

The Prodigal Son

Luke 15:11-32

MEMORY VERSE

LUKE 15:24

“For this my son was dead and is alive again; He was lost and is found.”

WHAT YOU WILL NEED:

Two signs: one that says SIN and another that says REPENTANCE.

Two containers, one with some gross leftovers, and the other with as many small prizes (pencils, erasers, stickers, etc.) as the number of children in your class.

Masking tape.

ATTENTION GRABBER!

The Repentance Game

Tape two cards on opposite walls of your classroom. Write SIN on one and REPENTANCE on the other. Tell your class that you are going to read several phrases. Instruct them to face the sign that best describes the attitude of the phrase.

Read the following:

- 1) Give me that toy!
- 2) Take off that hat, it's mine!
- 3) So what if your parents said no, it's only for a minute!
- 4) I did the wrong thing, please forgive me.
- 5) How does God know what's best for me?
- 6) May I please have another chance?
- 7) But I can't do the dishes; I'll miss my favorite show!
- 8) Can I please repay you?
- 9) I hope I never hurt your feelings again, I'm sorry.

Explain to your class that repentance is turning away from our sin. Today we will hear a story about sin and repentance and how God responds to our repentance.

LESSON TIME!

Jesus tells a wonderful parable in today's Bible reading. Who remembers what a parable means? It means, "to throw down alongside." Jesus is using a story about real life to explain a spiritual reality. He is throwing down a spiritual truth alongside a human story. This parable is often called the Prodigal Son or "Parable of the Lost Son," but a better title would be the "Parable of the Loving Father." It shows that **God is a loving Father**.

Note to the Teacher: Using a chalk or dry erase board draw a vertical line down the center, writing "God, Our Father" on one side and "Father of the Prodigal Son" on the other side. As you go through the lesson, have the children list the characteristics of the prodigal son's father. Then rewrite them under the "God, our Father" heading, explaining to the class that the father in today's lesson is a picture or type of our Heavenly Father, demonstrating his love and forgiveness.

Jesus told this parable to give His disciples and us a picture of God the Father's heart. Listen closely and hear about how much God loves us. **God is a loving Father**.

LUKE 15:11-13

Then He said: "A certain man had two sons.

"And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.' So he divided to them his livelihood.

"And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living.

Right from the start, this parable shows us that God does not focus on the son's sin. Instead He focuses on the son. In verse 11, Jesus is acknowledging that the father is the owner and primary source of all things. The son says two little words that really give away where his heart is. Does anyone see two words in verse 12 that show the son's heart?

He says, "Give me." This tells us that he made his decision out of his own selfish heart. "Give me" is what this son chose to live by. He gets as far as he can from the influence of his father by saying, "I want what you can give me, but I don't want you. I want your presents, but I don't want your presence." People often have that attitude toward God. "I want God's blessing, but I don't want God's presence in my life."

It goes on to tell us that the son wanted all the inheritance his father had for him. So the father gave him his request, and as soon as he received his inheritance, he left the father and wasted his inheritance on prodigal or wasteful living. "Wasted" is a sad word. A wasted hour or wasted day or wasted life is a tragedy. We were created to serve and worship God. When we choose to ignore this calling by denying Jesus, we choose to throw our lives away because the end will leave us forever separated from God. When we live only for ourselves, we are wasting time and wasting our lives away.

LUKE 15:14-16

"But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want.

"Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.

"And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything.

He spent every last penny and ended up with nothing to show for it. Even his so-called "friends" left him when the money ran out. They liked him when he had money to spend on them, but when the money disappeared, they did too. It says he began to be in want. A severe famine came. What is a famine? (Not enough food to feed the people.) The only job he could get was a job feeding pigs. He was so hungry and poor that he would have gladly eaten the pig's food.

This is what happens when we give our whole life over to serving ourselves. We will end up missing out on so much. We lose the blessing of our Heavenly Father. We waste our lives, and we become trapped and enslaved to our own sin. The friends that we think we have end up leaving because they are not really friends to begin with. When we serve ourselves or serve sin, our lives will only end in tragedy. It is never God's plan for us that we end up in that condition, but there was hope for the prodigal son, as we will see as we continue. **God is a loving Father.**

Pig Slop

Save some leftovers from home that are not too gross in a container and bring them to class. In a matching container put a small prize like a pencil, eraser or stickers, etc.

One by one, let each child look into each container. Have them be quiet with any comments about their contents.

When each child has seen the contents of both containers, ask for a vote of which they would like to have. Allow each child to pick out a small prize. Reaffirm the point that if the prodigal son stayed with his father and made the right choice, He would not have had to be eating food that was fit for the animals.

No one even noticed or cared about this prodigal son. No one offered to feed him or help him. He was all alone. He had once been rich, but now he was poor. He could have stayed in his father's presence and enjoyed him and all that he had, but he had chosen to go his own way and live for himself. That will always leave us wanting.

We can learn something from this story. The path of obedience and fellowship with the Lord is always the path of blessing. Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments". If we decide to walk in that path, especially as children, God promises that everything will work out for good, even if it does not seem good at the time (Romans 8:28). But if we choose to take another path and disobey God, we do not have the promise from God.

LUKE 15:17-19

"But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!

'I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you,

"and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.'"

These are wonderful verses! We see the heart of the son change. The Bible says that he "came to himself." It was kind of like he woke up and came to his senses. He realized something very

important: he was guilty of sinning against his father. It is the same realization we all should come to when our hearts cry out "God, I'm guilty. Please forgive me". Just like the son, we are unworthy of God's forgiveness, but by grace, He promises to forgive us if we come to Him.

We see the son start to choose the right thing in verse 18. He does three things: "arise," "go" and "say." These words show us his repentance. He stands up, leaves for home, and hopes his father will let him stay. That is what repentance is for us too. It is when we agree with God about our sin and ourselves. It is saying "I was wrong and You are right, Lord."

Another way of looking at repentance is that it is a change of direction. It is when we have a change of mind and a change of heart about sin. Then that change in our heart produces a change in our actions. It is like going in a certain direction, our own way, realizing it, and making a U-turn never to go that old direction again.

Then the son says, "Make me." Those are beautiful words! They are words that show that his cry has changed from "give me" to "make me." He is showing his desire to come under the authority of his father and leave self behind. Jesus wants us to look at our own hearts and ask, "Am I saying, 'give me' to God, or is my response 'make me?'" "Give me" shows we only want to live for self, and we will end up being in want. Our prayer can be like the prodigal son's, "Lord I want you to make me, to mold me." That is a beautiful prayer. Have you prayed that?

LUKE 15:20-24

"And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.

"And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

"But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet.

'And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry;

'for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry.

What an incredible passage of scripture! Remember that the heart of this earthly father is a picture for us of the heart of our Heavenly Father, God. **God is a loving Father.**

This shows God's response to true repentance. God always receives our repentance. **God is a loving Father.** This is the only place in Scripture we see God run. When we truly repent and turn our hearts toward God and say, "make me into what you want me to be." It is when we leave the "give me's" behind, confessing our sin (like the son in verse 21), that God receives us as Jesus pictures for us here in verse 20.

What does it say the father did? The father had lovingly and longingly been waiting for his son. He had been watching for him all this time. God waits and watches for us while we are separated from Him. Remember it is only our sin that keeps us from Him. When we come to Him in true repentance, He sees us and has compassion on us (that means His heart goes out and embraces us), and He runs to us with hugs and kisses. What great love! No matter what our sin has been, when we truly repent, God our Father receives us this loving way. He will completely forgive us and remember our sins no more. **God is a loving Father.**

What a wonderful Father we have. He does not condemn us or tell us how wrong we have been. He restores us as His children. Verse 24 says, "...for this is my son." What priceless words for a father to say to a child! He is going to celebrate because this is his son, restored to him! Our Heavenly Father loves us very much and wants us to come to Him no matter what we may have done. It is this great love that God has towards us that makes us desire to serve Him with all of our hearts. **God is a loving Father.**

LUKE 15:25-32

"Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing.

"So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant.

"And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.'

"But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him.

"So he answered and said to his father, 'Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends.

'But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.'

"And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours.

'It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.'"

Here we see the other brother. This can be a picture of some of us too. He seems outwardly opposite from the brother who left, yet just like his brother, he has a wasted life because of self-righteousness and pride. He wanted his brother to be reminded of his sin; he did not think there should be a celebration. He did not want grace extended to his brother. He thought his brother should be punished. This brother had stayed and been committed to his father's house, but he was a million miles away from his father's heart.

Verse 28 tells us this older brother exploded in anger. The right response would have been for him to join in the celebration of his brother's return. Instead he isolates himself in pride and creates a scene to disrupt the celebration. He was saying, "It doesn't seem to pay to do right." But here we see God's heart again. It says the father came out and pleaded with him, calling him son and reminding him that he was always with him and all that the father had was this son's.

What a loving heart God has to all kinds of prodigals. **God is a loving Father.** He lets us know that the blessing of obedience is having the Father's presence in our lives. There is no greater blessing than living in fellowship with our loving Father. Who would want to trade that for self and sin? Sometimes we do choose our own way, but when we truly turn back to the Father and say, "I have sinned. You are right," what will be His response to us? Remember **God is a loving Father.**

Mean or Loving?

Tape two square areas in your classroom. Label one “mean” and the other “loving.” Have the children stand in the appropriate square in response to several phrases you read to them.

Read the following:

- 1) A girl asked her father for a lunch, and as a joke, he gave her a paper bag with a snake in it.
- 2) A boy fell at school and got his clothes muddy; so his Mom brought him some clean clothes.
- 3) A girl broke her mother’s favorite bowl by accident and her mother said, “It’s OK honey, we all make mistakes.”
- 4) A boy wanted to go swimming without supervision and his Dad said, “No.”
- 5) A mommy let her baby play with dangerous toys because he wanted to.

Explain that a loving parent does not always give us what we want, but they always look out for our best interest.

PRAYER

Lead the children in a prayer of commitment to fellowship with our loving Heavenly Father. If any children have not responded to the gospel by receiving Jesus as Savior and Lord, give them an opportunity to do so.