

# The Prodigal Son

(Luke 15:11-32)

## Pre-Session Warm Up

[Teacher, perform the following skit with a puppet or in a role-play:]

*"I'm going to run away from home! I hate living here. I'm always getting bossed around. My mom is always making me clean my room, do my homework, and wash the dishes. Every day it's the same old routine. I have to get up at 7 a.m., go to bed at a 9 p.m. even when I'm not even tired — I wish I could do the things I want to, when I want to do them!"*

Have you ever felt like running away because you were tired of living at home? Perhaps you've lain in your bed at night thinking of what it would be like living somewhere else. It's very easy to become dissatisfied with what you have when you constantly think about the things you don't have rather than remembering all the good things you do have.

Perhaps that's what happened to the guy in a story Jesus told. Things looked a lot better anywhere else.

## Opening Prayer

Father, this morning we will again learn one of Jesus' parables. I pray that You will give us the spiritual understanding that we need to see beneath the surface of this story so that we might understand the deeper spiritual truths that You want us to learn about Your kingdom. Open the eyes and ears of our heart, I pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.

## Memory Verse

*Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? (Romans 2:4)*

## Lesson

The Pharisees and scribes were the arrogant and self-righteous religious leaders of Jesus' day. They thought it was terrible that Jesus showed kindness toward sinners. They thought they were better than most people because they strictly kept the *Ten Commandments* and all the rest of the rules. They thought that God shouldn't forgive people that they considered horrible sinners. It made them angry and resentful to hear Jesus teach that God wanted sinners to come to Heaven. So, Jesus confronted them with a parable to show them God's love for the lost sinner.

Remember a parable is a true-to-life story that teaches a truth about God's kingdom.

Luke 15:11-12

*To illustrate the point further, Jesus told them this story: "A man had two sons. (12) The younger son told his father, 'I want my share of your estate now before you die.' So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons.*

The oldest son always inherited two portions of the father's estate while the other brothers got only a single portion. Usually the sons would not have received their father's inheritance until after the father died.

How good this father was to his younger son! He was willing to give his hard-earned savings to his son even though the son didn't deserve to have it until after his father's death.

In a far greater way than you could ever imagine, God loves you and me. He is very good to us and has given us many things to enjoy! Can you think of some of the things God has given you? (He's given us good health, a loving mother and father, a warm bed, enough food to eat, and so on.)

[Teacher, lead the children into a discussion.]

The Bible says that God is "*abounding [overflowing] in goodness*" (Exodus 34:6). As our Creator, God has filled the earth with His goodness (Psalm 33:5).

Why is He so good to you? Is it because you deserve it or because you have earned it in some special way? No, God loves you because that is just the way He is. "*God is love*" (1 John 4:8), and you are His treasured creation.

The love of the father in our story is a picture of God's love for us: He willingly lets us enjoy all that belongs to Him. When the younger son asked for his portion early, it showed that he was self-centered and had no respect for his father.

Luke 15:13

*A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and moved to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money in wild living.*

Some versions of the Bible say that this son *wasted his possessions with prodigal living* (NKJ), that's why we call this the Parable of the Prodigal Son. The word *prodigal* means wasteful. Someone who lives a prodigal life is one who spends or gives lavishly and foolishly.

The son had disregarded his father's love and care and decided to go his own way. How foolish! God's Word says that you and I are much like that son. God has been very good to us: He has provided for our needs and given us many things to enjoy. Yet we, too, go our own way (Isaiah 53:6) and waste what the Father has given us.

We often do things that displease God. Can you think of ways we displease God? (We speak rudely to our brothers & sisters, talk back to our mothers, get cocky at school with our teachers, and so on.) [Teacher, lead the children into a discussion.] You do those things because you were born with a sinful heart that is constantly persuading you to do wrong despite God's goodness to you.

Your sin keeps you far away from God, and eventually it will lead you to the horrible consequence of being separated from Him forever. Your only hope is to believe on the Lord Jesus as your Savior from sin.

But often you and I are much like this son — foolishly going our own way, disregarding God's goodness and love. Soon the son would have to suffer the consequences of following his own sinful heart.

Luke 15:14-15

*About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve. (15) He persuaded a local farmer to hire him, and the man sent him into his fields to feed the pigs.*

According to the law God gave to Moses, pigs were unclean animals and the people were forbidden to eat pork (Leviticus 11:7,8). Jews would not even touch pigs. For a Jew to stoop to feeding pigs was a great humiliation.

Luke 15:16

*The young man became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him. But no one gave him anything.*

He was starving and would have eaten the pig food if it had been offered to him. But, for this young man to eat food that the pigs had touched was the lowest possible thing the listeners of this story could imagine. The prodigal son had truly sunk to the depths of society.

Luke 15:17

*When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, 'At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger!'*

The younger son, like many who are rebellious and immature, wanted to be free to live as he pleased, and he had to hit bottom before he came to his senses. It often takes great sorrow and tragedy to cause people to look to the only One who can help them.

Luke 15:18-19

*I will go home to my father and say, "Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, (19) and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant."*

The son realized his sin against God and his father. Recognizing that you have sinned is the first step towards making peace with God. Jesus was trying telling this story to the Pharisees and was hoping they would see that there was hope for them if they would only grieve and agonize over their sins like the guy in this story.

Luke 15:20

*So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him.*

In this story, the father watched and waited. He was ready to greet his son if he returned. In the same way, God's love is constant and patient and welcoming. He will not force us to come to Him. God waits patiently for us to turn from our sins, come to Him, and ask Him for forgiveness.

Luke 15:21-24

*His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.' (22) "But his father said to the servants, 'Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. (23) And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast, (24) for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.' So the party began.*

The son had left out of selfishness, just like we do when we willfully disobey God. But, God's great love reaches out and finds us sinners no matter why or how we got lost.

Luke 15:25

*Meanwhile, the older son was in the fields working. When he returned home, he heard music and dancing in the house,*

The older brother represents the Pharisees who were listening to Jesus tell this story. They were so busy finding fault with Jesus' allowing "undeserving sinners" to be part of His kingdom, they failed to enjoy their own rich inheritance.

It was hard for the older brother to accept his younger brother when he returned, and it is just as difficult for us to accept it when a notoriously sinful person comes to Christ. Our tendency is to hold that person in suspicion. Instead, we should rejoice like the angels in Heaven when a unbeliever repents and turns to God. Like the Father, we should accept repentant sinners wholeheartedly and give them the support and encouragement that they need to grow in Christ.

Luke 15:26-28

*and he asked one of the servants what was going on. (27) 'Your brother is back,' he was told, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf. We are celebrating because of his safe return.' (28) "The older brother was angry and wouldn't go in. His father came out and begged him,*

The older brother's attitude was just as self-righteous as the attitudes of the Pharisees' to whom Jesus was telling this story.

Luke 15:29-30

*but he replied, 'All these years I've slaved for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends. (30) Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the fattened calf!'*

In the story of the prodigal son, the father's response is contrasted with the older brother's. The father forgave because he was filled with love. The older brother refused to forgive because he was bitter about the injustice of it all. His resentment rendered him just as lost to the father's love as the younger brother had been.

Don't let anything keep you from forgiving others.

Luke 15:31

*His father said to him, 'Look, dear son, you have always stayed by me, and everything I have is yours.*

The father encouraged him to rejoice on behalf of his younger brother. He said, "everything I have is yours." The father wasn't going to take

the older son's inheritance away from him. He still had the double portion that was his by birth right, even though the younger son had already spent his single portion. The father was just glad the son had come home where he belonged.

Luke 15:32

*We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!"*

In Jesus' story, the older brother represented the Pharisees, who were angry and resentful that sinners were being welcomed into God's kingdom. After all, the Pharisees must have thought, "*We have done so much for God*".

How easy it is for us to resent God's gracious forgiveness of others whom we consider to be far worse sinners than ourselves. But when our self-righteousness gets in the way of rejoicing when others come to Jesus, we are no better than the Pharisees.

Jesus does not tell us how this older brother responded after his father's appeal. It was up to the Pharisees to finish the story by making a decision for or against God's love in Christ.

God is longing to forgive your sins and give you everlasting life.

## Closing Prayer

Father, I know that You are longing to forgive us our sins and to give us everlasting life. I pray that we would be like the younger son, and come to You with repentant hearts. Help us not to be resentful of others that receive Your love and forgiveness. We want to rejoice with You and the angels when the lost come into Your kingdom. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

## Learning Activities

### Craft Corner

### Game Center

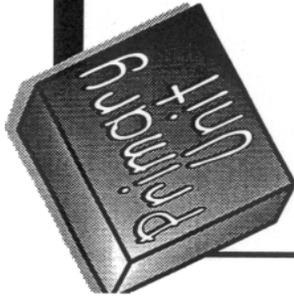
Have the children work on *The Lost Son* worksheet or send it home as a "take home" paper.

Or, use the following questions in another game of your choice:

### Review questions:

1. Who were the Pharisees and the scribes? (The arrogant and self-righteous religious leaders of Jesus' day)
2. Why did they think it was terrible that Jesus showed kindness towards sinners? (They thought they were better than most people.)
3. This is the Parable of the Prodigal Son. What does the word *prodigal* mean? (The word *prodigal* means wasteful. Someone who lives a prodigal life is one who spends or gives lavishly and foolishly.)
4. Can you tell me in your own words the Parable of the Prodigal Son?
5. Who does the father represent? (God, the Father)
6. Who does the younger son represent? (Us)
7. The son disregarded his father's love and care, decided to go his own way. What is that a picture of? (We, too, go our own way and waste what the Father has given us.)

8. What is the love of the father in the parable a picture of? (God's love for us. He willing lets us enjoy all that belongs to Him.)
9. What are some ways we displease God? (Speak rudely to our brothers and sisters, talk back to our mothers, get cocky at school with our teachers, etc.)
10. Why do you do things that displease God? (We were born with a sinful heart that is constantly persuading us to do wrong despite God's goodness to us.)
11. Why is feeding pigs the lowest possible thing for the listeners of this story to imagine? (According to the law God gave to Moses, pigs were unclean animals and the people were forbidden to eat pork.)
12. What did the prodigal son finally realize once he came to his senses? (He realized his sin against God and his father.)
13. Why did Jesus tell this story to the Pharisees and scribes? (He wanted them to realize that they were sinners and needed to ask the Father for forgiveness.)
14. Where was the father when the son finally came home? (He was watching and waiting for him and ready to greet him.)
15. Tell me about the older brother? Who did he represent in this story? (The arrogant and self-righteous Pharisees and scribes who were listening to Jesus tell this story.)
16. Why was the older brother so full of hate and bitterness and resentment? (His father was throwing a "welcome home" party for his little brother and he didn't think it was fair. He had stayed home and done all the right things—worked hard for his father, never did any prodigal living like his younger brother had.)
17. Why did the father throw that party for the younger son? (Because he had been lost, but now he was back home where he ought to be)
18. Have you ever been resentful when someone else got something you felt you deserved?



# The Lost Son

Read Luke 15:11–32. Then complete the sentences or mark the statements true or false.

1. There was a man with two sons. The \_\_\_\_\_. (a) younger (b) older son asked for his inheritance.
2. The son spent the inheritance very \_\_\_\_\_. (a) wisely (b) foolishly
3. The son got a job feeding \_\_\_\_\_. (a) horses (b) cows (c) pigs
4. **True or False** It was a very good job and the son had a lot to eat.
5. The son finally came to his senses and realized that his father's \_\_\_\_\_. (a) hired (b) top men had more food than he did.
6. **True or False** The son decided he would say to his father, "I have sinned against you and I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men."
7. When his father saw his son from far away, he \_\_\_\_\_. (a) walked slowly (b) ran to him and \_\_\_\_\_. (a) yelled at (b) kissed him.
8. His father did not give him \_\_\_\_\_. (a) a robe (b) a ring (c) sandals (d) a bag of money.
9. The older son was very \_\_\_\_\_. (a) angry (b) happy that his father was giving his brother a celebration.
10. **True or False** The father said to the older boy, "My son, you are always with me and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again."

In this parable "the father" represents God. What are some of the qualities of God shown by this parable? Unscramble the words.

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veol \_\_\_\_\_

gfroineessv \_\_\_\_\_

