

The Parable of the Prodigal Son

FOR THE TEACHER:

This lesson is designed to help the kids think about how everyone has a relationship with the Father, through Jesus Christ and how our thoughts and actions impact that relationship. Whether we sin or not, and whether we forgive others or not, we are all still adopted into the life of the Trinity. But learning to live as the Father's children, without hurting others and by being willing to forgive, is what makes life fun and makes relationships work.

Questions marked with an asterisk (*) are part of the Trinitarian Catechism.

FIRST ACTIVITY: Magnet Fun. For this activity, you will need a large magnet, smaller magnets and several small paperclips. Show the kids how magnets sometimes repel each other. Then show how they attract each other. Discuss how sometimes we are like the magnets - sometimes we get along and sometimes we butt heads. Next, place the small paperclips in the center of the table. Tell the kids the large magnet represents Jesus and the paperclips represent us. Have the kids take turns using the large magnet to pick up all the paperclips on the table. Once all the paperclips are connected to the Jesus magnet, put the paperclips back on the table for the next kid to try. As each child is picking up the paperclips discuss how Jesus includes and draws us all together to himself.

Activity Lesson: Jesus has included us all by drawing us to him. The better we treat each other, the more fun the life we have with Jesus and each other will be.

SCRIPTURE LESSON: Ask for a helper to pass out a bible to each child. Have them all turn to Luke 15:11-32. (Since this passage is lengthy, use a children's bible that tells the story in a shorter version for smaller kids.) For older kids, have them take turns reading.

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 men 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 men.' 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.' "

PRIMARY LESSON: Both sons are their Father's sons. It doesn't matter what they do or don't do, they are both included in their Father's life and he loves them both. The decisions they make determine the quality of relationship they will have with their Father and with each other.

SECOND ACTIVITY: Forgiveness. Ask the kids -

"Did the father in the story forgive his son?" (Yes.)

"Did the brother in the story forgive his brother?" (No)

"What was the consequence of the older brother not forgiving his younger brother?" (The older son missed out on a great party.)

"Did the father want both of his sons to come to the party or just one of them?" (Both)

"When someone has hurt us and we choose not to forgive them, who does it hurt?" (Both People)

"Are we all included in Jesus' family even if we don't forgive each other?" (Yes! Remind the kids about the magnet activity.)

Take the kids to a large open area either outside or inside. Divide them up into two teams. Mark a boundary line that the kids have to run to. Tell the kids that not forgiving someone that has hurt you causes both people to be handicapped. For this activity, tell the kids they are going to pretend that the other team has hurt them in some way and they choose not to forgive them. Their "handicap" is that they can

only use one leg in the race AND they have to link arms with a person from the opposite team. Both kids that have linked arms have to skip to the boundary line and back. Once they get back, the next two kids from each team can link arms and skip to the line and back until all kids have completed the race. Ask -

"Was it easy to try and win the race by skipping on one leg and linking arms?" (No)

"What would have made the race more fun?" (Being able to run with both legs; not being handicapped.)

"What do we have to do to get rid of our handicap?" (Forgive others).

Have the kids race again by running to the line and back with no handicaps.

Activity Lesson: We have all been adopted and are brothers and sisters. Choosing not to forgive someone makes it difficult to have fun and build relationships.

PRAYER: For older kids, have one of them pray this prayer (or come up with their own). For younger kids, have them repeat after you as you read the prayer.

Father in heaven, thank you for including us all in your life through Jesus. Thank you, Jesus, for not leaving anyone out of the Kingdom. Holy Spirit, please help us to reach out to other people and include them in our lives the way we have all been included in your life with the Father and the Son. In Jesus' name, Amen.