

Middle/High School Sunday School Lessons by

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Year 4: Session 5 – Parables: The Big 3

Class 13: Luke 15:11-32 – The Prodigal Son

CONCEPTS that will be covered in the lesson

- Read the parable of the Prodigal Son
- Highlight / discuss the attitudes and concerns of the two sons
- Highlight / discuss the shared characteristics between the father and God

Materials needed:

1. Movie clip (available on rfour.org) from *Despicable Me*
2. Electronics that show the video clip
3. For activity, you will need a smallish thing that can be easily hidden and somewhat easily found in the classroom

THE LESSON

OPENING PRAYER

OPENING QUESTION

- One of the things we do every class is ask and answer the opening question at the beginning of class – because it helps us 1. Learn more about each other and 2. Helps “warm us up” for some of the ideas in the upcoming lesson. So we’re going to do that now.
- So here’s the opening question for today’s class. I [the teacher] will ask the question and then to give you some time to think of an answer, I will answer first.
- Once I answer the question, we’ll go around the circle and each of us will answer.
- When it’s your turn, start with your name and then answer the question to the best of your ability.
- *Here’s this week’s question:* What is something that people do that you find to be at least a LITTLE bit wasteful?

TRANSITION TO VIDEO CLIP

- Thanks to the season of advent and our last session, we’ve transitioned from Old Testament stories to Jesus stories.
- In this session, we’re going to be reading and discussing the most well-known of Jesus’ parables
- Parables are short stories that Jesus shared with the crowds of people that surrounded him.
- In fact, parables are the main way he spoke to the crowds of people.
- In the parables, Jesus invites the listener to think about and see God, each other, themselves and the Kingdom of God in a new and/or better way without having an argument with them

- Today's parable is known as the Prodigal Son
- *Prodigal* simply means *wasteful*
- But even though the title focuses on a wasteful son, the story, as we'll see, is actually about a father and his two sons
- To help us get started then, let's watch this brief ad for the movie *Despicable Me*
- Most likely the two minions are not brothers, but for today, let's pretend that they are.
- Let's see what happens

WATCH VIDEO CLIP

ASK

- What did the younger brother have? (a can that went "Moo")
- Did he seem to like it? (yes)
- Did the older brother also seem to like the can? (yes)
- Did he like his younger brother having it? (no)
- So what did he do? (took it by force)
- Was this fair? (Not for the younger brother)
- Does this seem like something one sibling might do to another?

TELL / TRANSITION to Scripture Story

- In the following parable, we see a younger brother ask his dad for something – his inheritance
- An inheritance is what is left to you by someone when they die – it is usually in the form of money and items.
- The interesting thing about this is that the son wants it before his dad has died
- As we read the story, keep an eye out for how the the older son thinks about his brother's actions

READ Luke 15:11-32 (*recommend class reads it out loud; one person per verse*)

11Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons.
 12The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. 13A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. 14When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. 15So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. 16He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. 17But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! 18I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; 19I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."' 20So 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. 21Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22But 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. 23And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is 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. 26He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. 27He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' 28Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. 29But 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. 30But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’ 31Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.

32But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.’”

ASK

- Is there anything you find interesting or weird about this story? [*to teachers: You don't necessarily need to answer what they notice or have questions about – sometimes just agree with a, “yep, that's interesting” or a, “Yeah, I find that to be weird, too” works*]
- In verse 12, what does the younger son ask his dad? (give me my share – ie inheritance – of your property that you would normally give to me when you die RIGHT NOW while you are still alive)
- So, if you were to ask your family this question – what do you think the answer would be?
- In the story, what's the dad's answer? (he gives the inheritance to the son)
- Verse 13, what did the son do with his inheritance? (spent it all – *wasted* it)
- Verse 15 and 16, what happened to the son after he ran out of money? (was working with pigs – remember pigs are unclean to Israelites – and was even wanting to eat what the pigs were eating)
- Verse 17 – 19, what does the younger son start to realize? (that his dad is a really good and fair boss and treats his workers much better than the son is being treated and, therefore, the son is going to go back home, apologize, and ask his dad if he could be at least received as a hired hand)
- What do you think – has the youngest son learned something? If yes, what do you think he's learned? (he's learned to not take who his father is for granted)
- Verse 20-23, how does the father receive his son? (with compassion, love and celebration)
- Did you expect this response from the father? Why / why not?
- Would you have received the younger son like this? Why / why not?
- Verse 24 – What's the reason the father gives for celebration? (my son was lost and is now found, was dead and is now alive!)
- Verse 28 – Does the older brother receive his brother like his dad did? (nope)
- Verse 29 and 30 – Why? (Because the older son thinks the father does not celebrate the work and effort that the older son gives, but then celebrates the wasteful younger son because he came back – in other words, *it's not fair*)
- Verse 31 – What does the father say is the older son's reward? (everything that is the father's is now the older son's)
Verse 32 – Why does the father say they have to rejoice? (same line as before: *this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.*)

TELL

- Two things to focus on –
 - What the two sons have in common
 - What we learn about the father in this story
- One thing that is interesting about this story are that the brothers, though they are very different in terms of responsibility, both share the same issue in this story: They are concerned / focused on something other than their relationship with their father.
- We see the younger son is concerned about material possessions
- And we see the older son is like the bigger minion in the movie clip – he's concerned that the younger brother is getting something (the can that goes “Mooo”) that should rightfully belong to him, the older brother
- We then see that the younger brother, though, learns something that the older brother doesn't learn.

- The younger brother learns that the best thing that he had was his dad
- The older brother by the end of the story has not yet learned what his younger brother has learned, and who knows – he might never learn what the younger brother learns
- Another thing that is interesting is that, if we understand that the father in this story is meant to help us understand the characteristics of God – then we can learn A LOT of things about God in this story.
- We learn that God:
 - Is very giving
 - Is very forgiving
 - Allows mistakes to be made
 - Celebrates life
 - Likes to celebrate
 - Rewards steadfast obedience in the long run
 - Listens to and speaks with his children
 - Is patient
- With both children, we also see another characteristic about God emerge: That God values life and relationship far more than God values material wealth or well-done tasks.
 - We see that the father lets the younger son have his share of the inheritance even though it wasn't time for that
 - We see that the father still spends on his younger son when he returns
 - We see that the father will be fair to the older son by giving him everything, but that what's most important is to celebrate the return of the younger son
- So this might still seem like an unfair story for the older son, but that's only because the older son is focused on the little can that goes "moooo."
- If the older son were focused on who his dad was, like the younger son eventually does, most likely the older son, then, would not at all be jealous of his younger brother and would have been able to celebrate the younger son's return as well – because then, his focus wouldn't be on *things* or on *fairness*, but on the life that can be lived together.
- To help us think some more about the characteristics that are revealed about God in this story, let's do the following activity

EXPLAIN / DO ACTIVITY

- To begin, I need one volunteer to leave the classroom.
- *[choose a volunteer]*
- Before you go, let me tell you what's going to happen.
- After you leave, we're going to take this object (thimble, quarter, whatever) and hide it.
- Then when you come in, we're going to play the game, "Hot/Cold."
- But there's a catch:
 - When you come in, if you go in the right direction we'll say "warmer, warmer, warmer, hotter, etc." and if you go in the wrong direction, we won't say anything. So it's just a game of "Hot and no cold."
- Let's do that now
- *[have volunteer go outside the classroom and then have the class figure out a place to hide the object]*
- Remember, we're only saying warmer and hotter, and we don't say anything if the person goes in the wrong direction.

- *[Bring Volunteer in]*
- *[as secretly as possible, time how long it takes the volunteer to find the object]*
- *[Volunteer searches and then finds object]*
- Ok, very good.
- Now we're going to do the same thing.
- In just a minute we'll have you go back outside so that we can hide this object again, only this time when you come in, instead of telling you warmer when you go in the right direction, we'll only tell you "Cold" or "Colder" or "Freezing" when you go in the wrong direction.
- If you go in the right direction, we won't tell you anything.
- *[have volunteer go outside the classroom and then have the class figure out a place to hide the object]*
- Remember, we're only saying *colder* and *freezing*, and we don't say anything if the person goes in the right direction.
- *[Bring Volunteer in]*
- *[as secretly as possible, time how long it takes the volunteer to find the object]*
- *[Volunteer searches and then finds object]*

ASK / TELL

- To the Volunteer: Which round did you like better? Why?
- For the rest of us, which round did we like better? Why?
- So....I secretly timed how long it took to find the object in each round.
 - Here are the results:
 - Warm-only round: ____
 - Cold-only round: ____
- The hope was that the warm-only round would take the least amount of time to show that we respond more favorably to encouragement and care and compassion. So...did our volunteer respond better to encouragement or negative criticism?
 - [**Note to teachers:** *The results really depend on the class and the volunteer - my own experience is that the cold-only rounds tend to complete in a quicker time than the warm-only rounds. Ack!]*
- When we're told what we are doing wrong, like we did to [volunteer's name] during the cold round, we tend to "freeze up." We become more concerned about making mistakes and so we become more cautious.
- When we're encouraged to do the right thing and not discouraged by doing the wrong thing, we make a lot more mistakes but we find the object faster (again, hopefully the time results of the activity backs this up).
- In the parable of the Prodigal Son, we see this warm-only characteristic of God at work.
- And because of that warm-only approach, the younger son is eventually able to see past his fixation on material wants and his shame of messing up and return home.
- Also because of that warm-only approach, the older son will receive many opportunities to learn to see beyond his fixation on only what is "fair" and instead be able to see the person instead of just unfairness

CLOSING PRAYER