The Prodigal Son

Game Workshop: Moved by the Spirit

Scripture: Luke 15: 11-32

Key Verse for this lesson: "Dear friends, since God loved us this much, we must love each other" -- I John 4:11  CEV

Concepts:
1. God loves us even when we do wrong things.
2. When we are truly sorry God forgives us.
3. Making bad choices can hurt yourself and others.
4. God doesn't want us to be jealous even when things don't seem fair.
5. God wants us to be thankful for what we have.

Objectives:
Children will:
1. Find the story of the Prodigal Son in their Bibles.
2. Know the story in detail.
3. Be able to define a parable as a story told by Jesus to teach his listeners something.
4. Understand that the Prodigal Son is a parable told by Jesus to teach his listeners about God's love and forgiveness.

Procedure
Welcome and Introductions:
1. Introduce yourself and tell the children they’re going to play a game in which they'll need to know the story of the Prodigal Son in detail.
2. Open with a brief prayer, thanking God for the day and asking for help in learning.

Scripture/Bible Story:
1. Be sure to call this the story of the Prodigal Son. The kids need to recognize the name when they hear the story referred to elsewhere. Be prepared to define "prodigal" if anyone asks.

2. If necessary, review the organization of the Bible: The Bible is divided into two big parts, the Old and New Testaments. Each part is made up of books, which are divided into chapters and verses. Have them figure out whether Luke is in the Old or the New Testament (about Jesus so it’s NT). Show them that if they open their Bible
in the middle, they'll usually land in the book of Psalms in the OT. Point out that the book name is at the top of each page. After finding Psalms, if they then take the pages on the right side and divide them in half, they'll land somewhere in one of the four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) first four books of the New Testament. From that point they can find Luke. (Some of the older children should know the books of the Bible. Encourage everyone to learn them.)

After they've found Luke, help them find chapter 15, then verse 32. Write on the board, “Luke 15:32.” Some of the children will confuse chapters and verses. Show them that chapter numbers are the big ones, and also are at top of every page.

3. Emphasize that this is a parable – a story told by Jesus to teach people something about God or about how he wants us to live.

For grades 1-4, read the story to them, or tell it in your own words. You might let them help you tell the story if they are familiar with it. For grades 5-6, you might let the children take turns reading the story. Remind them they need to pay close attention to the details in order to be able to play the game. (If you can draw recognizable pictures, here's a suggestion for helping first- and second-graders remember the details: While telling the story, hold up single-picture flash cards – a pig when the son feeds the pigs, a ring when the father gives the son a ring, etc.)

Older children: If you have time and they are attentive, here are a few points you might include when reviewing the story. Some of the questions in the game refer to these items; so if you don’t talk about them in the session you might skip those questions in the game:

· Luke 15: 1-2) Jesus is telling the parable to Pharisees and scribes – Jews who obeyed all the laws (like the older brother) but disapproved of Jesus associating with tax collectors and sinners who were outcasts from decent society.

· Under the Jewish inheritance laws, the younger son would be entitled to 1/3 of his father’s property; the older son would get 2/3. The property would be mostly in the form of land, not money, so the father might have had to split up the family farm in order to give the younger son his share. This might have caused hardship for the family.

· Feeding pigs would be the lowest, most despicable job for a Jew. Pigs were considered unclean under Jewish law.

· The robe was symbol of honor.

· The ring was a symbol of power of attorney. Wearing his father’s ring, the son could act legally in his father’s name.
Discuss the meaning of the story. At least be sure they all understand that the father
represents God and the sons represent people. Also that Jesus is telling the story
and is not a character in the story. Analogies are not easy for the younger kids to
grasp. If you have time, you might use these questions for discussion or follow up
with them at the end of the game so you have enough time to play:

- Who is the father in the story like?
- How is the father like God?
- The younger son in the story thought he didn’t need his father, and went his own
  way. Do we ever act that way toward God? What are some things we do when we
  wander away from God?
- What does God want us to do when we do something wrong?
- Why was the older brother upset? Do you ever feel that things aren’t fair, because
  somebody else is getting something that you deserve more? Suppose you know
  somebody you think has been living a very bad life, and they feel sorry and ask God
  for forgiveness. How does God want us to treat that person?
- What should the Pharisees have learned from this story?

**Application:**

Break the class into several teams of three to five players (you might call them the
Scribes, the Pharisees, the Prodigals, the Older Brothers, or whatever else you can
come up with). Line the teams up. The teams will take turns spinning the game
wheel, then choosing a question from the hat. Let the first person in line for the team
spin while another team member draws the question and hands it to you without un-
folding it, because the answer is also on the paper (if you’re in a hurry, draw the
questions yourself). Give the player about 1 minute to answer the question. He can
ask his team for help, but he is the only one who can give the answer. Keep score
on the white board. If the player answers the question alone, his team gets the num-
ber of points he spun for. If the team helps him, they get half the points. No points for
wrong answer. (If they are taking too long to answer, give them a one-minute limit
and get the shepherd to time the game using the timer in the supply bin. Adjust the
time limit if it turns out to be too short/too long). After the team’s turn, the player who
spun goes to the end of his team’s line.

**Alternatives:**
- Let the rest of the team, but not the spinner, use their Bibles during the game. As
  above, award ½ points if the team helps answer the question.
- Instead of drawing questions at random, just use the sheet of questions and call
  them out in order. The point is for them to learn the story, and their knowledge might
be reinforced better if the questions follow the sequence of events (especially for the younger children, and for everybody in the earlier workshops). Take note of how much they seem to understand the story, and use your judgment for the game.

· For grades 3-6, you might add some open-ended questions that don’t have a right or wrong answer: What better decision could the younger son have made? Who in the story is your favorite character and why? Etc. Award points for any answer.

Two sets of questions are at the end of the lesson plan. They are basically the same questions but the easier format is multiple choice. Have both sets ready and be prepared to switch from one set to the other, depending on how well the children are doing in the game. A few questions, especially those near the end of the list, are fairly difficult or else involve interpretation.

Note: The questions were written using the New Revised Standard Version.

Wrap-up:
Recite the Bible memory verse. ”Dear friends, since God loved us this much, we must love each other.” -- I John 4:11
Ask the children how they think the verse relates to the story of the prodigal son.

Reflection Time:
Ask the children to write or draw what they think Jesus was trying to teach when he told this story.

Closing:
Prayer – Ask for prayer concerns. Close with prayer, including any concerns mentioned and expressing thanks for God’s love and forgiveness.

Materials:
Timer
Dry-erase marker
A hat or other container for game questions.
Game questions, cut apart and folded.

Timing:
10:00  Students Arrive - Introductions
10:03  Lesson is underway
10:15/20  The game should be starting so they get at least 15 minutes to play.
10:35  Wrap-up Time
10:44  Students leave for Closing
“Prodigal Son”

Questions for game

In the parable, how many sons did the man have? (2)

Which son (older or younger) went away? (younger)

Before he went away, what did the son ask his father to do? (Give him his inheritance)

After the son got his share of his father’s property, where did he go? (To a faraway country)

What did the son do with his inheritance money? (wasted it)

What happened to make food scarce where the younger son was? (famine)

After he ran out of money, what job did the younger son take? (feeding pigs)

What was the pigs’ food? (pods)

What was so terrible about a young Jewish boy tending pigs? (they were considered unclean, eating them was forbidden under Jewish law.)

Why did the son decide to return home? (he was starving)

What did the son plan to say to his father when he returned home? (I have sinned; I am not worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your servants --- accept any reasonable answer)

When the father saw the son coming home, what did he do (ran to meet him, hugged and kissed him)

This question occurs three times; require a different answer each time:
Name ONE thing that the father gave the youngest son to wear when he returned home. (a robe, a ring or shoes)

This question occurs three times; require a different answer each time:
Name ONE thing that the father gave the youngest son to wear when he returned home. (a robe, a ring or shoes)

This question occurs three times; require a different answer each time:
Name ONE thing that the father gave the youngest son to wear when he returned home. (a robe, a ring or shoes)

What animal was killed to prepare a feast for the returning son? (a fatted calf)
“Prodigal Son”

Where was the older son when his brother came home? (out in the field)

What was the first clue the older brother had that his brother had come home? (he heard music and dancing)

What did the older brother do when he heard music and dancing? (asked a servant what was going on)

How did the older son react to the return of his brother? (angry, jealous – accept any reasonable answer)

How did the older son react to the celebration feast? (refused to go inside)

What did the father do when he saw that the older son refused to come inside? (Went out to talk to him)

What did the older son say he had been doing the years while his brother was away? (serving his father, never disobeying his father)

What animal did the elder son wish he had been given to share with his friends? (a kid)

What did the father say ABOUT the older brother? (You are always with me, and all that I have is yours.)

What did the father say ABOUT the younger brother? (My son was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found – accept anything close)

Who told this story? (Jesus)

To whom was Jesus talking when he told this story? (scribes and Pharisees)

What is a parable? (a story that teaches something about God)

Whom does the father represent? (God)

Jesus told this story to a group of Pharisees. Which person in the story was most like the Pharisees? (The older brother)


Is the story of the prodigal son in the Old or the New Testament? (New)

What is the Bible memory verse you learned in the Great Hall? (“Dear friends, since God loved us this much, we must love each other.” -- I John 4:11)
“Prodigal Son”

Questions for game (simplified version)

In the parable, how many sons did the man have? (2)

Which son (older or younger) went away? (younger)

Before he went away, what did the son ask his father to do?
A. Give him a ring and a robe
B. Give him his inheritance
C. Throw him a party

After the son got his share of his father’s property, where did he go?
A. To a faraway country
B. To Jerusalem
C. To Babylon

What did the son do with his inheritance money?
A. Bought himself a farm.
B. Gave it all to the poor.
C. Wasted it.

What happened to make food scarce where the younger son was?
A. There was a shortage of pigs
B. There was a famine
C. The king took all the food for himself

After he ran out of money, what job did the younger son take?
A. feeding pigs
B. feeding sheep
C. feeding lions

What was the pigs’ food?
A. Purina pig chow
B. pods
C. table scraps

What was so terrible about a young Jewish man tending pigs?
A. Jews thought pigs were too ugly to touch.
B. Jews thought pigs were too tacky to talk about.
C. Jews considered pigs to be unclean, eating them was forbidden under Jewish law

Why did the son decide to return home?
A. He was homesick and missed his brother.
B. He was starving.
C. He wanted to be there for his father’s birthday party.
What did the son plan to say to his father when he returned home?
A. I am not worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your servants
B. I am not worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your fatted calves
C. I am not worthy to be called your son; treat me like my older brother

When the father saw the son coming home, what did he do
A. got on his horse and rode to meet him.
B. ran to meet him, hugged and kissed him
C. called the boy’s mother to come and see him.

Which of these things did the father give the son when he returned home?
A. a clean shirt
B. a gold watch
C. a robe

Which of these things did the father give the son when he returned home?
A. a medallion to hang around his neck
B. a ring
C. a silk scarf

Which of these things did the father give the son when he returned home?
A. shoes
B. money to replace what the son had wasted
C. a gold cross necklace

What animal was killed to prepare a feast for the returning son?
A. a pig
B. a fatted calf
C. a kid

Where was the older son when his brother came home?
A. in the house
B. at his friend’s house
C. out in the field

What was the first clue the older son had that his brother had come home?
A. he heard his father yelling
B. he heard music and dancing
C. he saw his father running to meet his brother

What did the older brother do when he heard music and dancing?
A. asked a servant what was going on.
B. went in the house to find out what was going on.
C. asked his father what was going on.
How did the older son react to the return of his brother?
A. he was happy and wanted to celebrate
B. he was angry and jealous
C. he wasn't interested

How did the older son react to the celebration feast?
A. he ran to help cook the fatted calf
B. he ran to join the party
C. he refused to go inside

What did the father do when he saw that the older son refused to come inside?
A. Shrugged and said, “Too bad.”
B. Went out to talk to him
C. Told him to come inside or else.

What did the older son say he had been doing the years while his brother was away?
A. serving and obeying his father
B. spending his own inheritance wisely
C. taking good care of his mother.

What animal did the elder son wish he had been given to share with his friends?
A. a pig
B. a kid
C. a lamb

What did the father say ABOUT the older brother?
A. I love your brother the most.
B. I love you the most
C. You are always with me, and all that I have is yours.

What did the father say ABOUT the younger brother?
A. Your problems are your own fault.
B. My son was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found
C. I love you more than your brother.

Who told this story?
A. Jesus
B. A Pharisee
C. The older brother

To whom was Jesus talking when he told this story?
A. his disciples
B. some scribes and Pharisees
C. the two brothers
What is a parable?
A. a story that teaches something about God
B. a story with a happy ending
C. a story with a surprise ending

Which person in the story is like God?
A. The older brother
B. The father
C. The servant

Jesus told this story to a group of Pharisees. Who in the story was most like the Pharisees?
A. The father
B. The younger brother
C. The older brother

What book of the Bible tells the story of the Prodigal Son?
A. Matthew
B. Mark
C. Luke

Is the story of the prodigal son in the Old or the New Testament? (New)

What is the Bible memory verse you learned in this lesson?
A. “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want"
B. “Dear friends, since God loved us this much, we must love each other."
C. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only son..."