

Junior Soldiers

Unit 8 : Lesson 7



Prodigal Son!

PURPOSE : For the children to explore and understand God's grace and unconditional love for us, no matter our everyday situation or how we might be lost.

'His father replied, "My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we should be glad and celebrate! Your brother was dead, but he is now alive. He was lost and has now been found."

Luke 15:31-32 (CEV)

Consider & Prepare

Read:

Luke 15:11-32

Try and access a copy of *The Jesus Storybook Bible* for this story

The Lost Son – Part 1 (<http://www.max7.org/resource.aspx?id=c8888c14-686b-4917-a339-ef68d443a0df&creatinguser=1>)

The Lost Son – Part 2 (<http://www.max7.org/resource.aspx?id=78224cd5-949c-447c-a2a9-6403b6fc4595&creatinguser=1>)

The story of the prodigal son is well-known—although not necessarily to children—because it deals with universal concepts like love, forgiveness, personal worth, work ethic, loyalty and family dynamics. It's a story told across the world, in many different languages and cultures, and it still makes sense and teaches lessons.

Most of all, it teaches us about grace and about how God extends grace to us when we seek it.

Be aware that children (and leaders!) may get upset during the 'Connecting in' activity as it will seem very unfair for some. This part of the lesson may be confronting for them and it is important that you support them through this time and help them to understand God's grace and unconditional love for them regardless of their story.

Some children have had to live with parents who did not extend the sort of grace the father in the story (and God) do, so this parable of grace and forgiveness and love may be a hard lesson to swallow for some children.

What you will need:

For 'Connecting In'

- Two bowls: one filled with Rice Bubbles and one filled with Coco Pops (or two different sorts of similar, small breakfast cereals).
- Ingredients and equipment to make chocolate crackles (source your own recipe)

For 'The Main Thing'

- Bible, *The Jesus Storybook Bible* or Max7 video clips
- Two good leaders to help facilitate the groups and lead discussions as they prepare for the debate.

- You can show The Lost Son (Max 7) clips. Part 1 to one group and Part 2 to the other.
- Suggested questions for the group to brainstorm.
- Bibles
- Butchers paper and textas to brainstorm their arguments.

For 'Home & Beyond'

- Print off a Home & Beyond card for each child.



Connecting In

But it's not fair!

For this activity you will need to separate the children into two groups. You will also need two bowls, one filled with Rice Bubbles and one filled with Coco Pops (don't add milk!).

Start this illustration by telling a story while holding both bowls such as: 'I was making my mum and dad breakfast in bed when I was young—one liked Rice Bubbles and one liked Coco Pops – but as I was walking up the steps to take them into my parents' room, I slipped and... (at this point, trip and spill the contents of the bowls so that they mix together).'

Ask for a group of children (approximately half of the group) that would be happy to volunteer to help separate them back into their bowls, one with just Coco Pops and one with just Rice Bubbles, and they will receive a small chocolate bar as a reward/prize (e.g. Freddo or Milky Way). This means that the group who have volunteered know their reward for helping to separate the mess and they agree to help.

After they have started separating the mess, say to the rest of the group that 'while the others are sorting out the bowls, the rest of us might make some chocolate crackles.' Each of the cooks will also get a Freddo or Milky Way after they've made the chocolate crackles. (Those who have agreed to sort the cereal for a chocolate reward will, hopefully, start grumbling because the others get the same reward while doing something much more fun.)

During the two activities, highlight how much fun the kids baking are having, and hurry along the kids who are separating the mixed cereal.

The kids cleaning up will grumble about the unfairness of what has gone on so, when they've cleaned up, draw all of the children together to discuss what has happened.

Before you ask the questions below, let the group know that the reward for those who were sorting the mess today is that they get to keep the chocolate crackles.

Link:

- I wonder if you think this activity was fair.
- What was not fair? Was the activity and what was required not explained well enough?
- Was it fair for the sorters to get the chocolate crackles at the end?
- So no one had it fair. This will be reflected in the story we are going to explore today.

'You may have read or heard about the story of the prodigal son before—today we are going to look at this story and how there were many things in this story that seemed unfair to others. But we want you to focus on the main teaching of the story, that even though sometimes things might seem unfair, we are all winners because God loves us unconditionally, no matter what.'

The Main Thing

The story of the prodigal...

'Today we are going to explore a story that looks at two sons, a story that you have probably heard before but have perhaps only considered from one side of the story and focusing on one of the sons. As we explore the story we will look at how the brothers respond to each other, how they respond to their father and his love, and how the father loves both of his sons. Let's start by looking at what the Bible says in this story, from start to finish.'

Read: Luke 15:11–32

You can read this from the Bible (we suggest using the CEV translation to help connect with the children) or you might like to use *The Jesus Storybook Bible* (the language is very engaging for children and the book is a great resource) or you might like to use video clips from Max7.

- How do we know God loves us? Does he show his love by giving us free chocolates or fun jobs to do?
- Does God love those who were cleaning up more than he loves those who made the chocolate crackles?

No, God's love doesn't equate to anything we do or say or even how we think. God always loves us, regardless of what is happening in lives. In the story, the father didn't go away or stop loving the son who left, it was the son who turned away and then decided to come back.

We have had a look at what the Bible says but now we are going to consider the same story from the perspective of the older son—something that might show us a little bit about how he felt about the whole situation.



'It's hard work running a farm. Now that Dad's getting old, my younger brother and I are responsible for making sure the work gets done, the workers know what to do, and the farm makes money. We work long days and it's exhausting.

So imagine how I felt when my brother said he was leaving to go and party and spend his inheritance? This is the money that Dad's setting aside for us from the profits of the farm; it's the money that means when he dies, we'll be okay, there'll be some reserves set aside to keep us in business.

But if my brother spends his part now...well, it doesn't just affect him, it might mean that we lose the farm just because he wants to have a good time. And what was I supposed to do? It's not like I could go to Dad and say, 'Yep, give me my money, too, I'm leaving.'

No, I was the loyal son, I was the hardworking son, I was the good son, I was the thoughtful son, I was the son who does the right thing.

So why, oh why, oh why is Dad throwing a party for the lazy, thoughtless, uncaring son who has come home simply because he's run out of money?

Dad says I should be happy because he's come home, but the fact is: he should never have left! It's simply not fair. I work hard to raise good cattle to sell at market, but when the foolish runaway comes home, we kill our best calf so that we can have a decent barbecue for him! What a waste!

I owe him nothing. He should have stayed away.'



Who is the most deserving?

Have a debate from the perspectives of both sons: 'Who is the most deserving of the father's love?' (This debate can happen even if you only have a couple of children, you will, however, need a leader for each side/group. You may like to invite a couple of the Big Buds to come and help with this segment. It would be good to have the main leaders to facilitate rather than working with groups, so that they're unbiased for the debate. You will need:

- Two good leaders to help facilitate the groups and lead discussions as they prepare for the debate.
- The Lost Son clips (Max 7). Part 1 for one group and Part 2 for the other.
- Suggested questions for the group to brainstorm.
- Bibles, to read the story again.
- Butchers paper and textas to brainstorm arguments.



Prodigal Son

1. Was there a good reason(s) the younger brother did what he did?
2. What are some of the reasons why his father should accept him back?
3. How would the son convince his father to take him back?
4. Why is he more deserving of the father's love compared to the older brother?
5. What was the son thinking and feeling? Is he genuinely apologetic?

Older Son

1. What would it have been like at home while the brother was away?
2. What are some of the good decisions he made which make him the better son?
3. What would it have felt like for the brother to return and be celebrated, without any thought of the older brother?
4. How has the older brother been treated unfairly?
5. Why is he more deserving of the father's love compared to the younger brother?

Give each group scripture, video clip, questions to formulate their arguments (brainstorm on butchers paper).

Conduct the debate, giving each side time to present their position, then discuss with the kids how well they did in the debate ('*You both presented strong arguments*').

'At the end of the day, both sons received the unconditional love of the father. So, for us, regardless of our circumstances and how we think things might be unfair or others are getting things better than us, we are also winners. Because regardless of what is happening in someone else's life, the fact is that God still loves you (and me) unconditionally. He loves us no matter what!'

Tying In

How will you respond?

For this section it would be good to break into smaller groups depending on the number of children you have in your session. This will give the children the opportunity to personally engage with the topic and share their responses.

As you sit with the children and help them to think about their responses to this story and the message that God has for each of us in this passage, help the children to think about the story from the perspective of both the brothers. How that, at the end of the debate, neither of them seemed more deserving of the father's love than each other.

Take some time to share appropriately with the children about a time when you have felt that you have been treated unfairly. It's important in this section that you share only an appropriate situation, not using names and too much specific detail.

I wonder if there has been a time where you have felt like this. Perhaps when you have felt that you were doing the right thing but were not recognised for it, perhaps someone else got credit for something that you did, maybe you were blamed for something you didn't do.

In reality, things that are unfair sometimes happen and we can feel sad, disappointed or upset by these situations.

- I wonder what your response to an unfair event will be? Or maybe what it should be?
- Will you judge the people involved? Will you be angry or upset?
- Will you love others regardless, like the father in the story, like Jesus loves all of us regardless of what we do?

Share the chocolate crackles with everyone; everyone is deserving of something special in God's eyes.

- Is there anything that you could do that would stop God from loving you?
- Is there anything that you could do that would make God love you more?

Give the children time to engage with the questions. These are pretty powerful questions for any of us.

Prayer for each other...

Sit in a circle for this prayer time, encourage the children to sit with someone different to who they would normally sit with. Encourage each person to pray for the person on their right and to thank God for something specific about them. Finish the prayer segment by focusing on God's grace and how he loves each of us unconditionally:

Dear God,

Thank you for loving me just for who I am.

I am sorry for the times I make the wrong choices in some of the things I say, some of the things I think and some of the things I do.

Thank you for forgiving me and that I don't have to do anything or be anything different for you to love me.

Amen

Home & Beyond

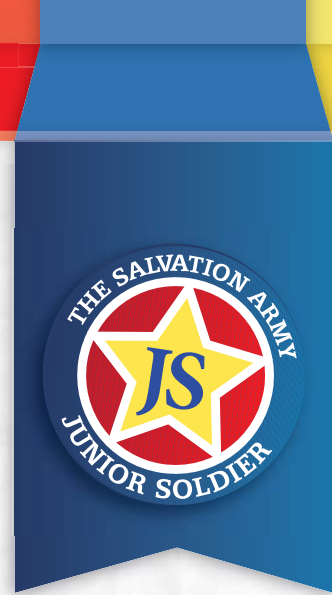
Print off the 'Home & Beyond' cards attached. The children might like to keep these in their journals or notebook where they could write or stick the challenges, reflect, answer questions or complete activities each week.

STOP, THINK & REMEMBER...

During the week when you are faced with a situation and feel like something is not fair, STOP and THINK and REMEMBER that no matter what the situation, God loves and accepts us no matter what.

Go back and read the story about the lost sons to remind you of God's love and grace—Luke 15:1–32

- Sometimes you will feel like the younger son, needing grace and forgiveness and to be loved. Know that God will always forgive you and want you back: he wants you to be connected to him.
- Sometimes you will feel like the older son, unappreciated and forgotten and overlooked. Know that God loves you, appreciates you, values you and wants to be with you.



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