

The Prodigal Son

Grades
1-2

GRACE

LUKE 15:11-32

What is happening in this story?

The parable begins when the younger of two sons asks his father, prematurely, for his share of the inheritance. Upon receiving it, he moves quickly into a selfish lifestyle and soon finds that life can be very difficult. Not only that, but he's lonely for his family. What he previously failed to value, he now sees as precious. So he heads home, planning to beg to be given a servant's job. Of course, his father greets him very differently than that, graciously and lovingly throwing a party in his honor—much to his older brother's dismay.

Why does this story matter for kids?

Every kid has messed up at some point. It might be something big like harming a friend or sibling, or something of lesser consequence, like not cleaning their room. For many kids, doing something wrong leads them to wonder if they are still loved. Children need to know that actions have consequences, but this certainly does not mean they are no longer loved—by caregivers or by God.

Why this theme?

The small word *grace* is huge in significance for Christian faith, and this parable brings the concept vividly to life. Jesus' point, of course, is that God's grace is more powerful than any of our bad decisions, and that God will always welcome us home.

AGE LEVEL TIP

Sometimes kids think grace is a free pass to behave any way they want. Gently remind misbehaving kids that God's free gift of love and blessing does not depend on our behavior, but our actions may still bring natural and logical consequences.



GENERAL SUPPLIES

- Pencils
- Eraser
- Scissors
- Scrap paper

LESSON SUPPLIES

- Shaving cream
- Paint shirts
- Paper towels
- String (at least 1 foot long per kid in class)
- Classroom chairs (2)

Do some kids arrive early? Try this.

Have kids put on paint shirts. Squirt shaving cream on a tabletop and allow kids to finger-paint in it. At the end, the mess cleans up easily with dry paper towels. **When we mess up, God's grace welcomes us.**

Circle up with kids for an opening conversation.

Who has been to a birthday party? What do you take to a birthday party? Usually, you take gifts to a birthday party. I wonder what would happen if you went to a party and forgot your gift. Would you still get to celebrate? When you are forgiven for making a mistake, it is called *grace*. Grace is a free gift. In today's Bible story, a father gives his son grace. I wonder when your family gives you grace.

Pray together: **Dear God, thank you for Jesus and your free gift of grace! Amen.**

Pass out leaflets and pencils.

Have kids unscramble the word by writing the letter from each colored cross in the top row onto the cross with the corresponding color in the bottom row. **What do you think grace is?** Allow kids to respond. **Grace is**

getting something good that you do not deserve and did not earn, like a gift. Have you ever been given a gift just because? Allow kids to respond. **There is nothing we can do to earn God's love and forgiveness. God gives it to us as a gift, because God is good! That gift is called grace!** Collect their leaflets until Respond.



Gather kids around the screen where you'll watch the video.

Otto and Ada have some decisions to make about their allowance. Let's see what happens.

View Episode 2, "Wish Woe," on the Year Gold Spring PreK–Grade 2 DVD.

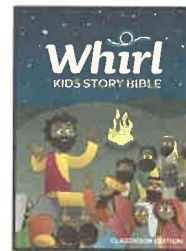
Ask kids these questions about the video:

- **What did Ada do with her allowance? Why?**
- **What did Otto do with his allowance? Why?**
- **Have you ever made a poor choice, like Otto? When?**
- **Why was Ada so upset at home?**
- **If you were Ada and Otto's parents, what would you have done?**



Open your Whirl Kids Story Bibles.

Let's find our story today! Help kids find "The Prodigal Son" on page 270. Before you read, invite kids to look for a son spending money, a son sitting with pigs, a father hugging his son, and a father inviting another son to the party.



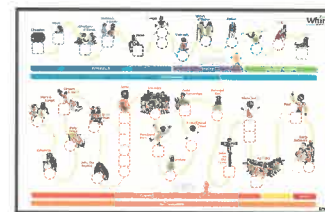
Read the story and Ada and Otto's questions and comments on each page.

Ask these questions after you read the story:

- **Where was the man in the story? Why?**
- **What did the man's father do when he saw his son?**
- **Do you think the man deserved a party? Why or why not?**
- **What did the man's brother say when he heard about the party?**
- **How do you think the father felt about each of his sons?**

Gather near the Wall Chart to place today's sticker.

Point out the Testament (New), Bible section (Gospels) and character image (Prodigal Son). **Jesus was the first to tell people the story about the son who returned home. Let's add a sticker to remind us of where the son was when he decided to go home** (with the pigs). Point to the corresponding images of the pigs on pages 270-271 in the Whirl Kids Story Bible.



Play together!

Ask kids as a group to identify the different places the man was in this story (with the pigs, at home, parties). **Where did he go? What did he do?**

Then divide kids into three groups: See, Hear, and Smell. For each place the man went, have each group think of at least two things the man saw, heard, or smelled. For example, all three groups may say the man saw pigs, heard pigs oink, and smelled the muddy pigs.

Have the groups come back together and share the sights, sounds, and smells of the story with the full group.

When we mess up, God's grace welcomes us. God never stops loving us.

BIBLE BIT

The level to which the son had fallen was emphasized by his job of feeding pigs. In Jesus' day, no Jewish person would go near a pig! See Leviticus 11:7.

WATCH IT AGAIN

What did Otto wish for from the wishing well? Did the wishing well work? Who can Otto trust to give him everything he needs? Why?

OUR CHURCH

A cross is a symbol often reflecting God's free gift of grace. Where can you find crosses in your church? (worship space, Christian flag, sign, hall) How many can you count?

RESPOND 10

Pass out leaflets and markers. Hang a string between the backs of two classroom chairs (1 foot in length per kid in class).

Unfold and tear off leaflet square.

1. Have kids fold the leaflet in half along the dotted line, and place the side without text face up.
2. Invite kids to think about the differences between the two sons in the story. **What are some of the things the son who went away did?** (left home, wasted money, got muddy, made bad choices, etc.) **What are some of the things the other son did?** (stayed home, saved money, worked hard, made good choices, etc.)
3. **Pretend to be one of the brothers. Write down or draw something you did in the box below the father.**
4. Invite kids to bring their leaflets over to the string between the chairs. Designate one chair as “deserves a party” and the other as “does not deserve a party” with signs written on scrap paper.
5. **The father is having a party. Which behaviors deserve to be rewarded with a party? Which do not?** Have kids hang their leaflets on the string, in order, from most to least deserving of a party. **The father invited both brothers to the party because he loved them—not because of their behavior!**
6. **How does God feel about us?** Have kids turn their leaflets around on the string, so the cross and heart show instead of the actions. **Our behaviors might lead to natural consequences, but they will never cause God to stop loving us. God’s grace welcomes us!**

LAUNCH 10

Circle up with kids for a quick review.

Grace is a free gift from God that does not depend on our behavior. The father invited both of his sons to the party because he loved them. When we mess up, God’s grace welcomes us.

Pass out leaflet panels, scissors, and string.

Cut out two spirals along solid lines. Cut up string from Respond and thread pieces through dot in middle of each spiral. Hang spirals, word side down, from the ceiling. **Celebrate God’s grace!**

Send kids out with a blessing.

Circle up with kids. **God blesses all of us. And that means me** (place a hand on your chest). **And that means you** (place your other hand on the shoulder of the kid next to you). Each kid passes the blessing by repeating those words and actions. When the blessing makes it back to you, say, **Go and bless the world.**

Thank kids for coming today. Remind them of the Family Square on the other side of the leaflet.