Unit 5—The Prodigal Son

Get Ready!

God Is Loving and Forgiving

By: Nikki Green

Text

Luke 15:11–32

Key Quest Verse

“You are forgiving and good, O Lord” Psalm 86:5a (NIV)

Bible Background

The Jews had strict legal rulings about every phase of life. One that was strictly enforced was the right of ownership. A father (not the mother) owned all that was in his care—land, money, and all other possessions. On his death, two thirds of his goods or possessions went to his oldest son. The oldest son was then to care for the mother and any sisters. The younger son, if there were only two sons, would receive one third of the possessions. In this parable, the younger son’s demand for his share of the inheritance would have been unthinkable in Jewish society. Due to the legal rulings, the father first had to give the older son his share before he could give the younger son a portion of the possessions. This first section of the parable illustrates how our sin causes us to rebel against God’s word and commands.

In the second section of the parable, we see the young man’s selfish ambitions and inappropriate lifestyle. However, the lifestyle quickly comes to an end in a time of pressure. Then, the prodigal son resorts to low, degrading work. Pigs were unclean and the Jews could not eat them. In this warm climate, they were often full of diseases and it was difficult to keep their meat from spoiling. However, this son was so hungry that he would have eaten the pigs’ food if he could have. Here, we see a sinful lifestyle represented. It shows us how tempting and inviting sin appears at first, even though it never lasts. Instead, it leads to a corrupt life in which we feel there is no out.

In the last portion of the parable, the young son returns home to his father, in order to confess the error of his ways and to seek forgiveness. He did not expect or seek anything more than becoming a hired servant. However, upon his return, his father rejoices over his homecoming and offers his son a pair of shoes. At that time, servants did not wear shoes. Thus, by giving his son shoes, the father reestablished him as his son. This section correlates to our repentance. When we repent of our sins and seek forgiveness, God welcomes us into His family, with the full rights that all family members receive. Due to our sinful nature, we are not worthy of His mercy. However, like the father of the prodigal son, He rejoices over our homecoming.
God loves us despite our bad choices and sin. He is just looking for a chance to forgive us, and pour His love and blessings on us.

What I want my students to:

Know:  God loves them no matter who they are or what they have done.

Feel:   Feel enormous love from their father in heaven.

Do:     Ask for forgiveness for their sins.

Sometimes God just lets us have our own way. He knows many times this will lead us into trouble, but maybe that is the best way for some people to learn. The prodigal son is like many of us. He knew what he wanted. He didn’t take his dad’s feelings into consideration. He simply focused on himself. By asking his father for his inheritance, he was basically saying, “I wish you were dead.” After his father grants this shocking request, he leaves with everything. I don’t think he intended on returning home. It amazes me that like this father, God still wants us. Not only does He want us, He runs to us and welcomes us home. He’s been waiting and watching for us to repent and return to Him. All the while He has gifts He wants to lavish on us. The forgiveness of God is beyond comprehension to me. He is good. It is such a joy to call Him “Father”.

Leader’s Devotion
Materials: Fake looking jewels, mud, waxed paper, clear jar, towel, and water

Preparation: Cover each of the fake jewels in mud and place them on waxed paper. Allow them to harden overnight. Fill jar with water before class.

Procedure: After children arrive, have them hold their hands out with their palms up. I have a special present for each of you. Continue to hold your hands out once I’ve placed your gift in your hands. Gently place one dirty gem in each child’s hand. The gems should look like clods of dirt. The dirt will easily rub off if the gems are handled too much. As you give each child their gift say, aren’t these beautiful? Children will make comments about the non-beauty they are holding. Oh wait a minute; I forgot to clean these gifts up. I’ve got a “God Solution” here, let’s try it. Have each child drop their dirty gem in the jar full of water. Tell your Bible story while the jewels are soaking. If you have a lid on your jar, give it a quick shake before removing jewels. Place the jewels on a towel as you remove them from the jar. Comment on how beautiful they are. They have certainly transformed from what they were at the beginning of class. Hand each child a clean jewel.

The son in our story today sinned. Sin makes us dirty in God’s eyes. The boy became dirty on the inside because of the way he was acting and treating his family. He was also out feeding pigs. That isn’t a clean job. He was filthy and in need of a “God Solution” to clean him up. God wants us to come to Him no matter how we are. If we seem pretty clean, a little dusty, or full of dirt and mud – He wants us. None of us really wanted to keep the ugly clods of dirt at the beginning of class. Once they were clean and shiny they looked like a cool gift though. Our “God Solution” took the dirty jewels and made them shine. God can cleanse us just as easily. No matter what we’ve done in the past, God can wash our sins away and make us shine like jewels.

GO TO THE BIBLE STORY
Materials: Tube of toothpaste and a paper plate

Procedure: Show the full tube of toothpaste. Squeeze entire tube of toothpaste onto the paper plate. You can squeeze half out, and then choose a responsible child to squeeze the rest out. While students are still admiring the mess on the plate, ask for a volunteer. Hand the volunteer the empty tube and ask them to put all the toothpaste back.

It’s impossible for us to refill this tube with paste. Think of this tube as a person, and the paste coming out as words. When we say something that hurts someone’s feelings, we can’t just cram the words back into our mouth. After they come out, they make a mess that people remember. The boy in our story hurt his dad’s feelings by words that came out of his mouth. Always watch what you say!
Teacher Tip: Provide markers for students to highlight portions of the story in their Bibles

Materials: Sticky labels (could use name tag labels or wide masking tape) and a pen.
Have the children name different sins for you. Write the sins on the labels as they say them.
Stick them on your shirt as you write them out. You could have “lying”, “stealing”, and “gossip”
on you.

If we don’t ask God to forgive us, we just wear our sins around all the time. Now if I put a
coat on and hide my sins, would they be gone? No, they would just be hiding. Some people
cover their sins by smiling and acting like they are good Christian people. Even when you
hide sin, it’s hard to feel good about yourself. We all must tell God we are sorry for what
we did and ask for forgiveness. The boy in our story today learned about sin the hard way.
Remove sin stickers. Hey, I’m clean and free from sin now. Don’t I look better? I sure feel
cleaner and prettier.

Jesus told a story called the “Prodigal Son” or “The Lost Son”. He was talking to many
people; teachers of the law, sinners, and religious men were all standing around listening.
Jesus began to tell the story of a man who had two sons. The younger son said to his dad,
“give me my inheritance money now”. Normally the inheritance money would go to the
boys after their dad died. This was hurtful to the dad because he wasn’t even close to dy-
ing. Soon after the boy got his dad’s money, he left for a far off land. He took everything
with him. I don’t think he planned on ever going home. Jesus said he wasted his money on
wild living. After he had spent every bit of his money, the land became dry and there was
no rain. He was hungry and needed money. He took a job doing something he would have
never done at home. He was feeding pigs. Pigs were unclean animals to the Jews in those
days, and now he has to feed them. The son became so hungry he started wishing he could
eat the pig’s food.
The boy realized he had been foolish. He knew his father’s servants had plenty to eat. He decided to tell his father he was sorry, he had done a terrible thing to him and God. He was going to ask if he could work as a servant for him. He knew he wasn’t worthy to be his son any longer. The boy headed home. When the son was a long way off, his father saw him coming. The father ran to him. He hugged and kissed his son. The boy told his dad how sorry he was. The father was so happy his son came home, he threw a celebration party. The father had his servants find the best clothes and put them on his son. He put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. He ordered his servants to kill the fattened calf and have a great feast. “My son was dead, but now he is alive again! He was lost, but now he is found!” (Luke 15:24 ICB). They celebrated his coming home.

The Lost Son in Jesus’ story didn’t wear stickers with his sin all over, but he sure could feel his sin on the inside. He knew he wasn’t worthy to go back home and have his dad call him “son”. Home started looking really good to him after he ran out of food and money. He wanted to go back, even if he had to be his dad’s servant. His dad is just like our heavenly Dad. God wants us to leave our sin and ask for forgiveness. He is watching and waiting for us to come to him. He is ready and willing to call you His son or daughter. He’s ready also for a celebration when you come to Him. The Bible tells us that there is rejoicing in heaven when a sinner repents. (Luke 15:7,10). Let’s all try to run toward God, not away from Him. A celebration party is always more fun than a pity party!
ART

Materials: elastic string, scissors, Baggies, tape, and colored beads as follows: black, red, clear (or white), blue, green, yellow. You will also need a filler bead to finish off your bracelet. Silver is shown here as the filler.

Preparation: Cut 10 inches of elastic string for each child. Have beads separated in a Baggie for each child. One of each colored bead and 15 filler beads.

Procedure: Hand each child a piece of tape, their elastic, and a Baggie full of beads. They must first tape one end of their elastic to the table. After their elastic is taped, the class must all work together to keep this project in the right order. Start with the black bead, have them put that on and push it toward the tape. Next goes red, clear, blue, green, and then yellow. After they have the colored beads on, they can add the fillers. The fillers could be clear, white, gold, silver, or whatever you like. This amount of beads will generally fit a pre-school wrist. Before tying the bracelet, see if extra beads are needed for thicker wrists. When the beads are on, an adult can go to each child and tie their bracelet. A double knot should hold the bracelet together, and the knot hides easily under the beads. Cut off extra elastic.

This salvation bracelet reminds us that we all start as a Lost Son or Daughter. Just like the Lost Son in our story, we all have sin. We need to turn to God and decide to be a part of His family and life. The black stands for sin. The red stands for the blood Jesus shed to forgive us of our sins. The clear, or white, stands for purity. Our hearts are clean and pure after God’s forgiveness. The blue reminds us of the blue waters of baptism, which wash our sins away. The green stands for growth. We can all grow as Christians. The yellow reminds us of what’s to come. The Kingdom and the streets of gold will be our reward.
GO!

**Joy Down In My Heart Cake**

**FOOD**  
**Materials:** Cake mix and necessary ingredients, aluminum foil, paper baking cups, oven, and icing

**Quest Connection**

**Procedure:** Make aluminum foil balls and place one in the side of each baking cup. Fill baking cups half full. The aluminum foil ball should help form your heart cake. Bake cupcakes. Remove foil and pinch the bottom of the heart to make a point. You can ice them yourself, or have the children ice them during class.

The father in our story threw a huge celebration party when his lost son came home. He forgave his son and was filled with joy when he returned. This father’s heart was full of forgiveness and love.

**Close**

Cake makes me think of a party. This dad threw a celebration party for his lost son. His heart was big enough to forgive and forget his son’s bad choices. The father now had joy in his heart - his son had come home! Let’s pray together right now and ask God to help us make good choices!
OBJECT LESSON

Materials: Aluminum foil, scissors, and coins

Preparation: Cut foil into 4-inch squares. Cut enough that each child gets two pieces of foil. The boy in our story did conform to his world. He wanted his dad’s money, and wanted to spend it on worldly things. He was conforming to the worldly people he was hanging out with. He probably began dressing like them, talking like them, and acting like them. He still had a father who loved him. Even though our foil now looks like money, it is still foil. If we are Christians, but begin to look like people in this world; we are still Christians looking like people of this world. God wants us to conform to the image of His son, Jesus. When people look at us, they should see Jesus has rubbed off on us.
Forgiveness Ring

ART

Materials: Aluminum foil, glue sticks, scissors, fake jewels. If you’ve done Option A, have children use the fake jewels you’ve given them.

Procedure: Cut foil into 5-inch squares. Each child receives one foil square. They need to fold it over and over, as shown in picture A. Have them use glue stick on under side of jewel and stick it to their folded foil. Help them wrap foil ring around their finger (see picture B). There is no need to glue it for size, it should stay in place. Cut excess foil from outer sides of ring prior to fitting it to child.

Who remembers what the father gave his son when he forgave him? (ring) We are going to make a ring.

Close

The father in our story was like God. He was forgiving, faithful, loving, and thankful to have his child home. He gave his son a ring to prove he still loved him and the son still held a place of honor in his father’s heart.
Don’t Drown In Sin

GAME

Materials: Paper cups full of water, rubber bands, Kleenex or double ply bathroom tissue, toothpicks, quarters

Quest Connection

Preparation: Fill cups with water. Separate two ply bathroom tissue or Kleenex and place it over cup opening. Secure tissue with rubber band.

Procedure: Place two or three children in a group. Each group will receive one prepared cup. Place one quarter on top of each tissue cup. Each child should be given a toothpick. The object of the game is for the quarter not to fall into the water for you. You want the quarter to fall in while someone else is taking his or her turn. Each child will take their toothpick and make two holes in the tissue. The hole can be a tiny poke, or a huge tear. The quarter needs to remain on the tissue, or you lose. Once the quarter falls in, the game is over. The person making the hole at the time it falls in, loses. See the picture of the man on this quarter. Let’s pretend this is the picture of the Lost Son in our story. You can pretend you are all the worldly people poking under him with bad stuff. We don’t know all the bad stuff he did, but we know he was out sinning. He did so many bad things he fell into the big sin trap and was drowning in sin. There is water in the bottom of this cup, so once he falls in he will sink. After our Lost Son falls in and is drowning in sin, whoever should have taken the next turn needs to pull him (the quarter) out.

Close

The Lost Son in our story was so interested in money; we will just pretend this money is him. If he had stayed home, he would have been safe from bad guys trying to hurt him. Instead he chose to run away and hang around people that really didn’t care about him. They were actually causing him to fall deeper and deeper into sin. Finally he fell so deep into sin, he probably felt like he was drowning in it. When we ask for forgiveness, God is always there to lift us out of our sin. It was fun to make someone else sink the quarter, but in real life we want to be the hand helping our friends out of sin.
**Erasable Mistakes**

**OBJECT LESSON**

**Materials:** Various pencils with erasers. Different colors and sizes would be great.

**Quest Connection**

**Procedure:** Hand each child a pencil. Have them describe their pencil. It is short, long, skinny, fat, old, new, yellow, blue, etc. You can pick one and describe it for them.

These pencils remind me of people. They are different sizes, colors, shapes, and ages. They all have one thing in common, they have an eraser. We are all given an eraser too. His name is Jesus Christ. We all make mistakes and need an eraser from time to time. Jesus died on the cross just so he could erase our sins. We just need to ask for forgiveness, and they are gone. We become like clean paper when we have been forgiven. God can’t see the ugly pencil marks, they’ve been erased!

**Close**

Lead your class in prayer.
Kiss Me Quick!

GAME

Materials: Hershey kisses candies, a watch or clock

Quest Connection

Procedure: Hide Hershey kisses around the room before class begins. In our story of the Lost Son, the boy’s father greeted him with a kiss. I just love kisses. We are going to play a game where I get a lot of kisses quick! I have hidden Hershey kisses around the room. Your job is to find them, run to me, give me your kiss, and say your memory verse, “You are forgiving and good, O Lord”. I’m going to time you. Let’s see how many kisses I can get in three minutes. Give each child a candy kiss when the game is over.

Close

The father in our story was thrilled when his lost son was back in his arms. He kissed him and welcomed him home. The father in this story was forgiving and good, just like our Father in heaven.
God made all the animals special!

Draw a line from the animal to the sound it makes.
Circle any animal from our story.

Oink

Baa!

Cock-a-doodle-do!

Quack!

Moo
Try to make a pig in the space below. Use 5 circles, 2 rectangles, 2 triangles, 2 straight lines, and a curly tail. Draw food by his feet when you are done. See if your parents can draw a pig.
Help the sinner get to church.

Living for God

church
Are you closer to living for God?

Or are you living Hog Wild?

Put an X and write your name on the line where you feel you are now.
Circle all items we heard about in the story.