explain why the brother's return was so significant.

The older brother was jealous and did not understand his father's complete forgiveness. How could his father forget it as if it had never happened? He had always tried to treat his father well and had watched while his younger brother squandered their father's money. Now, the father was giving all 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 return 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 have 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.

This parable is a vital reminder to us as teachers. Some of the children we teach may go on to live a life far away from what they know to be right. We should continue to pray that they will "come back home." We should make sure they know that "home" is where their father is! They are always welcome back home. Read Psalm 145:8.

Way to Introduce the Story:

Save your kitchen scraps in a well-covered container for a few days before you meet. When the group meets, tell the children you have something in the container that somebody in one of Jesus' parables wanted to eat. Let them guess what it is. After they have guessed, open the container and let them see (and smell) the disgusting scraps. "This is food like you would feed pigs! Why would someone want to eat this? Let's listen to the lesson and find out . . ."

The Story:

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

In this parable, a man had two sons. The father knew that someday he would get very old and die. When he died, all his money, 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 the money and

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give him his part. The father did as his son asked. He divided the money and gave half to his youngest son.

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

The problem was that soon, the money ran out. He had no more money for parties, and his friends stopped liking him. It turns out that they weren't real friends after all. They only liked him when he bought them things. They did not want to be around him now that he had no money.

Soon, the younger son ran out of food and became very hungry. He had to think of a way to earn money, or he would starve!

The situation became even more serious because there was a famine in the country where the son lived. That meant that there was hardly any food for anyone to eat. Many other people were hungry, too.

A farmer who owned pigs needed a helper, so the son began to work for the farmer. His job was to feed the pigs. The son was so hungry that even the pig food started to look good to him.

Finally, the son began to think about his bad choices. He thought about his father and brother. At home, people loved him. At home, there was plenty of food.

The son began to realise that he had made a terrible mistake. He never should have asked his father to give him the money early. He should have been patient. If only he could go back in time and change what he'd done.

"But it is too late now," he thought. "I have done many bad things. I am not good enough to be a son now. My father would never forgive me and take me back."

But the son had another idea. His father had many workers and many jobs to do. They worked hard, but at least they had enough food. If he spoke to his father, and admitted he had sinned and made a mistake, then maybe his father would allow him to be one of the workers. He could take care of the animals and work hard.

So, the son decided to return home.

The son thought the father would be angry, but as he got closer to his old home, he was shocked to see his father running to meet him.

When the father saw his son coming, he was filled with love for him. He was so happy to see his son that he threw his arms around him and gave him a big hug and a kiss. "My son has returned to me!" his father cried.

The son said, "I am sorry, but I have done terrible things. I do not deserve to be your son. I can just be one of your workers."

But the father did not treat him like a servant at all. He welcomed him home as 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.

"I thought my son was dead, and I would never see him again. But my son has come back to me!" the father said. "He was lost, but now he is found."

The father had a special meal prepared, and everyone in the household celebrated.
Almost everyone, that is. When the older son saw everyone celebrating, he became jealous and very unhappy. "This is not fair," he thought. "I have been the good son all along, but I am not getting the attention. I never left home and spent all the money, but nobody is having a party for me."

But the father went to the older son and told him he loved him too. He explained to the son why he was so happy. "Don't you understand, son? I am so happy because I thought my son was dead, but now I know he

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is alive!”

“He came back to me. He was lost, but now he is found!” he continued, “Please, let’s celebrate 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 wrong things. 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 forgives us and shows us His love. He loves us no matter what and will always be our loving Father. He is happy when His children repent and love Him again.

Do you think God will love 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 various 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 or other group participation.

Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell 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.

Click here for visual aids and more storytelling methods.

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Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story. Reflection questions encourage them to internalise the meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child’s spiritual development and help them connect to God. Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.

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Review:

- In the Parable of the Lost Son, what did the youngest son ask his father to give him? (His inheritance)
- What did the youngest son do when he left home? (He went to another country and spent all of his money)
- After the son spent his inheritance, what did he do for a job? (He fed pigs)
- What did the youngest son want to eat when he was feeding the pigs? (Pig food)
- In the Parable of the Lost Son, what did the father do when the son came home? (He ran to meet him, gave him a hug, and had a celebration for his return)
- Did the father forgive his son when he came back home? (Yes)
- How did the older brother feel about the father having a celebration for the younger son? (Unhappy, jealous)
- Who is like God in the parable? (The father)
- What does this parable show us about God (the father)?

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- What does this parable show us about people?

Reflection:

- What do you think the son looked or smelled like when he was working with the pigs?
- What do you think the father's celebration for the son's return was like? What did it sound, smell or look like?
- What surprised you in this story?
- Why do you think the son wanted to leave the father?
- Are you most like the younger brother, the older brother, or the father? Why?
- We are God's children, and God loves us just like how the father loved his sons. Do you know that God loves you?
- Where is our spiritual home? (Anywhere where Jesus is)
- Some things seem more fun or better than God and His love, just like how the son thought money was better than being with His father and having his father's love. Have you ever realized God's love was better than something else you cared about?
- Sometimes it's hard for us to feel God's love. Do you feel like the son when he was lost, and far away from his father's love, or like the son when he was home and his father embraced him and loved him? Do you feel like you are far away from God or close to Him?
- What does God say about you, even when you sin or make mistakes? (Things like I love you, you are my child, I care for you, I made you, you are precious to me, etc.)
- Is there anything you want to repent of and ask God to forgive you?

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a lifelong friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. A variety of prayer methods are found here.

Song Suggestions:

- Yes! Jesus Loves Me
- I'm All Wrapped Up, Tied Up, Tangled Up Song
- He's Still Working on Me Song
- Goodbye World Song
- Refer to the Song Page on this website for more song options.

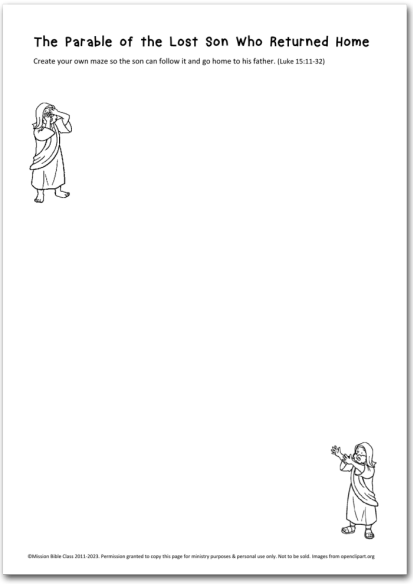
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Activities and Crafts:

- How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation.
- Visit the activities and songs pages for additional activities and crafts.

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Activities:



- Guide children in drawing their own maze that leads from the son to the father in the parable. This can be done on a blank paper or one the downloadable puzzle page. This could be turned into an outside activity by drawing the maze in sand or dirt.

- Give the children examples of times when someone might repent. Role-play situations and let children play the part of the one who forgives.
- 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).
- To understand the son's journey home to his father, make an obstacle course and take turns following the course "home."
- 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.

Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable "God's Story" printable reflection page. Free printables for this story.

Crafts:

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Print and use these free bookmarks, trading cards or timelines. Free printables for this story.

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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)
- Anagrams/word scrambles (dltk-bible.com)

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