

Parable of the Prodigal Son

Luke 15:11-32

1

October
Week 1

Teacher Background

What Happens: Jesus tells a story about a son who takes his share of his inheritance and leaves home to live a wild life. When the son's money runs out and he's almost starving, he repents and comes home. Before he can even apologize, his father runs and embraces the long-lost son. Jesus was showing that like the father in this story, he loves us no matter what.

Why It Matters: Not all the kids in your class may feel like there's someone who loves them no matter what. Help kids see that no matter what they do, they can never lose Jesus' love.

Think About: Who's a person you know will always love you? How has that person shown you what God's love is like?

Pray for kids to truly sense the fullness of Jesus' love for them.



Point

Jesus loves us no matter what.



Key Verse

"We love each other because he loved us first."

1 John 4:19

QUICK TIP

Not all parents are loving. Some kids may even have experienced some form of abuse at the hands of a trusted adult. For these kids, it's especially difficult to understand or believe that Jesus loves them unconditionally. If kids share anything that indicates abuse, share it with your children's director or pastor.

This Lesson at a Glance



WHAT HAPPENS	KIDS DISCOVER
CHECK IN Connect about the week.	The importance of friendships at church.
SET THE STAGE Share about a topic related to the lesson.	The connection between their world and the Bible.
EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE Reenact the Bible story and celebrate Jesus' love.	Jesus wants to be our lifelong friend.
HANDS-ON DISCOVERY Try to blow a pompom across a line.	Jesus loves us even when we miss the mark.
PLAY A GAME Race toward "home" in different ways.	Jesus welcomes us back even if we run away from him.
PRAY TOGETHER Feel separated from and then welcomed into the circle as they pray.	Jesus' love means he doesn't turn us away.

EASY SUPPLIES

- ☐ Bible
- ☐ paper
- ☐ markers or crayons
- ☐ painter's tape
- ☐ pompoms (1 per child)
- ☐ upbeat music (optional)
- ☐ music player (optional)
- ☐ worship music
- ☐ media player



CHECK IN (5 MINUTES)

- Thank kids for coming and have kids wave at anyone they're not sitting beside.
- Make announcements and collect offering.
- Celebrate any birthdays by having kids say "Yadhtrib yppah" ("happy birthday" backward).

ASK: Tell about something you made recently. Share your own quick story first, and then let everyone share! For groups of more than six, have kids share in pairs so everyone has a turn to talk.



SET THE STAGE (5 MINUTES)

SAY: Today we'll learn about a boy whose dad loved him no matter what. The boy came home after being away.

ASK: Tell about something you're excited to see or do when you get back home today. Share your own quick story first, and then let everyone share!



Hold up a Bible.

SAY: Just like it's nice to come home and get love from our families, it's nice that we can always go to Jesus. ➡ Jesus loves us no matter what! We'll see what the Bible says about Jesus' love because we know everything in the Bible is true and is from God.



EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE (10 MINUTES)



SUPPLIES

- Bible
- paper
- markers or crayons



CELEBRATE SMALL

In this Bible Exploration and through today's entire lesson, you'll explore Jesus' unconditional love. In your discussions with kids, you'll gain valuable insights into how kids do or don't understand or receive that unconditional love. Make the most of your smaller group and really listen to kids' answers and take extra time as needed to allow this amazing truth about Jesus' love sink in.

CRUMPLE AND DESTROY

SAY: We're learning that ➡ Jesus loves us no matter what. Draw something you love about your home. Allow time for everyone to draw.

In today's Bible story, Jesus told a story to make the point that ➡ Jesus loves us no matter what. A story with a point is called a parable.

In Jesus' parable, there was a boy who had a great home with a lot to love, but he decided money was more important. Here's what he did.



Read Luke 15:11-13.

Have everyone crumple their pictures. They can also stomp on them, rip them, and throw them away.

SAY: It wasn't very nice of the son to treat his dad the way we treated our pictures! And then the son started to live wildly.

MAKE UP RULES

ASK: If you could make up a wild rule for your home, what would it be? Share a few examples, such as ice cream for every meal or no chores.

ASK: Why would you like those rules?

ASK: How might it feel after a long time of following those rules?

SAY: It might sound good to have ice cream for every meal or stay up as late as you want. But I bet you wouldn't want that rule if it meant being all alone, far away from your family. And eventually, you'd feel sick from all the ice cream and tired from staying up so late!

That's kind of like what happened to the son in our story.

 Read Luke 15:14-16.

Have kids spread out so they're sitting alone. Ask them to call out things they would miss from home if they were out on their own.

CRAWL HOME

SAY: The son felt very alone and homesick. He remembered how well his dad had treated him...and how well his dad treated the servants!

 Read Luke 15:17-19.

SAY: The son was miserable. He had no money, and he was almost starving! So he decided to head home to apologize.

Have everyone crawl back to where they started as if tired and hungry.

ASK: Tell about a time you had to apologize for something.
Share your own example first, and then have everyone discuss.

SAY: Well, the son didn't expect his father to welcome him as a son, but he hoped he could get a job as a servant. Let's find out.

CELEBRATE

 Read Luke 15:20-21.

Invite kids to hug or high-five each other, as they're comfortable.

ASK: How do you think the son felt when his father welcomed him like that?

ASK: Tell about someone who loves you like that. Share an example first.

SAY: You know who loves you like that? *Jesus!* Remember, this is a parable—a story Jesus told to show how much he loves us.

➡ **Jesus loves us no matter what**, just as the dad loved the son no matter the things he'd done. And the father showed his love by throwing a big party!

 Read Luke 15:22-24.

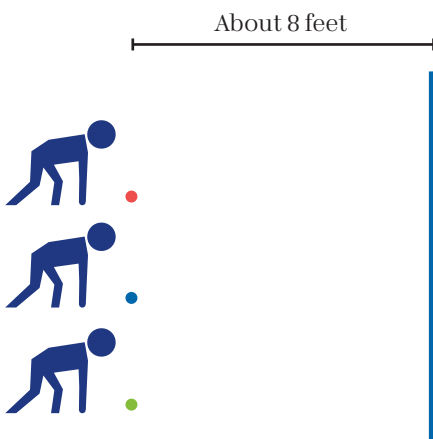
SAY: When people become friends with Jesus, I bet he's so excited! ➡ **Jesus loves us no matter what**, and he's so happy to be a close friend! Let's celebrate, too! Jump up and down and cheer with me! Lead a celebration.

It really is something to celebrate when someone loves us so much. ➡ **Jesus loves us no matter what**. Jesus is a friend whose love sticks with you—whether we're doing great or we mess up.



**SUPPLIES**

- painter's tape
- pompoms (1 per child)

**MOVE POMPOMS**

SAY: You're a pretty amazing, talented group of kids! Let's see if you're talented enough to hit the mark in this challenge.

- Make a tape line near one wall.
- Gather kids at least 8 feet from the line.
- Hand each person a pompom, and have kids sit down and place their pompoms right in front of them.
- Explain that kids have one chance—one breath—to blow the pompom over the tape line. Tell kids they need to put their hands behind their backs and they only get one breath.
- Give everyone a chance to blow the pompom one time.

ASK: Give me a thumbs-up or thumbs-down to show how well you think we did as a group in this activity. How well did we do at hitting the mark? Let kids vote and comment on how (generally) the group felt about how they did.

ASK: What made it so hard to succeed at this? Take responses from the whole group.

ASK: Do you think you could ever get the pompom across the line in one breath? Why or why not?

TALK ABOUT JESUS

SAY: Jesus told a story about a young man who missed the mark. The son in today's Bible story messed up, but his dad still welcomed and loved him. Jesus wanted to show how much God loves us and that ➡ **Jesus loves us no matter what.**

Have kids gather again at least 8 feet from the line, holding their pompoms.

SAY: Now let's imagine our line is a perfect life. Getting your pompom across this line represents finishing life without any sin—without ever telling a lie, hurting someone's feelings, disobeying God, or saying unkind words. We'll imagine this line equals perfection.

ASK: How likely would you be to hit that mark? Why? Have kids talk with a partner. Take a few responses from willing kids.

SAY: ➡ **Jesus loves us no matter what.** He came to show us God's love in the biggest, most important way—he took the punishment for our sins. When we blow it—when we miss the mark—Jesus still loves and forgives us.

Let kids take turns giving their pompoms one blow toward the line. This time, no matter where the pompom lands, give the person a high-five and say, "[Name], Jesus loves you no matter what."



RUNNING FROM HOME

- Gather the kids.
- Designate a place to be “home” in the center of your meeting area.
- If you’re playing indoors, choose a table or chair. If you’re playing outdoors, a tree or picnic table could be your home.

SAY: When I say “go,” you’ll have to count to 10 to run as far away from “home” as you can. After 10 seconds, I’ll call out “Welcome home!” and you’ll run back as fast as you can. Ready? Go!

- Count to 10 and then call out “Welcome home!”
- Then encourage kids to run back to home and you.
- Play again as time allows, each time changing how kids move. For example, kids can run, walk, walk backward, hop, skip, broad jump, crab walk, or bear crawl.
- If you’d like, play music during the game.

SUPPLIES

- upbeat music (optional)
- music player (optional)

QUICK TIP

If you have a wide age gap among your kids, have the younger kids run on one side of your designated “home” and older kids on the other. This will help keep the younger, smaller kids from colliding with bigger kids as they run.

TALK ABOUT IT

ASK: Tell about a time, if ever, you’ve wanted to run away like you did in this game. Share your own example first.

ASK: How do you think Jesus would treat you if you ran away from him?

SAY: Just as you were running away in this game, in the Bible, the younger son ran far from home. Even though the son ran away, his father still loved him. The father welcomed his son back home with open arms. Jesus’ love is like that. ➡ **Jesus loves us no matter what!**



ACTIVITY PAGES WITH A PURPOSE (10 MINUTES)



SUPPLIES

- “Parable of the Prodigal Son” Activity Page (1 per child) (page 111)
- “Parable of the Prodigal Son” Coloring Page (1 per younger child) (page 112)
- crayons

QUICK TIP

For younger kids, provide the Coloring Page and crayons as an alternative.

SAY: Jesus told the story about the son who ran away to show that ➡ **Jesus loves us no matter what.** When we do things our own way like the son in the story, Jesus is ready to welcome us back! Let’s help that lost son find his way home.

Distribute the activity pages and crayons. Have kids determine which path leads home by tracing over their best guess with a crayon. If they get it wrong, they can try tracing another path.

ASK: What happened? Did you get it right the first time?

ASK: How do you feel about your paper showing all your mistakes?

SAY: Not everyone could do this puzzle perfectly the first time. Most of us got it wrong at least once! And that’s OK; it’s just a puzzle.

But we also do wrong things—things that God says not to do. The son was wrong to take his dad’s money and leave, but his father still loved him. And ➡ **Jesus loves us no matter what.**

ANSWER KEY: Path D



PRAY TOGETHER (5 MINUTES)



FACE OUT

Have kids sit in a circle facing out.

SAY: Just like with the son in today’s Bible story, sometimes our choices and attitudes separate us from others. We might feel disconnected or away from other people, kind of like our circle feels right now. You can’t see anyone! But the good news is that nothing can separate us from the love of Jesus.

FACE IN

Have kids turn around, facing into the circle.

SAY: Welcome home! We can all be loved because ➡ **Jesus loves us no matter what.** Talk silently to Jesus right now and thank him for his forever love. Pause briefly for silent reflection. Let’s pray together.

PRAY: Jesus, thank you that you ➡ **love us no matter what.** Thank you for welcoming us, just like the father welcomed his son. We love you! In your name, amen.