



## The Prodigal Son: Luke 15:11-32 Lesson Plans

WRM Season 3 Session 1 : **Storytelling, Arts & Crafts, Movement & Games**

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### OVERVIEW SECTION

#### How to Read This Lesson Plan

The **Overview Section** is the foundation of this lesson plan. The questions and activities for the class that you will be teaching on Sunday morning have been based (sometimes loosely) upon what you read in this section. The **Overview Section** is composed of five components (each component is underlined in the lesson plan):

**How to Read This Lesson Plan** (defines all components of the lesson plan)

**Purpose of Sunday Morning Spiritual Formation** (a reminder of why we do this)

**Scripture(s) for the Session** (a reminder that the scripture is to be read in every class)

**Key Verses & Theology** (background for teachers to ponder)

**Themes to Focus on from the Scripture** (the ideas that the session's lessons are based on)

The actual lesson is found in the second section, **The Sunday Morning Experience Section**. Think of this section as the step-by-step instruction guide to your Sunday morning teaching experience. There are four components to this section (again, each component is underlined in the actual lesson plan):

**Preparation** (including supplies needed)

**Classroom Statement** (a brief explanation of what will be taught/happening in the classroom)

**Step-by-step process of the lesson** (including the scripture to be read)

**Suggested variations for age groups** (Self-explanatory but not always applicable)

We encourage you to read the rest of this **Overview Section** before reading the **Sunday Morning Experience Section**.

#### Purpose of Sunday Morning Spiritual Formation:

The purpose of Sunday Morning Spiritual Formation is, with God's help and in community, to hear and interact with the stories of our faith tradition, to pray, worship and play together, and to equip and support the building of relationships with God and with each other.

#### Scripture(s) for the Session: Luke 15:11-32

*Please READ this aloud in every class you teach.* The actual words to the scripture can be found in **The Sunday Morning Experience Section: Step-by-Step process of the lesson**. When reading to the class, please read it from the lesson plan (not an actual Bible) as the wording of the scripture has been modified to help clarify some language issues.

**Key Verses & Theology:** These are provided to help the teachers think about and build a framework for understanding the story to help in answering some of the questions that the students might raise in class.

*12 So the father divided his property between the two sons and gave the younger son his inheritance/share.* The father in this story is representative of God. So when we look at what the characteristics of the father are, then that also helps us to think about what God's characteristics are, too. In this part of the story, we see that the father is generous. And we also see that the father does *not* try to stop the younger son from making a grave mistake. The father doesn't say, "You shouldn't be doing this." He doesn't say, "Why don't you wait a few years." He doesn't say, "No, you cannot be trusted." He doesn't say, "You'll get it when I die." Instead, the father gives his son an abundant gift with no strings attached. This is a great amount of trust the father displays. But what is the father trusting? The son? His own abundance of property? Or maybe himself – that he has done a fine job of parenting? Regardless of what he is trusting, there is a serenity and calmness and graciousness about the father that appears attractive, though at this part of the story, maybe also naïve.

*21 Then the younger son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son."* The younger son had to experience life outside of his father's realm before he "comes to his senses" and returns home. Upon return, the son confesses what he has done wrong. And what is it that he confesses? That he has lived in a way that makes him no longer appear to be the father's son. Thinking back to Genesis and thinking about what image humankind is made in (God's), this is a very apt statement about who we become when we live outside of God's realm. Like the son who no longer fairly represents his father, when we live outside the Kingdom of God, we no longer fairly represent our Creator. We no longer reflect the goodness and abundance and trust and calmness that are the characteristics portrayed by the father in this story. And when we live like that, when the son lives like that, we do a disservice to ourselves and to God.

*24 let us eat and celebrate for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!* But what is the father's response to his son, to this son who has misrepresented his image to the world? Surprisingly it is to rejoice! And celebrate! To welcome his son home with open arms. The father forgives and embraces. This is like how as parents we often respond, too. However, for the father, the "fear part" of the response is missing. For instance, if you somehow lose track of your child in a store and then find him/her again. You want to hug them AND scold them, right? Like, "Oh honey, there you are! Are you ok? I love you so much..." Give hug. Hold on. Then take a step back and... "WHAT WERE YOU THINKING? You scared me to death! Don't ever do that again!" But that part never happens in this story with the father. It is all celebration for the father.

*31 Then the father said to [his older son], "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.* But the fear part *does* happen with the older son. The older son is the one who is grouchy about the younger son's return. So what does the father do with the older son? He's just as gracious and generous and calm with him as he is with the younger son! He gently, lovingly and correctly points out to his older son that there's no reason to be upset. He then reminds his older son that the most important thing is that he's always with him. So going back to the characteristics of the father, the most amazing one is that of trust (an emotion that is opposite of fear). The father is so full of trust that he's never afraid. There's no room for fear. And if the sons (old and young) are always with him, then what do *they* need to fear? Nothing.

They just need to trust him. The older son doesn't, of course, and that's the problem. He's afraid that the younger son is going to get some of what belongs to him. And in this regard, by the end of the story, the younger son knows more than the older son.

**Themes to Focus on from the Scripture:** Themes are provided to help teachers understand the teaching of the *session* (not necessarily the class). Sometimes an activity in one class may not match up with any of the themes.

**Trust/Letting go** – When we're afraid of losing something, we clamp down on that which we are afraid of losing. The father in this story does just the opposite. The father in the story lets go of his younger son and of his money/possessions in order to give it to his younger son. And then when the son comes back, the father doesn't have to scold his son with the "Told you so" speech. Instead, because he was able to let go of his son and avoid the dynamic of his son wrenching away, then there is not a burned bridge. The son can return. With God, the same dynamic is at play. God's not afraid of losing us. And so God lets us make bad decisions without us having to wrench ourselves away from God, making the return, if we choose, possible.

**Money/Stuff/Possessions** – It's very easy to believe that our things can save us. If only we could win the lottery. If only we could have a better paying job. If only we had that certain kind of computer/car/kitchen/college education that we always wanted, then life would be so much better. And even though our culture repeatedly tells us this idea, it simply is not true. Money and possessions do not save us from our own ways. In fact, money and possessions often enable our more self-destructive ways. This is what the younger son had to experience and see first-hand. And once he did, then he "came to his senses" and returned back to his father's realm.

**Confession** – A way to return to God's Kingdom is to admit (or *confess*) the ways that caused us to leave in the first place. The son confesses that he has "sinned" against heaven and against his father. The word, sin, here, means separation. The son chose separation, he lived in a way that was not in the image of his father. To come back to his father and to live his father's way is to confess that living outside of his father's image/way didn't work. It wasn't the better way.

**Restoration** – Even before the son confesses that his way doesn't work, he is welcomed back with open arms by his father. The confession by the younger son allows him to receive his father's warm welcome. Their relationship is restored not because the son confesses and the father forgives, but because the father has and always will love the son, and the son needs to confess how he kept his father's love at bay. With the younger son's attempt at separation confessed, then the younger son doesn't need try to stop his father's party for him. Instead, it's the older son who is trying to interfere with the restoration. And that is because there are ways that the older son has not confessed to (ways that he chooses) that cause separation from his father. But once he confesses and chooses to live in relationship instead of separation, then he too can enjoy a similar reception from his loving father, just like his younger brother did.



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## THE SUNDAY MORNING EXPERIENCE SECTION

### Preparation

- Print out this lesson plan and bring it with you on the Sunday Mornings you are teaching.
- Arrive at pre-arranged time to join other teachers, shepherds and staff for an opening prayer.
- Supplies Needed: Story to read, costume to wear, gift-like box (the dollar store usually has something) with one dollar in it; pennies, nickels, dimes and quarters, index cards to write on; pencils

### Classroom Statement

This Storytelling Class consists of telling a customized story about the Prodigal Son and then doing an activity that helps us see that what we want in the short-term can often be wasteful when compared to the long-term.

### Step-by-Step Process of Lesson

Shepherd comes in with students

#### **SHEPHERD ASKS** "Question of the Day."

#### **INTRODUCE yourself**

Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_ and I want you call me (tell the students how they may address you).

#### **PRAY** Short and simple is perfect. For example:

God, thank you for this day and for each other. We need your help. Help us to learn about you this day. Amen.

#### **TELL**

- The story we're going to read is a story that Jesus told to other people.
- It's called a parable. A parable is a story that helps others think about an idea.
- This parable is often called "The Prodigal Son."
- Prodigal means "wasteful."
- Listen for how the son is wasteful.

#### **READ** Luke 15:11-32

11 Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. 12 The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So the father divided his property

between the two sons and gave the younger son his inheritance/share. 13 A few days later the younger son packed, took his inheritance and traveled to a distant country. There, he squandered his property in wasteful living. 14 When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in great need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. 16 The son would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating because no one gave him anything. 17 Then he came to his sense and he said, "How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger?! 18 I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands." ' 20 So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. 21 Then the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24 for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is now found!" And they began to celebrate.

25 "Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 He called one of the servants and asked what was going on. 27 The servant replied, "Your brother has come back, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because your brother has returned safe and sound.' 28 Then the older son became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. 29 But he answered his father, "Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with wasteful spending, you killed the fatted calf for him!' 31 Then the father said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was gone, dead it seemed, but now he has returned, as if from the dead; he was lost and has been found."

### **ASK (answers in parentheses)**

- How was the younger son wasteful? (he spent all his money; he spent his inheritance)
- Do you know what an inheritance is? (probably not, so be ready to tell them: An inheritance is money and possessions your parents and sometimes other relatives leave for you to help you out after they die).
- Even though the younger son is wasteful, how does the father welcome the son home? (with open arms and a party)
- Does that surprise you?

### **TELL**

- I'm now going to read the story to you again, only this time I'm going to read it as though I *am* the prodigal (younger) son.
- Listen for how I waste my money.

### **DO/READ Storytelling** (The story of the Prodigal Son in his own words)

I am young and I want to see the world. I want to stay up late and sleep during the day. I want to party! But instead I live on a farm with my mom, dad and brothers. They love me very much. And I love them. But...they BORE me. They do the same thing everyday. But I want adventure. I gotta get out of here!

So I went to my dad and told him I wanted to see the world but to do that I needed my inheritance now. This was a very unusual request. I expected my dad to get upset. I expected him to lecture me about all that I still don't know. Blah blah blah. Instead, he said, "Always know that I love you and I'm here for you." And then he did it! HE GAVE ME MY INHERITANCE!

WOOOOOOOO-WHO! I left the next day for the big city.

When I got there, I didn't know anyone. So I went to a restaurant where people hang out. I paid for some of the people's dinner. And then I paid for their desserts. And by that time, we were having such a good time, that I bought their drinks for them too. They were so excited to have me there! And I was so excited to be there, too! Some of my new friends said I could stay with them. So I did. During the next few months, I did that everyday. I stayed up late with friends at restaurants and slept during most of the day. I didn't have a care or worry in the world. But then one day, when I went to pay for everyone's meal, I didn't have enough money. At first, I thought it was a joke, that someone had taken my money and hidden it from me. But when no one laughed when I said that, then I got angry and thought someone had stolen my money from me. But I knew that wasn't true either. I knew that I had spent all my money. When I couldn't pay for everyone's meal, my friends got mad at me and left. No one took me to their home that night. I had no where to stay, I had no food to eat and I had no money. What had happened? This wasn't the adventure that I wanted. I tried to get a job, but no one wanted to hire me. They knew I wasn't a good worker because I stayed up too late with all their sons and daughters. Finally a farmer hired me. But they paid me so little that I couldn't afford to eat very well. So sometimes I ate what the pigs ate at the farm. I finally realized that though my parents were boring, they loved me because of who I am, not because of what I have.

I went home and I told my mom and dad I was sorry for thinking there were more exciting people out there who would care for me just like they did. They were so happy to have me back that they threw me a big party!

Later, a friend was telling me how impressed she was with my parents. When I said, "What do you mean?" She said, "It's like your parents were like God. They knew you were making a mistake, but they let you do it anyways. So then, you made your mistakes but you remembered how much better life was with your parents and so you came back. And they weren't angry with you then, either. Instead, they hugged you and threw you a party. That's how God loves us. God wants us to live God's way because that's what's best for us, but when we think that's boring, God still lets us enjoy all these things God made for us and let's us live our own ways, just like you did: Mostly in a wasteful way. It was fun, but it didn't last. And then you came back to what does last, your parents' love. And that's how it is with us and God, too. God doesn't want us to leave him or ignore him, but if we do, once we realize that God's way is better and come back to living God's way, God welcomes us back with open and loving arms.

## ASK

- So how did I, the prodigal son, waste my money? (spent it on other people)
- Why would I spend my money on other people? (so that they'll like me)
- So what happened when I ran out of money? (the people stopped liking me)
- Did my parents stop loving me? (No)
- Did they take me back when I showed up? (Yes)
- How is God like the parents in this story? (God loves us and lets us make mistakes in our lives, even mistakes that take us away from God. But we're always welcomed back).

## TELL

- We're going to do an activity now that's sort of like the tv game show, "Deal or No Deal."
- This activity will also help us to think about God and money.

## EXPLAIN & DO ACTIVITY (It's a simultaneous sort of thing)

- I need you to write down on the cards that I'm handing out, "God loves me and my parents love me."
- Once you've done that, I need one volunteer to help me with my demonstration.
- (Once you've got your volunteer...)
- I am holding in one hand a penny and in the other hand, a nickel. Which coin would you rather have?
- (If they pick the penny, thank them and tell the volunteer to take a seat. Then pick a new volunteer and start over. If they pick the nickel give it to them)
- OK, you've picked the nickel. Hold on to it.
- (Now take the penny in your hand and switch it with a dime)
- Which would you rather have, this dime or that nickel?
- (If they pick the dime, switch with them. If they pick the nickel, have them sit down...)
- Now bring out a quarter and say, "which would you rather have, that dime or this quarter?"
- (Give them what they pick, thank them and tell 'em to have a seat)
- I now need another volunteer.
- (Once you've got your volunteer...)
- I have this present here. Look at it, all nicely wrapped. Do you think you might want it? What's in it you ask? Oh, I can't tell you that. Instead, I'm going to offer you money just like the last volunteer. And you have to decide if you want the money or if you want the present. If you accept the money at any point, then you won't get the present. Understood? OK, here we go...
  
- Do you want a penny or do you want to hold out for the box?
- Do you want a nickel or do you want to hold out for the box?
- Do you want a dime or do you want to hold out for the box?
- Do you want a quarter or do you want to hold out for the box?
  - (If they take the money at any point, have them return to their seat. Then tell the class, Would you like to see what's in the box? And show them)
  
- (If the volunteer has refused all offers to take the money, then tell the volunteer and class this...):

- Because of the decisions you have made, you are now eligible for what is in the box. Do you wish to accept what is in the box?
- Yes? OK, I am now giving you the box.
- (They open it)
- Show the class what's inside...
- Are you glad you waited for what was in the box?
- You get to keep the dollar, but I get the box back.

## **TELL**

- If you took the money instead of the box, then you would've been happy for the moment.
- However, you would've been disappointed once you heard about what was in the box (one dollar!).
- What I had you write on your paper, that is what the box symbolizes. It's easy to grab onto other things, things that seem for sure, but often times those other things can keep us from being in relationship with our parents or with God.
- In the story, though, the father, unlike the box, is never out of reach.
- That's how it is with God too. God is never out of reach. And that's the good news for today!

## **CLEAN UP**

### **Suggestions**

Have some sort of candy available (provided) to give to the kids after the activity to help lessen the disappointment of the kids who didn't get the dollar or coins.