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# Sunday School Lesson

TOPIC:

## “The Prodigal Son”

Luke 15:11-24

VERSE DISCOVERY: Luke 15:11-24 (KJV, Public Domain)

### Prepare

- Ask your class, what is a parable and why did Jesus like to use them when He taught?
- Review Luke 15:1-10. Pay particular attention to verses 1-2 and the Pharisees attitudes toward Jesus and the people that flocked around Him. Ask your class, why do you think people like the tax collectors and sinners wanted to be where Jesus was? Why do you think Jesus took time out for people like this? Why do you think the Pharisees didn't like that? Follow with a brief explanation of Jesus' answers using the parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin.

- **Object Lesson “A Not So Tasty Treat”:**

What you will need: indoor compost bin/pail and/or a mishmash of leftovers, plastic spoons or forks, a large pan (preferably disposable to make for easy cleaning at the end), and a real treat for after the lesson. (A box of cake mix with other ingredients for alternate object lesson.)

As your class is arriving, give everyone a plastic utensil and start putting the idea in their heads that something special is coming. You have a really tasty treat for them. (**NOTE:** Before getting into this lesson, I would like to note that my class is older and more mature. You may need to modify this a bit for younger children by using something not as gross as compost or mixed-up leftovers. Consider instead using a cake mix with all the wrong ingredients. This can also be a substitute if you just don't want to deal with that extra mess.)

Set up: put the pan in the middle of the table (make sure your compost bin and/or leftovers are out of sight).

Into the object lesson: Today, we are going to learn about a young man who desired the wrong way of life. He had it good where he was: a nice home, wonderful family, servants, and wealth. But for him, this wasn't enough. He wanted to be on his own and do what he wanted to do.

While many may think that sounds ideal, but when we desire things that are out of order, or don't follow the proper ways, we can end up with a big mess on our hands.

(Show your compost bin/leftovers). Ask, *Does anybody know what this is?* To stop unnecessary food waste from going into landfills, food scraps are collected here so that they can be composted where it will be broken down and used in gardens and such.

(Dump your products in the pan). Another way people now, and during the Bible days would deal with leftovers and food scraps would be to feed them to their animals, especially pigs.

Through his riotous living, the prodigal son in today's lesson found out the grass is not greener on the other side. He sank so low in life, that he desired to eat the same slop the pigs ate. Ask, *Who's ready to eat?*

I realize this isn't the treat you were looking for but walk with me through this lesson and I promise this story has a sweet ending. (At the end of the lesson, discuss the sweet ending of the father's love and the son being restored, and translate that to God's love for us and His response when come to Him. Then, present your class with a real treat.)

If you are using the cake mix idea, follow here: After discussing the young man who wanted to be on his own, do his own thing, and ending up with a big mess on his hands, using the big pan in the middle of the table, say, *Now, this cake mix says I need oil and eggs. But I don't want to do it that way. I don't want to follow the recipe. I want to do it my own way* (Add water, stir it around, and pretend to prepare it for baking.)

Say, *does that look good or should I add some more things to it?* (Start adding your surprise, alternate ingredients to the mix). *How does that look? Not so tasty.* (Pick up here discussing the prodigal son's riotous living and the rest of the object lesson explanation with a real treat to be presented at the end of the lesson).

- You can also search the internet for object lessons to use as a lead in for this lesson.

## Explore – Full Lesson Available on pages 6-12

God is in the saving business. God is in the redeeming business. The Lord Jesus Christ came to seek and save them that are lost (Luke 19:10), and He shares that very sentiment with those who are gathered, using one of His most memorable parables: The Prodigal Son. A story of restoration and healing after a series of wrong choices and mistakes.

The younger son of the man in this story demanded his inheritance before the death of his father. After receiving it, he journeyed far from home to another country. There we are assuming he became involved with the wrong people and situations and spent all he had on reckless living. He **“wasted”** everything he had and every resource available to him was gone.

He wasted his time. He wasted his money. He wasted his identity with his “**riotous living**,” (compare Proverbs 28:7). He went away from everything he knew and became everything he was not and now that a famine has hit the land, he has nothing. “**He began to be in want.**”

Starving and finding himself without the necessary basics of life, the prodigal son became a citizen of this foreign land and was given the job of feeding the pigs. And, if that were not enough, in the desperation of his situation, he desired to eat the pig’s food.

Coming to himself and realizing the bold truth that servants in his father’s house are faring better than he, he resolved to return home. He’s unsure of the reception he will receive, nor was he expecting to be received back as a son. But in his hopes, he pressed forward with the possibility to at least be received back as a servant.

Upon returning home, he is greeted with the most humbling experience: a forgiving father with arms opened that welcome him back home. After confessing his wrongs to his father and heaven, the once lost son has been restored back to his rightful position in the family and is now found. The father’s love was waiting there for his son, and our Heavenly Father’s love is waiting for all who will, come back, and find restoration in Him once again. People matter to God. Lost people are loved by God. His strongest desire is to see them come back home in His loving arms where they belong. What an eye-opening picture this parable presents.

## Activities

- There are so many great points to bring out with this lesson. Use the blank **Journal Pages** to write one thing about this lesson that stands out to you, and why?
- Younger students can draw three things that will help them to remember the lesson using the **Draw the Scene** activity sheet found on site.
- Younger students can also put together the Prodigal Son celebration **Party Hats**. Simply make a party hat any way you’d like out of construction paper, newspaper, etc. (**draw a semi-circle, like half of a moon, cut it out, bring the ends together and staple it, and decorate**). When the Prodigal Son came home, his father threw a party because it was a time of rejoicing. These hats are symbols of the celebration. (For added flair, add the memory verse to the hats along with any pictures that pertain to the story. I used a pig to remember where he came from when he returned to his father.) Pig cutouts and memory verse available on site.
- Alternate activity sheets such as **Word Search, Crossword, and more** are available on site for those who just want to work with printed materials.

## Review

- Commit to memory the base verse from the lesson: ***“For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.” Luke 15:24***
- Fill out the review sheet provided (page 13)

## Life

“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;” (Romans 3:23) is what the Bible shows us. But, the good news is, we don’t have to stay that way. God’s arms are opened and waiting for the truly seeking soul. All of us at one point were lost like that son in Jesus’ story. We all need the salvation the Father offers. We all need to repent. And, we all need to be restored through our Lord Jesus Christ. “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord,” (Romans 6:23).

TOPIC:

## "The Prodigal Son"

Luke 15:11-24

### VERSE DISCOVERY: Luke 15:11-24 (KJV, Public Domain)

*Man's failure and God's redemptive work is the whole story of the Bible. From Genesis to Revelation; from the Fall to last words of Christ in the Bible that state, "Surely I come quickly," (Rev. 22:20), God has sought a relationship with mankind that would eventually lead into eternity. No other story in the Bible demonstrates this sought for relationship better than that of the Prodigal Son.*

*In it, we see the rebellion of man. But, also in it, we see the love of the Father looking for His lost child. One's eternity will be predicated on if one made the same choice as the Prodigal – to turn back to the Father, repent and rest in His love, and let Him restore.*

### THE PRODIGAL'S REQUEST

**Luke 15:11-12 "And he said, A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living."**

The Pharisee's had a propensity for thinking they knew better than Jesus. Many of Jesus' actions were frowned upon by them. Little did they know His mission was to seek and to save them that are lost, (Luke 19:10). To do this, He often stepped out of the box most in His time would not. Their comfort zone didn't allow them to spend time with the baser sorts of the world and when Jesus did, He was talked about and misunderstood. His motives were of pure love and showing mankind there was a better way. He didn't mind teaching to any who had an ear to hear including "publicans and sinners," (Luke 15:1-2).

His focus was to teach them, as well as the religious elite, the Father loves the world (John 3:16) and the salvation He seeks to give and the relationship He wants to have is extended to

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all mankind. Every human life is valuable to Him; therefore, He will rejoice when even just one of those lost ones becomes found.

To demonstrate this, He told stories we have come to know as parables. These heavenly nuggets of truth illustratively depict the Father's desire to be in constant communion with us. When that bond between Father and creation was broken by sin, His love was not, and He celebrates with all of heaven the one who turns back to Him.

Before reaching the story of the prodigal son, Jesus told two lost and found stories regarding sheep and a coin (see Luke 15:3-10). These are things, property if you will, who have no eternal value in them. Once they have expired their use here on earth that's all there is. There is no soul to worry about in these "objects" for eternity. Yet, people get really upset when property is messed with; when things that can be replaced disappear.

Jesus knows His audience. He knows the value they put on these "things." He knows when a disappeared object is restored and found happiness soon follows. To bring it all into perspective He adds in Luke 15:7, 10, the joy that all of heaven experiences "over one sinner that repenteth." Some get happy over found objects, but heaven rejoices over found people. Unlike those objects, people have eternal value. They do have souls to worry about and when one is restored in proper fellowship with the Father – oh, what a day that will be!

Priming the pump, if you will, with those parables, Jesus further explains in more detail using human relationships, something not as easily dismissed as a story of a sheep or a coin. He tells of a father and his two sons, one of which is dubbed forever as the prodigal.

What made him a prodigal? His reckless lifestyle of squandering money and resources to please his immediate pleasure of the flesh to live lavishly made him so. Not wanting to wait until his father died, one day the younger of the two boys, the prodigal son, went to his father and said, "**Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me,**" (Luke 15:12a). To some modernist, this may not seem like a big deal. Nowadays, some like to give out portions of inheritance so that they can see their kids enjoy what would have been left to them.

But, in Jesus' day, this was an insult. His father was apparently still alive and very vibrant in health. He had many years ahead of him and was nowhere near to being on his death bed. But this selfish son couldn't wait that long. He wanted his portion now. Pushing forth in this manner was not only a disrespectful sentiment toward his own father, but he was seeking

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to usurp the tradition of the older son receiving first. According to law, the older son would also receive a double portion because of his firstborn status (see Deut. 21:17).

The Bible doesn't go into detail about the father's reactions. Was he taken aback by the younger son's request? Did something in his behavior lead the father to believe this day was coming? We don't know. But we do know surprisingly the father agreed to the request and **"he divided unto them his living," (Luke 15:12).** With the word "them" included, we can only assume that both sons at that time received their inheritance.

## THE PRODIGAL'S RIOTOUS LIVING

**Luke 15:13-14** "And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want."

Not wasting much time, **"not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living," (Luke 15:13).** As if his original demanding of an early inheritance was not offensive and dishonorable enough, this rebellious son took all that was now his and left.

He took his father's hard-earned money and resources which he spent a lifetime accumulating and put a huge distance between himself and his family. Instead of loving the father more for what he had received and cleaving to him, he sowed seeds of division. Acting like a spoiled brat (as one would call him today), he separated himself from the reach of his father and his jurisdiction, and off he went **"into a far country," (Luke 15:13).**

Reading the text, we see this younger son's wrong lifestyle and choices caught up with him. Judging by the robe, ring, and feast later given at the end of the parable, I am supposing his father to have been a man of considerable wealth. Meaning his portion of inheritance was no chump change. He had to have arrived at that far country with a considerable sum of money. With one wrong decision leading to another, and then another, extravagantly spending here and there, he squandered his money and **"wasted his substance with riotous living," (Luke 15:13).**

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His irresponsibility went far beyond just misspending and purchasing items without regard. His lifestyle knew no restraint. The son exposed himself to a free-for-all, anything-goes pattern of behavior, he was not privy to under his father's roof. He may not have to answer to his father any longer but, life and the choices he made, will demand one. Eventually, what he sowed he is going to reap (Gal. 6:7) and he will begin to understand the real impact of his actions.

With a famine befalling the country and no longer with the privilege of money and friends at his disposal, **"he began to be in want," (Luke 15:14).** Never in his life did he ever have to go without, but now just the basics of life eluded him, and he was destitute. He was poor beyond measure. One can lack money and still have some sort of familial support or a soul to confide in and depend upon. He had none. His lifestyle didn't promote the faithfulness of human support to see him through his difficult ordeal. Any friends he had probably came and went with his money. Now, his situation is about to get even more desperate.

## THE PRODIGAL HITS AN ALL-TIME LOW

**Luke 15:15-16 "And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him."**

And, as they say, "desperate times call for desperate measures." With that, **"he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine," (Luke 15:15).** Becoming a citizen of a country means you agree to be one of them now. You agree to abide by and uphold their laws and traditions. Depending on the country you could be asked to totally acclimate to their culture and give up all previous markers of identity that made you, you.

In his desperation, he felt he had no choice. He was starving and without residence and he needed to secure employment just to live. Being in no position to negotiate, he had to take what he could even if it was something totally against his upbringing. He had to **feed the swine (Luke 15:15).** The Jewish people do not eat or deal with anything pig related. To them, these unclean creatures were the lowest of the low, and yet his employment now causes him to care for them.

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If his situation couldn't get any lower, we read his desperation was teetering on the side of despair and total hopelessness. With no dignity left, and without regard to propriety, he began to desire the slop the pigs were eating: **"he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave until him," (Luke 15:16).** This is what one calls a rock-bottom scenario. He was about as down as down could get.

How was he to come out of this?

## THE PRODIGAL RETURNS, REPENTS, AND IS RESTORED

**Luke 15:17-24 "And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry."**

After the reality of a situation so bad he was willing to eat the slop of pigs, the prodigal son was hit with an even bigger dose of reality. His destructive lifestyle had taught him a lesson or two the hard way: 1) The grass is not always greener on the other side, and 2) What he had to begin with, was not so bad after all. This is one of those moments when the obvious is made clear and people say if it was a snake it would have bit you.

Therefore, he said, **"How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough to eat and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants," (Luke 15:17-19).**

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It's amazing how a humiliating and humbling experience can open one's eyes to the true blessings that were already there. In his **coming-to-himself** moment, his eyes were opened to many things: 1) His eyes were opened to the fact that even the **servants** in his father's house were better off than him right now. While living there did he ever stop and think about their work or appreciate the fact that he had servants to help care for his home and livelihood, dependable people who worked hard to make sure everything was cared for? He knew that right now they were not in want as he was. He was **perishing with hunger**. Though a son by birth, they fared better than he at this moment; 2) His eyes were opened to **his sin**. He realized, not just for the sake of needing food and a roof over his head, that **he had wronged his father**. His foray out into the world made him realize his blunder. Notice also, he readily admitted that he had not only wronged his father but heaven as well. Sin impacts one's relationships with people and God; 3) His eyes were opened to his now **unworthy** state. Claiming his early inheritance and distancing himself from his father meant he wanted no more dealings with him. He knows he could be disowned from the privilege of being called "**son**." Yet, he is willing, if his father is willing, to secure employment there and work as a "**hired servant**."

He sought a complete turnaround in the life he messed up. With great resolve to get back to where he belongs, "**he arose and came to his father**," (Luke 15:20). Little did he know, despite his selfish behavior his father never stopped loving him and never stopped looking for him. "**When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him**," (Luke 15:20).

This is that type of rejoicing we see in the two previous parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin made even more alive by the returning of the lost son. The father who is representing our heavenly Father has compassion and rejoices over the repentance of the lost. As I stated at the beginning of this article, this has been the whole story of the Bible. Man's lost state meets with God's compassionate redemption. Wow!!

Every time someone leaves the world of sin behind and comes back to the Father, He is overjoyed. Heaven is singing and shouting praises. People matter to God. Lost people are loved by God. His strongest desire is to see them come back home in His loving arms where they belong. What an eye-opening picture this parable presents.

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The son readily admitted his failure to his father and confessed his sins (see Luke 15:21). Thinking to come back as a servant, how big his eyes must have gotten when he heard the command, **“Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry,” (Luke 15:22-24).**

Instead of disowning him and putting him to work, the father received him with joy and restored his position as his son (signified by adorning him with the best robe, ring, and shoes – all markers of his position in the family). This went way beyond his farthest dream could imagine when he was hungering and wishing for at least some pig slop to eat. He was totally restored!

This is God’s end desire for all, including the lost. He wants to welcome them home and put on them the identifying markers that they are His child and they are restored. Those that are spiritually dead He wants to make alive once more. If one finds themselves currently in a prodigal state of living, without hesitation I plead with you to turn back to our heavenly Father and let Him restore you. Experience His compassion of salvation offered through our Lord Jesus Christ.

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TOPIC:

## “The Prodigal Son”

Luke 15:11-24

Please Answer the Review Questions Below

1. **T or F.** It was the younger son that demanded his inheritance early. (Luke 15:12)
2. He “took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with \_\_\_\_\_ living.” (Luke 15:13)  
**A.** Riotous      **B.** Happy      **C.** Reckless   **D.** Prudent
3. There arose a mighty \_\_\_\_\_ in that land; and he began to be in want. (Luke 15:14)  
**A.** Drought      **B.** Abundance      **C.** Storm      **D.** Famine
4. What job did the prodigal son have to take in order to survive? (Luke 15:15)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. What does “**he came to himself**” mean regarding the lesson? (Luke 15:17)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. **Circle two choices.** Who did the prodigal son admit to sinning against? (Luke 15:21)  
**A.** Heaven      **B.** Brother      **C.** Mother      **D.** Father
7. **T or F.** The father had compassion on the prodigal son.
8. **Circle the correct reason the father was happy.** (Luke 15:24)  
**A.** My son was dead, and is alive again.  
**B.** He was lost, and is found.  
**C.** Both

