

# A Tale of 2 Sons – Lesson Plan on the Prodigal Son

This Tale of Two Sons lesson plan on the parable of the prodigal son will help youth understand that followers of Jesus cannot just view freedom and duty from the world's point of view. The generous father shows us how to live these in the context of love.

## Opening Game for the Prodigal Son

Start this lesson plan on the prodigal son by playing [Pig Food Race \(see the complete instructions\)](#).

Follow up with a couple of questions:

- Would you want to work by feeding muddy pigs?
- How would you feel about eating pig food?
- How hungry would you have to be to eat dog food or cat food?

Feeding pigs is difficult, messy, smelly work. And their food is not very appetizing. Imagine being so hungry that you would wish you could eat pig food. That's just how desperate the young man in today's gospel was.

## Scripture Reading for Lesson Plan on the Prodigal Son

Here are some words from Jesus about bad news:

[Luke 15:1-3, 11-32](#) (Jesus Reacts to the News) – the Gospel Reading for the [4th Sunday of Lent – Year C](#)

Tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to Jesus, but the Pharisees and scribes began to complain, saying, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." So to them Jesus addressed this parable:

"A man had two sons, and the younger son said to his father, 'Father give me the share of your estate that should come to me.'

So the father divided the property between them. After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation.

When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he found himself in dire need. So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens who sent him to his farm to tend the swine.

And he longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed, but nobody gave him any.

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Coming to his senses he thought, 'How many of my father's hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger. I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers."' "

So he got up and went back to his father.

While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him.

His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.'

But his father ordered his servants, 'Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.' Then the celebration began.

Now the older son had been out in the field and, on his way back, as he neared the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing.

He called one of the servants and asked what this might mean. The servant said to him, 'Your brother has returned and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'

He became angry, and when he refused to enter the house, his father came out and pleaded with him.

He said to his father in reply, 'Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends. But when your son returns who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf.'

He said to him, 'My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours. But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' "

[Luke 15:1-3, 11-32](#)

## **Discussion for the Prodigal Son Lesson Plan**

There are two sons in this story. The younger son wants his freedom. He is tired of working on for his father. He wants his independence. His father is wealthy, so the son basically says that he is tired of waiting for his father to die. He wants his inheritance now.

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The older son is dutiful and obedient. He does what his father asks of him. He is probably tired of doing tasks his little brother was supposed to do. But he expects his brother will have to pay for his irresponsibility eventually.

The father gives the younger son what he asks for. Imagine your parents giving you a huge sum of money – like a hundred thousand dollars. You can go live how you want. You can purchase whatever you like. But if you are not careful, you will run out of money more quickly than you expect.

That is what happened to the younger son, who is called the prodigal son. [Prodigal means “spending money or resources freely and recklessly; wastefully extravagant.”](#) He didn't make a budget and plan ahead. He just spent the money on whatever he wanted at the moment. And it ran out pretty quickly.

So then he had to find a job to live. He had no real skills, so he ended up feeding pigs. This was a really low job and he was paid almost nothing. He was so hungry that he wished he could eat the pig food. Eventually, he decides that the people who work for his father are better off than he is, so he decides to swallow his pride and go ask his dad for a job.

You know what happens then. The father welcomes him back and forgives everything. He throws a giant feast for him. He is treated even better than before he left.

Now the older son doesn't like this one bit. He is pretty mad at his dad for welcoming his brother home. Why are there no consequences for wasting all of that money? He feels like his little brother, who really messed up, is being treated better than he ever has been. So he complains about it.

These two brothers show us two dangers we can encounter along the path of discipleship.

The younger brother is an example of just doing whatever we want. He tries living independent of his father's love and guidance and he fails miserably. In the end, he realizes his father's way is better.

So we can also think we can just ignore God's commands and do whatever we want. Without a loving relationship with our heavenly Father, we will stumble, fall, and suffer. And as we develop that relationship, we realize that we never want to walk away from him, even if it means giving up some of our freedom to do whatever we want.

But we can also be like the older brother. He is dutiful, but he is also lacking in love for his father. He is obeying because he thinks it will result in a reward later. That is why he is so angry when his little brother, who was completely disobedient, was celebrated. He wonders why he should obey his father if his little brother can do whatever he wants and still have love lavished upon him.

This can also be a problem for us as Christians. If we are only following God's commands out of duty or obedience, then we are also in trouble. Our relationship with God becomes based on expecting a reward instead of on love.

It is not wrong to want to go to heaven, but that should not be our primary motivation. If we are truly disciples of Jesus, we will serve and obey God out of love, not because we are expecting something in return.

So the parable of the prodigal son shows us that either freedom or duty, without love of God, can be an obstacle on the path of discipleship.

## Reflection Questions for the Prodigal Son Lesson Plan

- Think about the two sons. Which do you most closely identify with – the prodigal son or the older son? Why?
- Can you think of a way in which you think God's commands conflict with your own desire for freedom?
- Do you ever wish someone you know would be more obedient to God's laws? Do you feel judgemental about them or can you look at them in love?
- What are some things you can do to be motivated by love of God, instead of freedom or duty?

## Challenge for the Prodigal Son Lesson Plan

This week, be aware of the traps of freedom and duty.

If you identify more with the prodigal son, think of a way which you want to be free that conflicts with God's commands. This could be a sin you are struggling with. Maybe you like to gossip. Or you would prefer to sleep in on Sunday instead of going to Mass. Spend some time in prayer about this. Know that your heavenly Father loves you and try to let that motivate you. Go to confession if appropriate.

If you identify more with the older son, then watch for moments when you are judging others or begrudging God's mercy for them. This could be someone you know personally. Or maybe you see someone on the news who you think God needs to punish. Instead, pray for that person and ask God to show them love and mercy, just as you have been shown love and mercy. Think of a time when God forgave you. This is also a good time to receive the sacrament of reconciliation and confess sins of judgment and pride.

## Prayer for the Prodigal Son Lesson Plan

Conclude by offering petitions and praying [the St. John Paul II Prayer for Guidance](#).

## More Resources

[Reflect further on the parable of the Prodigal Son](#)

[Learn more about the parables](#)

[Washed Away Prayer Service](#)

[The Prodigal Song](#)

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