**Group Session**

Small Group Study

**Leader Overview**

*The heart of our Father God is displayed through this well-known and enriching story in Scripture: the Parable of the Prodigal (Lost) Son. Today’s discussion takes us on the journey of the son as he finds redemption through the love and compassion of his father.*

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| ***You Will Need**** *Optional: Worship song about the Father and His grace, mercy, or forgiveness, and a way to play it*

***Getting Ready**** ***First time leading* Listen *for Youth? Look here for the* Facilitator Guide.**
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**Engage**

**Welcome**

*Take this time to welcome everyone, introduce first-time guests, learn names, and thank everyone for coming.*

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| **QUESTION**What was the best part of the last week for you? |

**Opening Prayer**

*Prayer thoughts: Thank God that He is our Heavenly Father and cares for each of us with a perfect love. Thank Him for the opportunity to grow in our understanding of Him as a perfect Father. Pray for everyone present and their families. Pray for your church and the schools represented by the students in your group.*

**Introduction**

Father God—for some, referring to God as Father may be tough to think about. Some of us didn’t have good examples of what a good father is all about. I understand that, but it doesn’t have to ruin our view of the Heavenly Father. He is a loving Father who cares for us beyond anything we can imagine. The parable we’re about to look at gives us a great picture of God’s love, forgiveness, and grace toward us.

Before we listen to this parable, let’s find out what a parable is.

**Did You Know?**

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| A parable is a story used to illustrate a truth. Depending on how you count them, there are over thirty parables recorded in the Gospels. The Prodigal Son is one of these parables shared by Jesus.  |

**Group Activity**

**One Wish**

We’re going to look at a parable Jesus told that gives us an idea of what God the Father is like. The Parable of the Prodigal or Lost Son tells the story of a son who made a request of his father before leaving and the journey the son took as a result.

So, just for fun, let’s do something similar. If you had one wish, what would it be? You can’t ask for more wishes or unending anything. One wish, one item. Who would like to go first?

• *Allow students to respond.*

Let’s see what we can pick up from the video.

**Watch**



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| **QUESTION**What stood out to you from this video? |

**Consider**

*Ensure each student has access to a Bible, preferably the same version.*

**The Prodigal Son**

Read Luke 15:11–16.

Like the guy in the video, many people call this the Parable of the Prodigal or Lost Son. The word *prodigal* describes someone who gives away extravagantly or wastefully. The younger son in Jesus’ story was a wasteful son. It seems like he was quite the inconsiderate one as well.

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| **QUESTION**What did the younger son ask of his father? What did the father do? |

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| **QUESTION**Why do you think the father honored his request? |

Could you imagine asking your parents for your part of an inheritance before they’ve even died? That’s almost like you’re telling them you wish they were dead. In only a couple verses, Jesus has told us a lot about the character of this son.

We can also surmise from the parable that the father had a considerable amount of wealth. As we continue to read the parable, you will see that he had land, livestock, and servants. All of these indicate the father was wealthy. The son, living in his father’s house, already had access to all that belonged to his father. Yet he wanted his part to use as he saw fit, and he wanted it now.

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| **QUESTION**What attitudes do you believe the son had that caused him to want to leave home? |

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| **QUESTION**What happened when his money ran out? |

**The Son Comes to His Senses**

Read Luke 15:17–21.

After the younger son came to his senses, he decided to go back home. He must have been pretty desperate to go back there. Not only was he returning to the father he disrespected, but he was also returning empty-handed after wasting his inheritance portion of his father’s wealth. Life had completely humiliated him. Let’s consider how this went down.

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| **QUESTION**What three things did the son plan to say to his father? |

It probably wasn’t a bad plan. But he probably never expected the reaction he got from his father.

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| **QUESTION**How did the father respond when he saw his son? |

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| **QUESTION**How do you think that made this younger son feel? |

**The Father’s Reaction**

Read Luke 15:22–24.

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| **QUESTION**What did the father tell the servants to do now that his younger son had returned? |

By putting the robe, ring, and sandals on his son, his father made a strong statement. He was proclaiming, “You are my son, and I call you worthy!” The father welcomed his son back into the family, fully and completely.

Remember, the younger son had taken his part of the father’s inheritance. All that was left of the father’s wealth after his death would eventually go to the older son.

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| **QUESTION**How do you think the older brother felt about his portion of the inheritance being used to celebrate the return of a brother who wasted his? |

Let’s see how the older brother responded.

**The Angry Brother**

Read Luke 15:25–32.

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| **QUESTION**How did the older brother respond to the celebration? |

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| **QUESTION**Why did the father tell him they had to celebrate? |

The father had longed for his son to come home. It was a moment that deserved celebrating—a family reunited. The older brother couldn’t see beyond his selfish anger to join in a moment that should have been full of happiness.

One thing that’s very interesting about this story is that Jesus told it in response to some religious leaders complaining about Him being around “such sinful people” (Luke 15:2). In reality, those “sinful people” came to hear Jesus, and Jesus was sharing His love and truth with them. But, like the older brother in the story, these religious leaders couldn’t get past their feelings about the crowd to see the beauty of Jesus bringing these outcasts back into God’s family.

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| **QUESTION**Do you think the religious leaders figured out that the older brother in Jesus’ story reflected their attitudes? Why or why not? |

**Reflect**

**The Heart**

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| **QUESTION**What do you think the son felt as he saw the father running toward him? |

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| **QUESTION**What do you think the father felt as he ran to his formerly lost son? |

Jesus needed a way to convey to people who His Father, God, was. Like those who listened to this parable firsthand, He also wants us to understand the heart of His Father.

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| **QUESTION**What do you think does Jesus wants us to learn about God’s fatherly heart? |

This parable shows us just how forgiving, loving, and merciful our Heavenly Father is. God’s love is much more than we deserve or can even imagine. Not only will our Father take us back, He is willing to move and meet us as soon as we turn to Him.

**Our Prodigal Story**

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| **QUESTION**How do you think God feels when we make a bad decision or sin? |

It’s clear in the Bible that God loves people in general. But some people struggle with whether or not God feels the same way about them and their life decisions as He does others. This parable makes it clear that even though we’ve turned our back on Him and done wrong against Him, He is eager to forgive and embrace.

• *You may want to have a personal story to share for the following questions. You can go as deep as you feel comfortable going, but avoid sharing too many details.*

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| **QUESTION**Have you ever done something that you later regretted? Would anyone be willing to share what happened? |

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| **QUESTION**Do any of you feel like God is disappointed, frustrated, or angry with you? |

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| **QUESTION**What’s going on to make you feel this way? |

* *This is a great opportunity for ministry at this point. Be ready. Also, skip ahead to the Salvation Opportunity if you feel a student is interested in making a decision to follow Jesus.*

 **Digging Deeper (Optional)**

The Parable of the Prodigal Son is one of three stories Jesus told in Luke 15 that deal with something being lost and then found. One of the other three is referred to as the Parable of the Lost Coin.

**The Lost Coin**

Read Luke 15:8–10.

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| **QUESTION**How is this parable different from the Parable of the Prodigal Son? |

In this parable, a woman loses a coin and diligently searches for it. This parable reveals that God is also willing to search for those who are lost.

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| **QUESTION**How is this parable similar to the Prodigal Son parable? |

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| **QUESTION**What do these parables indicate happens in heaven when someone repents of their sin? |

**Activate**

*If desired, close with a worship song about the Father and His grace, mercy, or forgiveness. Challenge students to run to the Father anytime they sin.*

**Conclusion**

Our Father, God, is a loving Father and wants us to know Him as such. This is just one reason Jesus shared this parable. Be assured that no matter how far you’ve fallen into sin, your Father in heaven is ready to forgive and welcome you home.

The good news is that this doesn’t just apply to us. This same message is for everyone, and we can share this good news with our family and friends.

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| **Salvation Opportunity***Include this if you think there may be some in the group who do not have a personal relationship with Jesus.***Maybe you’ve never thought of God as a Father who loves you. Maybe you’ve never realized that He is waiting to welcome you into His family. If you have never put your trust in God, I want to make sure you have a chance to receive Jesus as your personal Savior.****God the Father sent Jesus to save us because He loves us. He knows everything about us, including the choices we’ve made in life. Yet He still wants to be a part of our life and lead us toward the amazing future He created for us.****Is there anyone here that we can pray for who doesn’t have a relationship with Jesus or wants to renew their relationship with Him?***Take a moment to acknowledge those who respond, and thank them for their desire to make things right between themselves and God. Pray with them now or after the group time is over. Following group time, talk more about where they are in their walk with God and how you might be able to help.* |

In a moment, we’ll close in prayer. As we do, let’s all pray for the individuals who surrendered their lives to Jesus.

**Prayer**

Heavenly Father, thank You for showing us the depths of Your love and forgiveness. We ask that You forgive our sins and help us grow in our understanding of Your love. We also pray that You would equip us to share this love of Yours with others. In the Name above all names. Amen.

Next time we will see a different aspect of Jesus. Come ready to experience Jesus in a whole different way.