

Prodigal Son (Luke 15:1-3; 11-32)

Children's Message

Lost and Found; getting what we don't deserve

Written by [Kristen Schmidt](#) for [Ministry-To-Children.com](#)



Main Objective: For young children, the “lost and found” parables can be a little tricky to understand at first. We might not feel lost, or comprehend how it is that the Lord needs to “find” or to save us. This message takes on an angle of grace, emphasizing how we “lose” when we sin, but God loves us enough to seek us out and let us “win”! It is helpful to use the prodigal son story to discuss how God gives us great things even though we have messed up and deserve bad things. Most kids are familiar with rewards and punishments. It seems strange to be rewarded even though we mess up, but that is what the good news of the Gospel is all about!

Law/Gospel Theme: We all make mistakes and do bad things, and because of that we should deserve consequences. When Jesus took our bad things on Himself, it allowed God to take the punishment away from us and let us have Heaven instead. We should give thanks for that and live to God's glory because of the great things He has done.

Optional Materials: Trophy, medal, or certificate, speeding ticket or disciplinary write-up; stickers or small “winner” type ribbons or buttons.

Children's Sermon (Luke 15:1-3; 11-32) Parable of the Prodigal Son

Message: Note: All elements are open to adjustment. Cater to the needs of your group

“Good morning! I hope you're doing well today. I have a couple of things to show you, and I want to see if you can recognize what they might be for. (*hold up a trophy or medal*). What is this? That's right, it's an award. Would you receive this for doing something bad? Of course not! This is a special winner's treat.

Now, what do you think about this one...do you know what this is? (*Display speeding ticket, or maybe a poor report from school if it's more familiar*) This is something your mom or dad might see if they do something wrong while they are driving...and it usually means you have to pay money. You wouldn't expect to get a medal for speeding down the highway. But it sort of happened in the gospel reading today. Someone got what they did not deserve!

You see, the son in the story asked his dad for all of his money, basically. But then he ran away and wasted it. Have you ever disobeyed your parents or done something wrong? (*allow responses if time and children willingness allow*) Well, this guy did much worse things. He pretty much abandoned his family. But eventually, the money and fun times ran out, and he realized he'd made some pretty big mistakes. He thought he could make it and ignore his dad, but finally decided he needed to apologize and hope that maybe he could accept punishment and just live like a servant. He didn't think his dad would even let him back home as a son.

But did you hear what happened? Not only did his dad rejoice when he saw his wandering son, he even through him a party and gave him special presents! He was so happy to see the boy, it was like he hadn't done anything wrong. This may seem strange. Shouldn't we be disciplined when we do bad things? Well, in a lot of ways we should... But, the good news of the Bible is that even though we sin and do bad things, God still lets us be part of His family. It's called "grace." We deserve the punishment that our sins have earned. But when we tell God we're sorry and let Jesus rule in our lives, grace gives us positive rewards instead.

God loves us so much that He wants to find us no matter where we are or how far we stray. Nothing can get us so far away from God that He won't let us back in His arms. And He lets the death of Jesus cover over the things we do. Jesus didn't do anything wrong, so He didn't deserve to die. But He took on the punishment for our bad things, so that we could get the reward of His goodness. That hardly seems fair! But we can thank God that life is not always fair. Just like the Father in the story, God celebrates over us when we come to Him. Isn't that great?

Optional take home: give each child a small "winner" ribbon or star sticker to remind them that we are winners in God's eyes, no matter what we do.

Prayer: Offer thanks that God will has given us grace and let us be part of His family:
(Have kids repeat each line, if desired)

Dear God,
Thank you for your grace
Thank you for forgiving our sins
We know we do bad things
But you still call us your kids!
Thank you for your love, Lord
We love you!
Thanks for sending Jesus
In His name we pray, Amen

Bible Verses to Reference (or for additional exploration):

So the last will be first, and the first last. -Matthew 20:16

Luke 15:1-3 New International Version (NIV)

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. ² But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." ³ Then Jesus told them this parable:

¹¹ Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

¹³ "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. ¹⁴ After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸ I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' ²⁰ So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹ "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

²² "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

²⁵ "Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ²⁷ 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'

²⁸ "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. ²⁹ But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'

³¹ "'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'"

[New International Version \(NIV\)](#)

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