

# A Good Shepherd **Parable**

## The Prodigal Son

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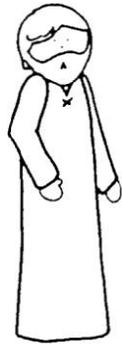
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## **THE PRODIGAL SON .... MATERIALS**

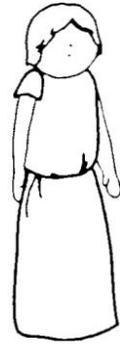
- parable box containing:
  - tan felt rectangular underlay
  - brown felt road
  - laminated city scene
  - laminated pig pen scene
  - laminated father figure
  - laminated older son figure
  - laminated younger son figure
  - 2 laminated money pouches



Father



Older Son



Younger Son

## THE PRODIGAL SON .... LUKE 15:11-32

### ACTIONS

After speaking, walk slowly to the shelf and pick up the parable box with two hands. Return to your place in the circle.

After speaking, gently trace the outline of the box. Sit in silence as you concentrate on the box and gather your words for the story.

Rest your hands lightly on the box, touching it reverently.

Slowly shake your head and smile.

Nod your head confidently.

Raise your eyebrows and shake your head.

Lift the lid just slightly.

Unfold and smooth the tan underlay. Then put the brown road across the underlay from the center to the left side. Place the city scene above the road toward the left side and the pig pen scene below the road toward the left side.

### WORDS

Watch carefully where I go to get this story. Then, if you choose to make this your work today or another day, you will always know where to find it.

All of the words to this story are inside of me because I have made this story my own. Will you make silence with me, please, so I can find all of the words to this story?

This is a parable box. I wonder if there is really a parable inside this box?

You see parables are very precious.

This box looks a bit like a gift.

Parables are like gifts. We can't go buy one, or even rent one, like we do a movie. Parables already belong to us.

And like gifts, we don't always know what's inside by looking at the box.

We have to take the lid off. If we take the lid off our box, maybe we will discover a parable.

Once there was a man who said such amazing things and did such wonderful things that people began to follow him. And some of the people said, "We don't understand why you spend so much time with people who do things that make you sad." And the man said to the people:

Place the father and two sons on the right end of the underlay.

Place a money pouch near each son.

Move the younger son and money pouch to the left on the road then into the city. Place the money pouch back into the parable box when you say "he had none left".

Shake your head.

Put the younger son near the pigs.

Put the younger son in pen with pigs.

Move the younger son to the right on the down road toward home.

Move the father out on the road to meet the younger son. Put arms around self for a hug.

Shake your head slowly.

Once there was a man who had two sons.

The younger son decided that he wanted the money that would be his when his father died.

And the father gave him his money and gave the older son his money.

Very soon the younger son took his money and went far away to another country. He wasted his money until he had none left.

Soon the younger son became very hungry. He had no food to eat. He had no money to buy food.

He got a job taking care of pigs for a farmer.

He was so hungry he would have eaten the garbage the pigs ate, but no one would even give him that.

Then he decided, "My father's servants at least have food. I'll go home and tell my father that I did so many things wrong I know he won't want me for a child. I will be his servant." And he went home.

When the younger son came near his home his father saw him. And the father loved him very much. He ran out to see him and hug him and give him a kiss.

And the younger son said, "Father, I made a big mistake. I did things that made you sad and made God sad. I'm not good enough to be called your child."

Smile and hold hands out in front of your chest as though receiving a gift.

Move the father and younger son to the right side of the underlay.

Move the older son and his money pouch to upper right of underlay.

Move father next to the older son.

Open hands and arms wide as you say "everything I have .... "

But the father said to his servants, "Get the best clothes and shoes and put them on him. Put a ring on his finger and prepare the best food. I am so happy. I thought my son was dead, but for me he is alive again. He was lost and now he is found."

And all of the people had a party.

But when the older son heard what happened, he was angry. He wouldn't go to the party.

His father came out and asked him to come and join the other people.

But the older son said, "I've been such a good son. I've worked hard and never disobeyed you. But I never had a party like this. It's not right that my brother, who ran away and disobeyed, gets a party."

And his father said, "You've always been with me. Everything I have is yours. But it's right for us to be happy and celebrate. Your brother was gone away like a dead person, but now we know he is alive. He was lost, but now he is found."

### **WONDERING QUESTIONS:**

I wonder what it was like to have no food?

I wonder how it felt to want to eat with pigs?

I wonder if the younger son was scared of his father?

I wonder if the older son ever forgave his brother?

Place all the laminated pieces in the parable box. Then put in the brown felt road.

Beginning at either side fold the underlay to the other side.

Repeat the side to side fold.

Carefully, place the top edge against the bottom edge and place it in the box.

After speaking, carry the parable box back to its shelf. Place it carefully on the shelf and return to the circle.

Go around the circle having each child choose their work. Dismiss the children ONLY when all have chosen their work.

Watch very carefully how I put these materials away if you choose to make them your work today or another day.

This is a large piece to fold. But it has straight edges so that helps. If we take this edge and put it by this edge, then we have made another straight edge.

Let's do that one more time.

Now, if we put this top part by the bottom part it should be ready. There ... it fits.

Watch carefully where I return this parable so you will be able to find it if you decide to make this your work today or another day.

I wonder what you will make your work today? Let's go around the circle and decide.

## **THE PRODIGAL SON .... TEACHER HELPS**

The parable of the prodigal son is a favorite of clergy, lay persons and scholars. It has often been given other titles, such as "The Lost Son", "The Forgiving Father" and "The Loving Father". I believe it is a favorite because it is a parable that has maintained its relevancy through the ages and because we all rejoice in the unconditional love and grace shown to the younger son.

This story of a lost son is one of a group of parables in Luke. At the beginning of Luke 15 the Pharisees and scribes are "murmuring", complaining among themselves, that Jesus is sitting and eating with sinners and tax collectors. The Pharisees did not see themselves as sinners. And they considered the tax collectors despicable. The Roman government taxed the Jewish people, but they appointed or hired local publicans (people who collected public revenue) to actually collect the taxes. The Jews who collected the taxes could add any surcharge they wanted to the actual tax they were to collect. Most of the time tax collectors charged much more than was fair and became wealthy at the expense of others. The Jews considered the tax collector's money unclean so they wouldn't touch the change offered. If they did not have the right change for taxes, they borrowed from friends. (The Bible Almanac; J.I. Packer, Merrill C. Tenney, William White, Jr.; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1980. p. 530) Good Jews would not even associate with the tax collectors.

So the setting for this parable is one that has Jesus associating with those considered unclean, much to the disgust of the Pharisees and scribes. In this setting Jesus told several parables, one of which was "The Prodigal Son".

The main teaching of this lesson for the children is the overwhelming love of the father. We try to emphasize that no matter what the son had done, when he came back the father was overjoyed to see him. The father never tells the son "I told you so", nor does he make any references to the money wasted. Rather the father celebrates the life of his son. He had thought the son was probably dead. He'd been sure he would never see his son again. The story makes the son as undesirable as the tax collectors. If he worked with pigs, an unclean animal, it would not even have been possible for the son to remain true to his Jewish rituals for being clean. So the son would have lost his right and ability to go into the synagogue to worship.

The secondary teaching of the story of the lost son is the reaction of the older son. Many children will be more comfortable with the response of the older son than with that of the father. If they have siblings, they will especially understand the older son's feelings that his father's actions were "unfair".

By using this parable the author tries to help us understand that law and ritual were not as important to Jesus as people. Jesus was concerned for each and every person, no matter how they were ranked by Jewish religious leaders. For Luke, especially, it was important that the world understand that Jesus came for all people, not just for the Jews. Our emphasis today is much the same. There is no person who cannot have the love of the man who said amazing things and did wonderful things. Then each of us is to rejoice when any new person joins the family of God.

The wondering questions in this parable move from the simplest to the more difficult. The last two questions will probably appeal more to older children with younger children more responsive to the first two questions. There may be a child who asks what happened to the younger son. Did he ever get money from his father again? Did his father make him work for it or was he just given another share of his father's wealth? We don't know the answers to those questions. But the parable would indicate that the father was willing to wipe the slate clean and start again. The power of Jesus' love is that it is so very radical and filled with grace that each of us get more than we can ever deserve. It may be interesting and fun to have some of the older children get together after the story circle and come up with a new ending to the story. Do the brothers ever talk to each other again? Does the father offer more money to the younger son? The sanctified imagination can be allowed a free reign with this story.

#### SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR OLDER CHILDREN:

The son who went away from home didn't believe his father would want him back because he wasted all the money he'd been given. How did the father feel about the money the son had

wasted? Why is it important that we never read anything about the father speaking of that money after the son returns?

For the son who left home, the hardest thing to do was to decide to come back and work for his father. Think of the times you've disagreed with your parents. What is the hardest thing for you to do after you've had an argument?

If we pretend that God is the forgiving father in this story, who is the son? If we are the son, then what do we learn about how God feels about us?

Who are you most like in the story: the father, the son who left home, or the son who stayed home? Why?