

TEXT Luke 15:11-24

OBJECTIVE The students will be able to explain how the parable of the prodigal son depicts the spiritual condition of many people today. They should be able to parallel the forgiveness the prodigal son received when he admitted his need, to the forgiveness a sinner finds when he returns to God.

KEY VERSE FOR ANSWER Come, and let us return unto the LORD. — Hosea 6:1

KEY VERSE FOR SEARCH And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. — Luke 15:21

RESOURCE MATERIAL Tract No. 51 — Prayed Out - Stayed Out

**ANSWER
TITLE:** **Back to Father's House**
**SEARCH
TITLE:** **The Prodigal Son**

REFERENCE INFORMATION

Swine were considered unclean, and were forbidden as food in Israel. As a Jew, the prodigal son must have detested these swine, but in a foreign country and at the point of starvation, feeding them was the only available job. In the eyes of any Jew, he could stoop no lower.

The prodigal son was so hungry he would have eaten the

pods or husks that were fed to the pigs. These were probably carob pods which come from the locust tree. The pods grow six to ten inches long and are very bitter when green. But as they ripen, they take on a darker color and a sweet syrup forms inside. In Jesus' time, these pods were used to feed swine and cattle. The poor people also ate them because they were cheap.

YOUR OPENER

The Prodigal Son

TEXT: Luke 15:11-24

KEY VERSE: And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. — Luke 15:21

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RESPONSES

1. The students will likely conclude that the son's leaving home was an act to throw off parental restraints and control. In the same manner, Adam and Eve in their original state had everything they could hope for, yet they did not want to abide by the condition which would perpetuate their tranquility.

2. As your students draw a parallel between the prodigal son and a person's moving away from Christianity, the thought should be brought out that the steps may seem small at first. In the case of a backslider, it may be a lack of reading the Bible or praying, then the Lord's work becoming less of a priority, a lack of respect for other Christians, ignoring the authority of the ministry, justification of unrighteous behavior.

3. The young man had wasted all that was given him by his father, and was impoverished by riotous living. He was driven to extremes— feeding swine and desiring to eat their husks. Ask your students to compare this to those whose lives are dissipated by sin. The results of drunkenness, avarice, pride, profligacy, etc., might be likened to the husks.

4. Nothing was provided by his friends. In trying to find a solution to his problems, he "joined himself to a citizen of that country." Ask your students to compare this to the one who finds himself in trouble in the world of sin. In many cases, his initial reaction is not to turn to God. He likely will strive to alleviate his problems in some manner of his own devising. Was the attempt of the young man in the parable successful? No, he found himself reduced to the level of the pigs he was feeding. The answer will show that sin is a cruel thing.

The prodigal son may have enjoyed the pleasures of sin, but it was only "for a season." Sin, as he discovered, has a kickback. The straits into which the prodigal son was brought in the far country is a typical example of the degradation which a man can reach who has cast to the winds the restraints of Christian teaching. His only hope is to come to himself and ask forgiveness of the One against whom he has rebelled.

1. Since there was plenty at his father's house, what motive prompted the young man to leave?

2. Arriving at his destination in a "far country" was not an instantaneous happening. The prodigal son went step by step, farther and farther away from his father's house. Each step was an act of will, another decision or action which took him even farther from the benefits and blessings of home. Parallel this to the steps taken by one who is moving away from the blessings and benefits of Christianity.

3. We read that the young man had "spent all." What is meant by that expression? Draw a spiritual parallel, explaining why sin is expensive.

4. When the young man was in want, what was provided for him by his friends? What was his initial attempt to help himself?

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION NOTES

5. What does the phrase, "he came to himself" mean?

6. What did the young man resolve to do, and how can we liken this to the actions of a sinner who wants out of the life of sin?

7. How was the son received by the father? How does the heavenly Father receive the repentant sinner?

8. The first request the son had made was "Father, give me . . ." inferring that he felt he had some rights to his father's possessions. What request was the young man proposing to ask of his father when he left the "far country" and what change of attitude did this show?

9. Who would you say is the most outstanding character in the lesson and why?

5. In contemplating his situation, the young man realized he was in dire straits, and in desperate need of help. The depth of his need made him face the facts, which to this point he would not do. Ask your students to parallel this to the experience of the sinner when he realizes the awfulness of his condition and acknowledges the need of a complete about-face in his life. The young man would never have started toward home had he not come to this realization. Just so, the sinner can never come to God until he recognizes his wretched condition through the convicting hand of God.

6. He resolved to return to his father's house and confess that he had done wrong. Likewise, a sinner must resolve to turn to God, forsake his evil ways, confess that he has sinned, and ask forgiveness. Ask your class members what followed the resolve of the young man in our parable. They should bring out that the resolve was followed by action. The sinner, too, must do more than purpose to do right. He must repent and come to his heavenly Father for pardon. See Isaiah 55:7.

7. The father saw his son a great way off and had compassion, and ran to meet him. He fell on his neck and kissed him, receiving him with joy. The class will see that the love of the father reached out to the son in such a measure that he offered no word of rebuke, no criticism of the son's neglect or past behavior. He accepted his son home with words of welcome and a heart full of thanksgiving. Such is the love of our heavenly Father. Have your students note, however, that though the father loved the son deeply, he did not compel him to come home. This had to be the son's decision. He left of his own choice, and he had to return by his own free will.

8. The proposed request was to have been "Father . . . make me as one of thy hired servants." The son realized that he had relinquished his rights to his father's love or anything that his father had. Ask your group what response this radical change in the son's attitude brought forth from the father. They should respond that he called for his servants to bring the best robe, the ring, the shoes, and to kill the fatted calf. The point of this discussion should be to show that when man is willing to settle for God's will in his life, God will give him more than he could ever hope for.

9. While the parable is generally considered the parable of the prodigal son, and he is the central character, yet your students may conclude that the far-reaching and selfless love of the father demonstrated a quality of love that could be equated with that of our heavenly Father. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (1 John 3:1). When the son was willing to settle for nothing, the father gave him everything.

YOUR WRAP-UP

SUPPLEMENTAL QUESTIONS

In the parable, why do you think that the younger son of the wealthy man wanted to leave home? What caused him to make this decision?

What do you think makes people today want to leave the Christian way and forsake God?

Why does God let people go off in the way that they plan when they decide to leave the Gospel?

What does "came to himself" (verse 17) mean? What did it take for the prodigal son to realize his sin?

What would it take today for the backslider (a person who has removed himself from God) to realize his sinful mistake?

Describe the condition and the attitude of the prodigal son when he arrived home. What was the first thing he did?

What must the attitude of a backslider be when he returns to God?

It must have hurt the father when the younger son took his possessions and left. How do you suppose God feels when we ignore His will and choose our own way?

What do you think were some of the characteristics that the prodigal son might have had when he left his father's house?

Do you think a person would have to go as deep into sin as Peter, Cliff and Ron (the young men in the ANSWER story) did in order to be considered a "prodigal"? How might a Sunday school boy or girl be a prodigal?

THINGS TO DO

For young juniors, bring some magazine pictures illustrating things for which the prodigal might have spent his money in our day— for example: luxurious car, home, entertainment. Discuss how these items went as he wasted his money, putting the story into terms of our daily living . . . his car was repossessed, he had to sell his home at a loss, etc.

Have a mini-skit at the beginning of class with several children acting out the characters in the story. Talk about what could have been different to make a happier story.

The following activity can be started in a couple of ways. One way would be to send an assignment home with each child the week before this lesson. Have each child draw a different picture from the list below and tell them to bring it back the next Sunday. Use these pictures to teach the lesson. Another way would be to take three to five minutes at the beginning of class to have the children draw pictures, then teach from the pictures. You could put the pictures on a bulletin board for others to see after class.

1. Draw what you think the man's two sons looked like.
2. Draw what you think the prodigal son looked like when he first went to the city.
3. Draw what you think the prodigal son looked like when he was feeding the pigs.
4. Draw what you think the father looked like when his son left.
5. Draw what you think the father looked like when his son returned.

Answers for ANSWER

