Lesson 4:
The Prodigal Son

Lesson Theme: God forgives us because he loves us.

Learning Objective: The learner will recall the story of the prodigal son, define sin as making a wrong choice that displeases God, and recognize God’s forgiveness when we leave sin and turn to him.

Early Arrival or Starting Activity: Teacher Says!  

Instructions: (similar to Simon Says!) The leader will say: “Teacher Says…” for the activities that the players will perform. Omit the phrase “Teacher Says” for the activities that the players should not perform. Give directions, such as these:
- Teacher Says turn around once
- Teacher Says jump up and down
- Teacher Says stand on one foot
- Clap your hands

If a child claps his hands even though the leader did not say “Teacher Says” let him jump five times on one foot before rejoining the group. (This game will help the children think about the choices they make.)

Introduction

Start with a prayer. One of the children may want to pray. The leader asks the children if they have any brothers or sisters in their family. As they raise their hands, call on a few to answer by naming their siblings.

Leader: Today we are going to hear a story about two brothers.

Bible Story

- Explain to the children you will tell them a parable about two brothers. A parable is a simple story that teaches a lesson. Jesus told parables to help make his instructions easier to understand and remember. This story is in the Bible, God’s Word. (Have a Bible to hold and show the children.)

- Familiarize yourself with the story as it is written below. With great enthusiasm tell the story (do not read it), then tell it again using puppets, skits, props, or costumes. This is a great story for team members to act
out for the children. Team members are needed for these roles: the prodigal son, the brother, the father, the farmer, and even the pigs. After the story has been told a second time, allow the children to act out the story, while you narrate.

Scripture from 15:11-24

Jesus told them this story. A man had two sons. The younger son told his father, “I want my share of your estate now, instead of waiting until you die.” So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons. A few days later this youngest son packed all his belongings and took a trip to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money on wild living. About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve. He persuaded a local farmer to hire him to feed his pigs. The boy became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him. But no one gave him anything. When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself. “At home even the hired men have food enough to spare, and here I am, dying of hunger! I will go home to my father and say, ‘Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired man.’” So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long distance away, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him. His son said to him, “Father I have sinned against both heaven and you and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.” But his father said to the servants, “Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger, sandals for his feet, and kill the calf we have been fattening in the pen. We must celebrate with a feast, for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.” So the party began.

Leader: Jesus said that God is like the father in this story. He is so very glad when someone who has run away from him comes back. When we know that we have made a bad choice and we tell God that we are sorry, He is pleased with us.

CONNECTION: PASS THE PRESENT

Materials required:
- A small gift-wrapped box
- The leaders needs to be prepared to say Luke 15:24 in the children’s native language

One way to celebrate is to give a gift like the father gave the prodigal son. The leader will say Luke 15:24 to the first child and hand them the present. Then the child says the verse and passes the gift to the next child. The box continues around the circle until all have said the verse or as time allows.

CRAFTS: PAPER DOLL

Materials Required:
- Paper Doll, printed on cardstock and pre-cut, see resource page 2.
Paper Hat, printed on cardstock and pre-cut, see resource page 3.

White printer paper, one piece per child

Crayons

Small pieces of ribbon, small buttons, fabric, sequins for decorations

Instructions:
Lay the white paper on top of the card stock person. Make a rubbing of the card stock person by using the crayon to rub across it, until the outline of the person becomes visible. (Leader should emphasize that this represents the prodigal son who went away and then comes back.) Decorate the card stock doll by adding a party hat—using other decorations including fabric, ribbon, and buttons. Add a happy face and eyes to complete. (Remind children that the son’s father was glad to have his son home. God is glad to have us admit our sin and return to him.)

OPTIONAL CRAFT: DOLL CHAIN

This activity is for older children.

Materials Required:

- Doll chain pattern, one per child, printed and cut in half length wise along solid line, see resources page 4
- Crown party hat pattern, see resources page 5, option: use fun foam crowns
- Scissors
- Pencils
- Crayons
- Small pieces of ribbon, buttons, fabric, sequins for decoration

Instructions:
(Any part of this activity can be done ahead of time to simplify). Take the doll chain pattern and fold it back and forth along dotted lines, similar to a paper fan. Cut along the line to produce the chain. Decorate the dolls on the chain with scraps of fabric, buttons, ribbon, and a party hat. (Leader: remind children that they are celebrating the prodigal son’s return.)

GAMES: LET’S CELEBRATE!

Instead of a game we suggest having a celebration. Bring cake mixes and canned frosting from the US and make cupcakes for the group. (Or bring Rice Crispy Treats if you do not have cooking facilities.) Let the children wash their hands at the Tippy-Tap and assist with the frosting if you have a small group. If you make a large cake it can be served on cupcake papers. Have fun and celebrate!