

STORY

The Prodigal Son – Luke 15:11-32

TEACHER PRAYER

Dear Lord Jesus, You came to earth to save sinners, of which I am the chief. In this lesson You teach me of your great love for me in forgiving all of my sins. I know that all of my sins – those that I regard as small and those that I regard as great – all are forgiven because of what You have done. Please give me the wisdom and ability to teach this truth to my students, that they may always turn to You and know Your loving forgiveness, no matter what sin they have committed. Amen.

VOCABULARY

Prodigal – recklessly wasteful. A "prodigal" is one who spends lavishly and foolishly.

Famine – a time when there is not enough food to eat.

Fatted calf – a calf kept by itself, fed well, and preserved for special occasions.

OUTER AIM

Jesus tells the parable of a foolish son who was lost and then found.

INNER AIM

God shows His love for sinners by forgiving our sins.

BACKGROUND

In Chapter 15 of Luke's Gospel, Jesus emphasizes the fact that God continues to love and seek after those who wander from the fold. This entire chapter demonstrates the depths of God's love and patience with sinful mankind. The Parable of the Prodigal Son was directed toward the Pharisees and scribes, who not only refused to attempt to regain those who had strayed from the fold of Israel, they would not even be seen with them. Their condemnation of anyone who would so associate himself is what prompted Jesus to speak the words of our parable. Since this is a parable, we are again to look for one central truth. This parable stresses the unconditional character of God's love and forgiveness.

v.11-12

- ▶ Note the love (and lack of selfishness) demonstrated by the "Father."
- ▶ By definition an inheritance belongs to an heir only after the benefactor dies.
- ▶ The young son had no claim to "his portion" while the father was still alive; still the father gives it freely.
- ▶ So we read that "he divided to them *his* livelihood."

v. 13

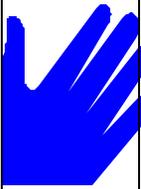
- ▶ The young son falls almost immediately into the same trap that snares so many young people who are given great wealth at a young age.
- ▶ Work is a blessing for many reasons. It occupies our time and energy in worthwhile endeavors, and it teaches us the value of what we receive.
- ▶ Emphasize to the student that having a great deal of money to spend and time to spend it – especially at a young age – may seem like something to be desired. It is in fact, a great temptation that almost no one can master.

v. 14-16

- ▶ Mercifully the money ran out.
- ▶ The young man no doubt regarded this inevitable consequence of his lavish lifestyle as a curse. It was in fact a great blessing from his God.
- ▶ It was not until the god, "money," was gone that the man "came to himself."

v. 17-19

- ▶ The son's contrition here is real. He "came to himself" in that he realized that he had sinned



greatly in what he had done.

- ▶ He did not return to his father expecting anything but to work as one of his servants.
- ▶ He had forfeited his right to be called a son.
- ▶ He recognized that his father was under no obligation to give him anything.

v. 20-24

- ▶ The key to this parable lies in these verses. The father owed the son nothing, but forgave him freely and gladly reinstated him as a son.
- ▶ Note that the father reinstated the son before the son's confession.
- ▶ The son did not earn his father's forgiveness. It was freely given.
- ▶ The robe was a symbol of authority, proof that the son was again regarded as a son.
- ▶ The ring signifies the complete nature of the father's forgiveness. Many regard it as the ancient equivalent of a credit card. A father who did not fully forgive would never have entrusted his son with more "buying power."
- ▶ The sandals also indicated reinstatement, since servants usually went barefoot.
- ▶ The joy was based not so much on proximity as it was on condition; that is, they rejoiced not so much that the son was living at home again, but that he had been brought back to life from spiritual death.

v. 25-32

- ▶ The terrible condition of the youngest son's heart was obvious when he was living a wild, extravagant life of sin.
- ▶ The state of the older son's heart, though concealed, was just as bad.
- ▶ The older brother is a picture of the Scribes and Pharisees, to whom this parable was addressed.
- ▶ Note how the older brother refused to go in and rejoice that his brother had come to his senses and returned.
- ▶ He would not even acknowledge him as a brother, but referred to him as "this son of yours."
- ▶ The father demonstrates his love for both sons, for God is not willing that any should perish.

STUDENT PRAYER

Dear Jesus, in this parable You have shown me how much I am loved by my Father in heaven. I did not deserve His love, yet He gave it freely because of Your death on the cross. Help me to remember at all times that no matter what I have done wrong, God the Father has freely forgiven me all my sins. Please give me now a spirit that is not jealous of this love and forgiveness, but one that makes me eager to share it with my neighbors, friends, and family. In Jesus' name I ask this. Amen.

PRESENTATION

The account is short enough to read to the students, or to be read by them. If you are able, consider telling the story in your own words, using the written account as your guide.

APPLICATIONS

1. God our heavenly Father loves all sinners like the father in our parable loved his sons. We have many faults, God loves us in spite of them – unconditionally. Guide the student to see himself in the prodigal son, for we too have been wasteful and lazy. We too have insisted on going our own way rather than God's way.
2. Work is a blessing. This is sometimes a difficult concept for children to understand, yet it would be well worth our time to have the children try to list some of these blessings on their own. Illustrate their correct ideas with examples from the story. (Greed of the young son, lack of appreciation for the value of money, laziness, seeking after worldly pleasures to the harm of his soul, too much free time led to sin, etc.)

3. Work at making the student realize the terrible nature of the sins of the prodigal son. God does not categorize sins as to "bad" and "not so bad," but we do. Help the child to see that the sins of the young son are among those we would categorize as very bad, demonstrating how God freely forgave them. We want our students to understand that our merciful God does not stop loving and forgiving us when we fall into even the most shameful sins.
4. This is an excellent opportunity to teach the children about true repentance. True repentance is not feeling sorry because you got caught. It is not even simply feeling sorry that you did something wrong. Godly repentance means that we are not only sorry for what we have done, it also includes believing that God the Father has forgiven our sin for Jesus' sake. A truly repentant sinner realizes that he cannot "make it up to God." God does not forgive us *because* we are sorry. He forgives us because of what Jesus has done for us.
5. Show the child what terrible things sin can do to us. What happens when we lie? Hurt someone? Curse someone? How do we feel? How do others feel about us?

PASSAGES

These passages can be assigned as memory work or simply discussed in class as to how they fit the lesson.

Lower

Psalms 103:12 - As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.

1 John 4:19 - We love Him because He first loved us.

John 15:9 - "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love."

Middle any of the above and...

Luke 15:7 - "I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.

1 Timothy 2:3b-4 - God our Savior... desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

1 John 1:9 - If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Upper any of the above and...

1 John 3:1 - Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.

Psalms 103:2-5 - Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, Who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

Ephesians 2:4-5 - But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).

HYMN CHOICES

"Redeemed, Restored, Forgiven" (TLH 32:1-2)

"From Depths of Woe I Cry to Thee" (TLH 329:1-3)

"O Thou that Hear'st when Sinners Cry" (TLH 325:1-4)

"The Man Is Ever Blessed" (TLH 414:1-3)