

WEEK 1

Bible Story

As we make our way through the Bible together, we're taking a look at the books in the New Testament that describe what Jesus did and said when He was here on earth. When Jesus began teaching and performing miracles, crowds of people followed Him wherever He went. This made the religious leaders mad . . . for a number of reasons.

For one, **THEY** liked being the ones that the people followed. But they were also angry that Jesus chose to welcome everyone—even people who had done wrong things. The religious leaders believed that keeping all the rules made them closer to God than anyone else, yet here was this man, claiming to be God's Son, who was spending time with people the religious leaders saw as sinners.

Jesus knew that this was making them mad, so He told them a story. Jesus often liked to tell stories to explain things.

Once there was a man. Hmm . . . let's see . . . This man had two sons. Today's story is really just about the younger one. Tradition said that when the father died, his sons would receive an inheritance, which was things like money, land, animals—really anything the father had. One day, the younger son approached the father and demanded his share of the family's things. He wanted his inheritance **NOW**.

The truth is, it was incredibly insulting for the son to ask his father for the inheritance. It was supposed to be something that the son would get when his father died . . . so when he demanded to have it right then and there, it was like he was telling his father, 'I wish you were dead.' Yeah. Ouch.

The father must have been hurt, but he agreed and gave his son his share of the family's things. The son then packed up and left for a country far away. In this country far from home, the son began to really live it up with his newfound wealth. We're talking party time. The son lived it up a little too much and spent **ALL** his money. There's nothing left.

Yep—the son spent all his money on wild living. But things were about to get even worse for him. This '**Faraway Country**' started running low on food. The son got desperate, so he went to work for someone . . . feeding pigs.

In fact, the son got so hungry that he even thought about eating the pigs' food!

Thankfully, the son shook this idea off. He started to think clearly again. He could go **HOME**! He could admit that he had done wrong. He could beg his father

to forgive him and let him be a servant. After all, the servants in his father's house had FOOD to eat—not pig slop!

The son started off for home.

His dad saw him coming when he was still a long way off! The father began to RUN to his son. When the father reached his son, he hugged him and kissed him. The son was so ashamed of the way he had acted. He said:

Open the Bible to Luke 15:21 (NIrV) and read.

“Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer fit to be called your son.

“But the father called out to his servants:

Open the Bible to Luke 15:22-24 (NIrV) and read.

Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattest calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. This son of mine was dead. And now he is alive again. He was lost. And now he is found.

The younger son had completely messed up. The father had every right to refuse to welcome him back. But instead, the father told his servants to bring a robe, ring, and sandals for his son. He was welcoming his son back into the family. Not only that, but he also even wanted to have a PARTY to celebrate his son's return!

Wow! The father had freely forgiven the younger son. But the story Jesus was telling wasn't finished yet . . . because the older son was still working out in the fields. Would he be as forgiving as his father? You'll have to find out next week!

Jesus probably told this story to illustrate a few different things. But one thing we can learn from it is this.

“Everyone needs to be forgiven.”

Everyone. Even us. That's why God sent Jesus! We've all messed up at some point. And our sin separates us from God. But Jesus came to be our Savior, and He died on the cross for our sins. When we believe and put our faith in Jesus, God welcomes us into a relationship with Him that will last forever. Let's thank God for sending us Jesus!

Jesus often told stories like this one to help explain certain things about God. And often we can see ourselves as one of the characters in the story.

In this story, we're like the younger son—all of us. We have ALL sinned and done wrong things.

God is like the father in this story. He chooses to forgive us! We can always come back to Him and find His love and forgiveness.

In fact, God has had this plan for us from the beginning. He knew that people would turn from Him. He sent Jesus to be our Savior.

Jesus is called our Savior because He came to SAVE us. He offers us forgiveness once and for all. When you put your trust in Jesus—when you tell Him that you believe He is God's Son and that He came to die on the cross for your sins—He WILL forgive you.

Anytime you do something wrong, you can always go to Him and ask for forgiveness. And then you can give forgiveness to others because of the way God has forgiven you.

You can forgive others for losing their temper and saying unkind things, because you remember how you had to ask God for forgiveness when YOU said mean things. When you remember what He has done for you, then you can choose to forgive others, too.

PRAYER

Dear God,

Thank You for sending Jesus to be our Savior. We didn't deserve forgiveness, but the truth is, we all NEED it . . . and You freely offer it to us all. Help us to receive it and be thankful, and to be willing to forgive others as well. We love You, and we are thankful that we can call You Father. We know that we can trust You no matter what.

We love You.

AMEN

