


the  
Jesus   
Storybook  
Bible  
Curriculum

## Running away

The story of the lost son, from Luke 15

☉ Please see the curriculum Introduction .pdf for more guidance on praying with your group and on Scripture memory.

☉ The total allotted time per lesson is 45 minutes. This is the minimum amount of time it would take to complete the whole lesson. The time can easily be extended to increase the lesson to as much as 1.5 hours. If you have more than the allocated 45 minutes, please use the extra time to extend the time for activities, to learn the memory verse, and to pray.

☉ The “Notes for Teachers on the Text” section is intended as explanation of the Bible text and advance preparation for you only; it is not expressed in terms or language the children could understand.

*The Jesus Storybook Bible Curriculum*  
By Sally Lloyd-Jones and Sam Shammas

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## Recap of the Previous Story

3 min. 

☉ Welcome the children and ask them to sit in a circle.

☉ Briefly recap the main point of the previous story: “Last time we discovered that Jesus’ love is a gift and, like all gifts, it is free. Jesus knows all about our sin, but he loves us anyway. And because we know that Jesus loves us, we want to stop sinning. We also memorized a verse about this gift.”

☉ Ask them to recite together the verse they learned at home about the story. “Ephesians 2:8–9 — ‘For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast.’”

☉ To lead into the theme of today’s story, ask: “What is it that you like about your home? I like my home because ...” Share your own answer and then ask a few children to do the same.

## Activity Introducing the Story

10 min. 

**Aim:** To expend energy and introduce the places in the story.

**Materials:** A way of drawing or laying out a line on the ground, e.g., packing tape, a long rope, etc.

1. Draw or lay out a line across the room. Ask the children to stand on one side of the line. Announce that that side of the line represents “home” and the other side represents a “far off country.”

2. Explain the game: When you call out “far off country,” everyone should jump to that side of the line. You will keep calling out “home” and “far off country” and the children must jump to the correct side of the line. So, if they are at “home” and “home” is called again, they just stay in place. If they make a mistake, they are out.

3. Call out “home” or “far off country” quickly, alternating between them, but sometimes calling out one of them twice or more times in a row. You can also try to catch the children out by pointing to “home” while calling out “far off country.”

4. Once a few children are out, ask everyone to start on the home side again so no one is sitting out for too long. This also allows a short pause in the game.

5. Toward the end of the allocated time, ask everyone to sit back down in the circle and say: “In today’s story someone goes from home to a far off country. Let’s find out why and what happens.”

Join the children in the circle and announce the title of the story. Read aloud pages 272–279 from *The Jesus Storybook Bible* or listen to CD3 track 6.

### Notes for Teachers on the Text

In the parable, the younger son (the parable as told by Jesus in Luke actually has two sons in it, but *The Jesus Storybook Bible*, for reasons of simplicity and space, only mentions one son so these notes will only cover that aspect of the parable) rejects his family and goes off to squander all his inheritance in riotous living. Then he comes to his senses—he realizes his sin. He decides to return home, but he has no expectation that he is worthy to be called his father’s son. All he hopes for is to be retained as a hired servant. It is quite natural for people who approach God to believe the same thing. We say, “I am not worthy to be a child of God. All I can hope for is to struggle along as an employee of his. So, if I perform well, God will answer my prayers and give me his favor. But if I perform poorly, he may fire me.” But a child of God is never afraid of being “fired,” because the relationship is not based on performance standards.

Note three things about the prodigal’s return. First of all, the father runs. Commentators on this parable agree that this was a demeaning thing for the father to do. In those days, the inferior would come to the superior. The superior would stand stationary. Instead, the father runs to the son. This meant he had to pick up the skirts of his robes and bare his legs, and that’s why adult males didn’t run. But this father does. He loses his dignity to welcome his son home.

Second, the father kisses the son before the son says anything repentant. The father does not sit on the porch, watching the boy approach, grumpily saying, “If he repents, then I’ll kiss him.” Instead he runs out and kisses him. The father’s kiss is not a response to the son’s repentance, but rather its facilitating cause. We all need God’s grace to come to us first.

Third, he won’t let the son pay him back. Instead he tells his servants to give his son a robe and a ring. The ring was the signet ring by which the family made contracts. In other words, the father is saying: “I’m not going to let you pay me back. You are forgiven. You are part of the family again.”

On the cross, Jesus Christ didn’t just lose his dignity, he didn’t just bare his legs; he was stripped naked. In Romans 5:8 we’re told: “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” He came to us first. And, on the cross, he paid for our sin himself so that we could be forgiven.

In *Children of the Living God*, Sinclair Ferguson writes about this parable: “Jesus was underlining the fact that ... the reality of the love of God for us is often the last thing in the world to dawn on us. As we fix our eyes upon ourselves, our past failures, our present guilt, it seems impossible to us that the Father should love us. Many Christians go through much of their life with the prodigal’s suspicion: ... ‘I am not worthy to be God’s son, but perhaps I can struggle through as one of his hired servants.’ At the root of such thinking is an inability to believe that salvation is entirely of God’s grace and love. We contribute nothing to it, we can do nothing to earn it in any way. We are often slow to realize the implications of that. We are sons, but we are [always] in danger of having the mindset of hired servants.”

# Understanding the Story

15 min. 

**Aim:** To understand more about grace.

**Materials:** Crayons; copies of the handout (the last page of this document).

1. At the end of the story, say: “Jesus told this story to show us what God is like and to show us what we are like. Let’s play a game of frozen sculptures to retell the story and see what it shows us.”
2. Explain the game (you have played this activity before, but it is always good to repeat the rules): You will call out a scene from the story. Then you will all quickly share ideas about what people, actions, or feelings might be shown in the frozen sculpture. You will announce the scene again and everyone will take positions as characters in that scene. You will call out “Freeze.” They will hold that sculpture for 5 seconds. You will then say “Unfreeze,” they will sit down, and you will announce the next scene until the whole story has been told.

STORY	FROZEN SCULPTURE
<p>Once upon a time, there was a boy and his father. One day the boy thinks he will be happier without his father, so he asks his father for money so he can leave his home. The father gives his son what he wants.</p>	<p>Say: “Everyone in this half of the circle, you are the father. Everyone else, you are the son.”</p> <p>Ask: “How does the son feel? Raise your hand if you think he is happy. Correct, hands down. Raise your hand if you think the father feels happy. Correct, the father is sad. Fathers ready to look sad? Sons ready to look happy? Let’s form a frozen sculpture.”</p> <p>Announce the scene again; ask everyone to stand up and form the sculpture. Ask them to freeze for 5 seconds, then say “Unfreeze.” Ask them to sit, and announce the next scene.</p>
<p>The son takes the money and runs away from home to a far off country. Everything is wonderful. He eats, drinks, and goes to parties.</p>	<p>Say: “I need a volunteer to be the son. Please stand in the center of the circle. Everyone else, you are the people at the party. Ready?”</p> <p>Announce the scene again; ask everyone to stand up and form the sculpture. Ask them to freeze for 5 seconds, then say “Unfreeze.” Ask them to sit, and announce the next scene.</p>
<p>But soon the son in the far off country runs out of money. So he gets a job feeding pigs. He is so hungry he even tries to eat the pigs’ food.</p>	<p>Say: “I need a volunteer to be the son. Please stand in the center of the circle. Everyone else, you are the pigs.”</p> <p>Ask: “How does the son feel now? Raise your hand if you think he is still happy. Raise your hand if you think he feels hungry, sad, and homesick. Good, hands down. Ready?”</p> <p>Announce the scene again; ask everyone to stand up and form the sculpture. Ask them to freeze for 5 seconds, then say “Unfreeze.” Ask them to sit, and announce the next scene.</p>



STORY	FROZEN SCULPTURE
<p>The son realizes he was wrong and he is sorry. So, he decides to go home. But on his way home he begins to worry that his father does not love him anymore. But what he doesn't know is that his father has been waiting for him all this time.</p>	<p>Say: "Everyone in this half of the circle, you are the father. Everyone else, you are the son."</p> <p>Say: "The son realizes he was wrong, he had sinned, and he is sorry. So he turns away from his sin and goes home to his father to ask forgiveness. The word the Bible uses for that is 'repent.' The son repents—he is sorry for his sin and wants to stop sinning."</p> <p>Ask: "Why does the son feel worried on his way home to his father? Correct, he knows how sinful he has been and so he thinks his father does not love him anymore. But his father has been waiting for him all this time. So, sons, you are walking home worried. Fathers, you are waiting, watching the road for the son you love. Ready?"</p> <p>Announce the scene again; ask everyone to stand up and form the sculpture. Ask them to freeze for 5 seconds, then say "Unfreeze." Ask them to sit, and announce the next scene.</p>
<p>The son is still a long way from home, but the father sees him coming and runs to him. The father throws his son a party. His lost son is home!</p>	<p>Say: "I need volunteers to be the son and father. Please stand in the center of the circle. Everyone else, you are the people at the party."</p> <p>Ask: "Why does the father throw a party? Correct, he had lost his son, but now his son is back. He loves his son and forgives him. Ready?"</p> <p>Announce the scene again; ask everyone to stand up and form the sculpture. Ask them to freeze for 5 seconds, then say "Unfreeze." Ask them to sit, and announce "The End."</p>

3. At the end of the activity, say: "Jesus told this story to show us what God is like and to show us what we are like."
4. Give each child a copy of the handout and a crayon. Say: "On your paper you can see a picture of the father and the son."
5. Read aloud the questions, asking the children to fill in the answers.
6. Read the questions aloud a second time, this time asking the children to call out the answer together.
7. Say: "The son from this story is like us. Like the son, we sometimes think God does not want us to be happy, and we run away from God. And then, like the son, we sometimes repent for our sin, but we worry that God does not love us anymore. The father from this story is like God. God runs to us and loves us even though we have sinned; God forgives us and brings us home."

**For larger groups:** You may want to divide the group into smaller circles, each with a teacher. Each teacher can facilitate the activity with their circle, and then the circles can all perform for one another.

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## Drawing the Story to a Close

1 min. 

Say: "Like the son in the story, we sometimes feel that we would be happier without God; we sometimes run away from God. And then we sometimes repent, but we worry that God does not love us anymore."

Say: "But God forgives us and loves us even though we have sinned, and he brings us back home. How does God do that? How does God forgive us and bring us home? Correct, by sending Jesus."

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## Jesus in the Story

2 min. 

Ask: "What did we discover about Jesus from today's story?"

Get a few children to share their answers aloud, commenting appropriately; then ask everyone to write an answer in the space on their handout.

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## Praying about the Story

5 min. 

Pray aloud, thanking God for his love and grace. Thank him that even though we are like the son in the story, because of Jesus, God forgives us and brings us home.

Ask the children to thank and praise God that he is like the father in the story.

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## A Verse from the Story to Learn at Home

2 min. 

☉ Introduce the verse: "The verse we recited at the start is all about God's love and the fact that it is a gift."

☉ Announce the verse: "So, your verse to practice at home is Ephesians 2:8–9 — 'For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast.'"

☉ Read the verse out loud together as a group.

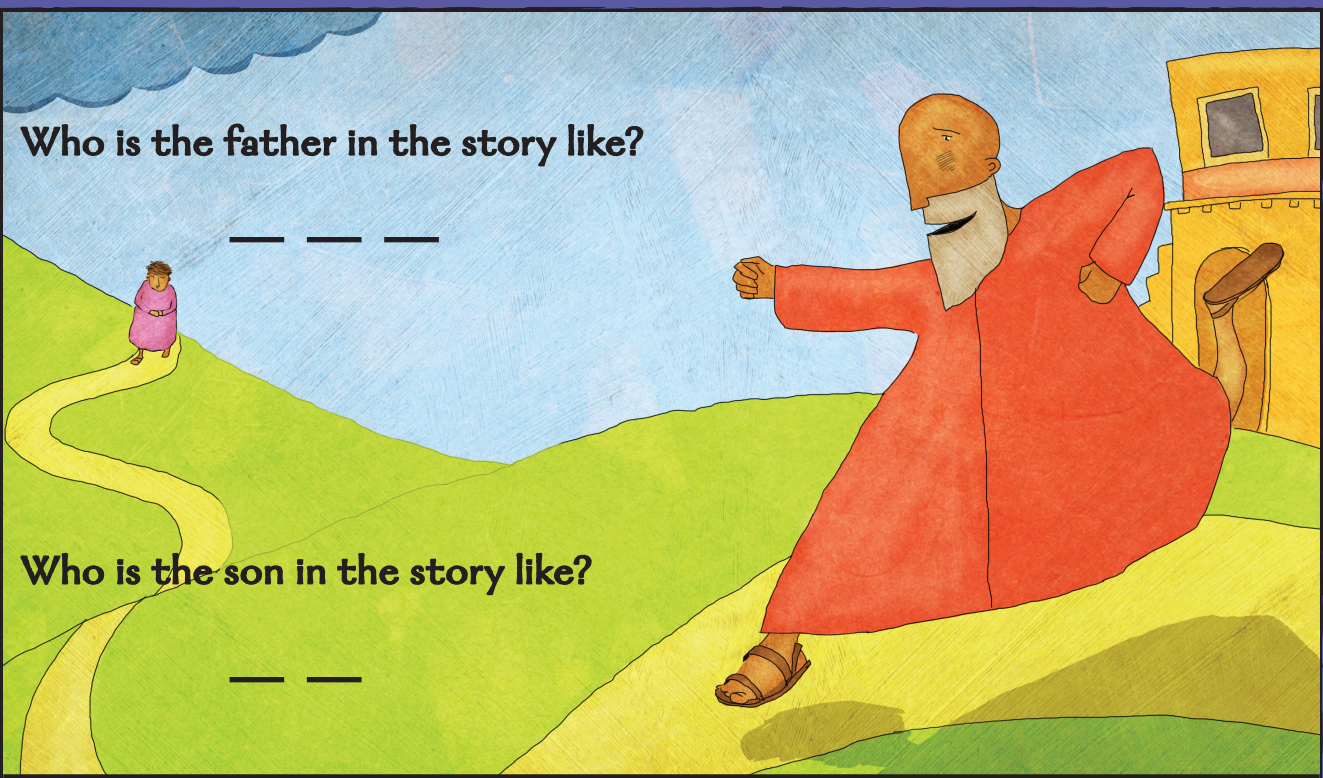
☉ Remind the children to give the handout to their parents and to memorize the verse for next time.

Who is the father in the story like?

— — —

Who is the son in the story like?

— —



Jesus in the Story



What did you discover about Jesus from this story?

Jesus

A Verse from the Story to Learn at Home

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2:8–9)

2 Corinthians Galatians Ephesians Philippians Colossians



Notes for parents: From the story we learned that, like the prodigal son, we often think we will be happier without God. Even though we run away from God, he forgives us and brings us home. Please help your child to memorize the verse and the Scripture reference for next time. Please review with them the place of the book of Ephesians, using the diagram above. www.jesusstorybookbible.com