

The Prodigal Son

Grades
3-4

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

Parables are stories that can start conversations. Asking kids which characters they relate to and which ones they differ from helps them see that there is more than one perspective to every story.



GENERAL SUPPLIES

- Markers
- Glue sticks

LESSON SUPPLIES

- Gift tags (2 per kid)
- Dice (1 per kid)
- Party hats (1 per kid)
- Party horns (1 per kid)
- Bowl of banana peels
- Ribbon
- Toothpicks (1 per kid)

Do some kids arrive early? Try this.

Set out gift tags and markers. Tell kids to write the most expensive gift they have ever wanted on a tag and something they want that doesn't cost any money on another tag.

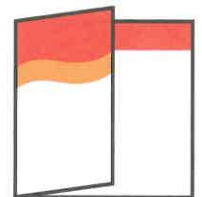
Circle up with kids for an opening conversation.

When does a person deserve to receive a gift? Give kids time to talk about gifts they've received and given, what motivates them to give gifts, and how gifts are expected on certain occasions. **Lots of times we give a gift because someone is celebrating a special day or because they earned it. God gives us a gift called grace just because God loves us—not because it's a special day or because we earned it. God gives us grace every day. It doesn't matter if we mess up, do a really great job, are crabby, feel jealous, or do something nice for someone. We always receive God's grace. Today we're going to read a story about a man who receives the gift of grace when he least expects it.**

Pray together: **Dear God, thank you for your gift of grace. Be with us and guide us, even when we make the wrong choice. Amen.**

Pass out leaflets, dice, and markers.

When have you felt upset or frustrated when you didn't win a game? Have kids each roll the die and sign their initials on their leaflet by the number they rolled. **If you rolled a six, you win! You get to join the party. Stand up, cheer, and do a little dance! If no one rolled a six, the kid(s) who rolled closest may celebrate. If you didn't win, you have to stay seated. You can't join the party.** Play only one round. **How was it fair or unfair that some kids got to celebrate and some didn't?**



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

Grace is a gift. We receive it whether we succeed or fail. Does this seem fair? Let's see if Leo thinks it's fair—at a science . . . fair!

View Episode 2, "Unfair Fair," on the Year Gold Spring Grades 3–6 DVD.

Ask kids these questions about the video:

- **What does Leo remember about last year's science fair?**
- **What does Leo think Eagle Eye will do again?**
- **How does Leo feel about Eagle Eye being at the science fair again? Why?**
- **In the end, Leo helps Eagle Eye. How can you help each other?**
- **Why does God keep giving people not just one but many second chances?**



Open your Whirl Kids Study Bibles.

Today's passage is from the book of Luke. It's in the New Testament in the Gospels and Acts section of the Bible. If this is your first time reading from Luke, invite kids to check out the book introduction and comic on page 1225. Have party hats and party horns ready to use after verse 13 and a bowl of banana peels to show after verse 16.



God's grace can be hard to understand. How can God give us grace and not expect anything in return? Jesus told a parable about a father and son to help people understand God's grace. It can help us understand God's grace too.

Help kids find Luke 15:11-32 and read it in this creative way together: Invite kids to take turns reading one or two verses at a time. At verse 13, encourage everyone to put on a party hat and blow the party horns. **The younger son is having a great time partying and spending his dad's money!** After this "party," take off the hats and put the horns down. **Now all the money is gone.** Ask the next kid to resume reading. At verse 16, set out the bowl with the banana peels. **The younger son had to eat the food set out for the pigs.** **What if the only thing you had to eat was this bowl of banana peels?** Continue reading. When you reach verse 22, have the kids put on the hats and blow the horns again.

Invite kids to check out what Leo says about Luke 15:20-24.

Ask these questions after you read the story:

- **What does the younger son want from his father when he says he plans to leave his family?**
- **What does the younger son decide to do when he is out of money and friends?**
- **Would you react the same way as the older brother? Why or why not?**
- **How do you feel when you've done something wrong, but you still get a hug?**
- **The father showed God's grace to his son. What are some ways you can show grace to other people?**

Make your mark on the Wall Chart.

Look at the chart and find the theme for today. Give kids time to find the word *Grace*. Sometimes gifts are wrapped with ribbon. **God's grace is a gift we receive in all kinds of ways.** Invite one kid to glue a small piece of ribbon in the box by *Grace*.



BIBLE BIT

This parable is often titled "The Prodigal Son." Other names are "The Running Father," "The Two Sons," and "The Loving Father."

WATCH IT AGAIN

If you watch the video again, invite kids to remind Leo to "Chill out!" when he's being judgmental.

OUR CHURCH

There's always a reason to have a party. Work together with other Sunday school classes to throw a Gift of God's Grace party for the whole church.

RESPOND 10

Open leaflets and pass out toothpicks, glue sticks, and markers.

Tear off leaflet square.

- 1. Tell me about a time when someone said, “You can do this, but only if you do something else first.”**
After kids offer examples, explain that these are called *conditions*—something you have to do or agree to do in order to earn something else.
- 2. Talk together about these questions: What condition has to be met before you can go into a movie theater? (Buy a ticket.) Get on an amusement park ride? (Be a certain height.) Ride a bike? (Wear a helmet.) Play a video game? (Finish your homework or chores.) What conditions are required to ride a bus? (Stay in your seat; don’t bother the driver.) Receive a birthday gift? (Have a birthday.) Play a boardgame? (Follow the rules.)**
- 3. Now hold a toothpick over the leaflet. Snap it in two. What might happen if some of the conditions we talked about aren’t met?**
- 4. The good news is that God’s grace doesn’t come with conditions. God gives us the gift of grace even when we goof up. Glue the broken toothpick inside the heart. The father in the story didn’t have to forgive his son, but he did anyway. That’s what God’s grace is like. We receive God’s grace even though we haven’t done anything to earn it.**
- 5. Write “UN” before “CONDITION” and “AL” after it. What is the new title of this square? (Grace is God’s unconditional love.) God’s forgiveness, love, and grace are given to us freely with no conditions.**

LAUNCH 10

Circle up with kids for a quick review.

Just like the father in the story, God welcomes us every day. That’s what grace is—the free and unearned love of God. Everyone makes wrong choices sometimes, so we all need God’s grace. How does God’s grace make you feel? How can you offer grace to others?

Return to the leaflet panels and pass out dice and markers.

Play the dice game again with one big change: if you don’t roll a six the first time, roll again and add that to your total. If you still don’t have six, roll again! You get as many chances as you need. When you reach six, flip your leaflet over and sign your names somewhere on the party. Celebrate when everyone reaches six. **God gives us as many chances as we need.**

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.