

General Church Education



The Prodigal Son

Luke 15:11-32

Lesson 22

Jacob's Ladder Religion Lessons

Level 2: The Lord Is Our Shepherd

For ages 7-8 years

The Prodigal Son

Luke 15:11-32

Ideas for Parents & Teachers

This parable contains a powerful lesson about the Lord's love and forgiveness. Sometimes we waste the spiritual riches we have been given. We are prodigal (wasteful) when we do not live the life the Lord commands but use our talents to gratify selfish desires. If we go far enough on this path, we will find ourselves starving for real goodness and happiness.

True repentance in our spirit and change in our thoughts and actions bring us back to the Lord and our true home. The Lord forgives us and welcomes us always with tenderness and rejoicing. The parable shows how this can happen. Giving the prodigal son the "best robe" represents delightful, heavenly thoughts. The "fatted calf" represents a deep desire for heavenly life. The celebration represents the wonderful pleasures of heavenly life. Although in many ways the older son lived the better life, he is a vivid picture of self-righteousness and hardness of heart. Everyone has evil tendencies, and we need to look at our inner selves to root them out and build a heavenly character within. Children can be taught to begin to recognize and change bad habits, and to avoid self-righteous ways.

Ideas for Children

- Parables are stories with a hidden message. The Lord uses parables to lead people to understand the truth and how it applies to them.
- The Lord is always ready to forgive and we need to forgive as well.
- We can feel happy when we make good choices, but we shouldn't feel better than others.

From the Writings

By the prodigal son are meant those who are prodigal of spiritual riches, which are knowledges of truth and good. Penitence of heart is meant by his return to his father, and his confession that he was not worthy to be called his son. *Apocalypse Explained* 279

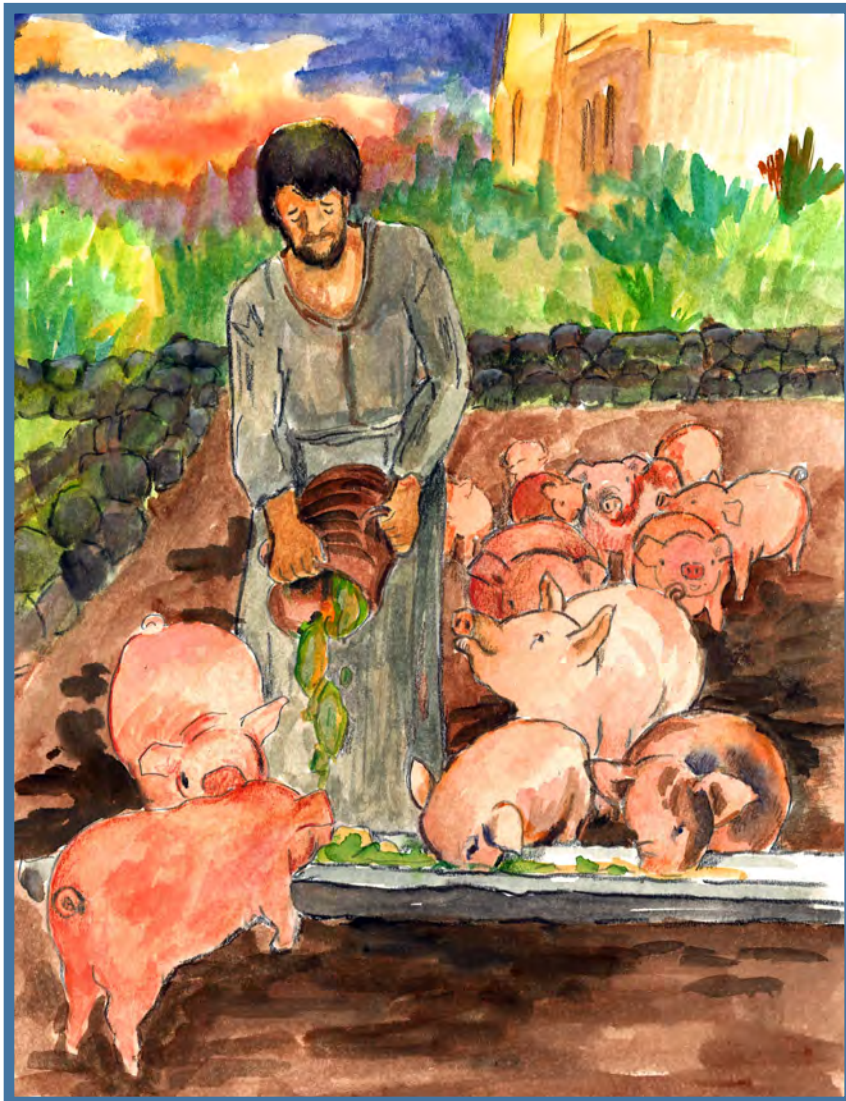
Anyone who wishes to be saved must confess his sins before God and repent. Confessing one's sins is recognizing evils in oneself, acknowledging them, considering oneself guilty and condemning oneself on account of them. Repentance is to stop doing them, and to lead a new life in accordance with the commandments of charity and faith. People who live lives of charity and faith repent every day, reflect on the evils in themselves, acknowledge them, try to avoid them, and beg the Lord for help. A person's sins are continually being forgiven by the Lord, for He is absolute mercy. But sins cling to the person, however much he thinks they are forgiven. The only way to have them taken away is to live in accordance with the commandments of true faith. The more a person lives thus, the more his sins are taken away, and the further they are taken away, the more they are forgiven. See *New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine* 159-165

The Prodigal Son

A Man with Two Sons

One of the times when people came to the Lord to learn from Him, He told a story about a certain man who had two sons. One day the younger son asked his father to give him his inheritance, that is, the money he intended to give the son when he died. So the father divided up the things that belonged to him and gave the younger son his share. It wasn't very long until the young man left his home and went out on his own. He quickly used up all the money his father had given him by buying whatever he wanted and having what he thought was a "good time." Read the first part of the story to find out where the young man went and what happened to him. The word "prodigal" means wasteful.

Read Luke 15:11-16. Where did the young man go? (To a far country.)



What happened after he had gone through all his money? (There was a famine in the land and he did not have food to eat.)

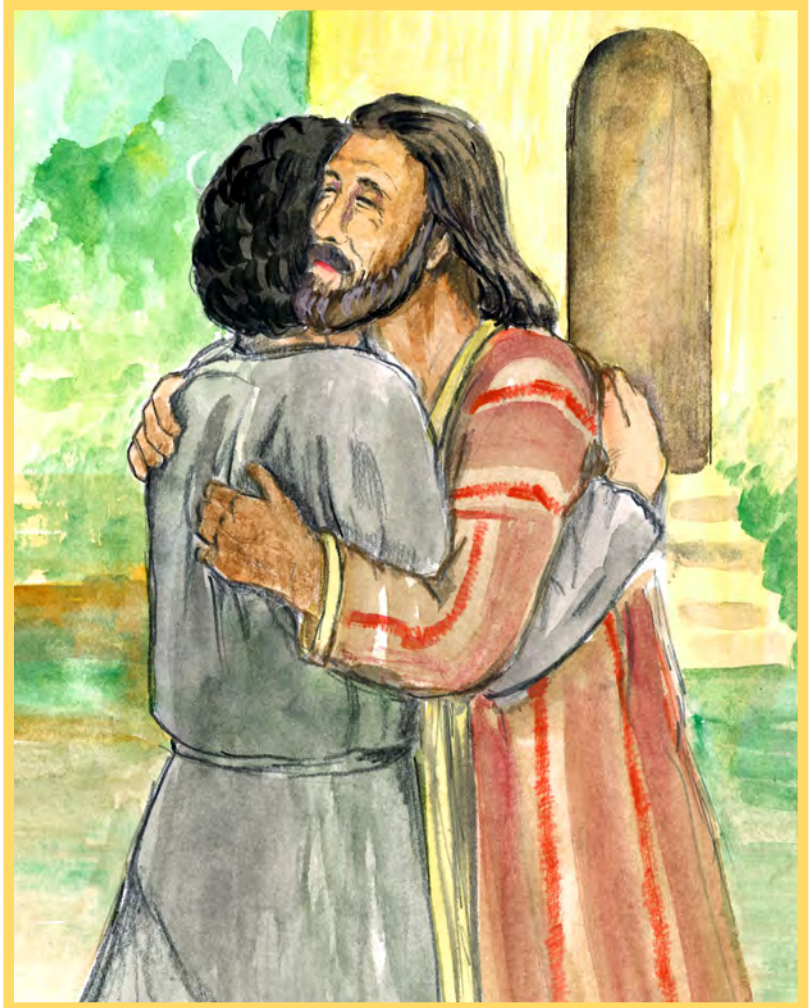
How did he get some food? (He got a job feeding swine or pigs.)

Do you know the kind of food pigs were given to eat? People would feed them whatever was left over. Really, it is garbage or rubbish. For instance, people eat an ear of corn and then give the husks to the swine. People would eat the fruit of an orange and throw away the peel. Husks or peels are the outer covering of the good food. That isn't much to eat, is it?

Can you imagine how this young man felt? He was

used to having a lot of money and doing anything he wanted. He hadn't wanted to work or invest his money. He had been happy to spend it freely on things he wanted. But now he did not even have enough money to buy the things he really *needed*, like food and clothing. His fine clothes were all gone, he was starving and he had to live with the swine.

It was then that he realized how foolish he had been. He thought about his home and how his father's servants had better and more to eat than he now had. He knew he had done wrong and was very sorry. So he made the decision to go back home and ask his father to forgive him. Let's read on and see what his father did.



Read Luke 15:17-24. What did the father do when he saw his son coming home? (The father went out to meet him and kissed him.)

When the son confessed to his father that he knew he had sinned against the Lord and against him and asked to be taken back only as a servant, what did his father give him? (The father gave him the best clothes and had a big meal made to celebrate his homecoming.)

Do you think the father forgave his son for his selfish and wasteful actions? (Yes, happily.)

The father felt that his son had been dead and now was alive again, that he had been lost and now was found!

How do you think his older brother felt about all this? Read the rest of the story now to find out.

Read Luke 15:25-32. How did the older brother feel? (Angry and jealous.)

Yes, the older brother thought he was much more deserving of rewards for his good behavior all along, but he actually responded in a hard-hearted and unforgiving way.

The Lord Is Always Ready to Forgive

The younger son in this parable is like each of us, because we all do what is wrong sometimes. The father is like the Lord, our Heavenly Father. He gives us good things, good and true ideas. Our Heavenly Father lets us choose what to do with these good things, but He hopes that we will choose to follow what is good and true in our daily lives. He wants us to obey His commandments so that we can be truly happy. But He also knows that we will make mistakes while we learn exactly how to use the good things that He has given us.

When we want to do as we please without thinking about the Lord or other people, we are like the prodigal son who wasted his money on whatever he wanted without thinking about what was right. When we realize and admit that we have acted foolishly and wrongly, when we are truly sorry and ask the Lord to forgive us, He happily does so, like a father welcoming a lost son home. If we ask the Lord for help, He can take away the bad feelings and bless us with good ones again. The Lord is always ready to forgive us when we are sorry that we have done something wrong and try to do better.

We are all like the older brother sometimes as well. He is a picture of what it is like to think we are better than others, to think we deserve more than others. In this story the Lord is telling us it is not enough to behave well all the time. We also need to learn to love the Lord and our neighbor. When we are kind and helpful to others, when we forgive others, then we open our hearts and minds to the love and forgiveness of the Lord. Then we are like the angels who want to welcome everyone into heaven.



Discussion Questions

- What does “prodigal” mean? (Wasteful.)
- What did the father do when his younger son came home? (He forgave the son, welcomed him happily and gave him fine clothes, special food and a great celebration.)
- Why do you think the older son felt so badly? (Because he was jealous and did not think it was fair to reward his younger brother who had been so wasteful.)
- How can you tell if someone is truly sorry for something they have done wrong? (When we are truly sorry, we try to change our ways and not repeat wrong behavior.)

Activity Overview | The Prodigal Son

Recitation

Learn the recitation by heart.

Seek the Lord while He may be found;
Call upon Him while He is near.
Let the wicked forsake his way,
And the unrighteous man his thoughts;
Let him return to the Lord,
And he will have mercy on him;
And to our God,
For He will abundantly pardon. Isaiah 55:6,7

Songs

The Prodigal Son

Listen or download at <https://www.newchurchvineyard.org/resource/song-the-prodigal-son/>

Activities

Choose one or two.

- Activity 1 | Prodigal Son Movie Strip
- Activity 2 | How Did the Prodigal Son Feel?
- Picture to color

Additional Activity Ideas

- Watch a video of *The Prodigal Son* song at <https://www.newchurchvineyard.org/resource/video-the-prodigal-son-song/>

Activity 1 | Prodigal Son Movie Strip

Re-tell the parable of the Prodigal Son using a movie strip.

Materials

crayons, colored pencils or markers
scissors
tape
copy of *The Prodigal Son* movie strip
sheet of paper in a contrasting color

Instructions

1. Color the pictures on *The Prodigal Son* movie strip.
2. Cut the pictures into two strips along the line in the center of the page.
3. Line the strips up vertically, so that they tell the story. Tape across the middle of the strip. Make sure you tape to the edges on both sides of the strip so that it does not catch as you pull it through the “projector” slot.
4. Take a piece of paper in a contrasting color and make two slits in it that are wide enough to accommodate the movie strip (approx. 4.5” or 11.5cm), and far enough apart that a single image shows (approx. 3.25” or 8.5cm). (See picture, below.)
5. Feed the movie strip through the slits.
6. Tell the story, advancing the pictures as you go.

The Prodigal Son



Activity 2 | How Did the Prodigal Son Feel?

Look at the two pictures from the story. Decide how the son feels in each picture.



Color the face that shows how the son feels in this picture.



Color the face that shows how the son feels now.



Talk about a time when you were sad.

What helped you feel happy again?



