

Today's Bible Story: Homecoming (The Story of the Lost Son) • *Luke 15:11-32*

Today's Bottom Line: God will always forgive you.

Monthly Memory Verse: *Put up with one another. Forgive one another if you are holding something against someone. Forgive, just as the Lord forgave you. Colossians 3:13 (NIRV)*

Monthly Virtue: Forgiveness—deciding that someone who has wronged you doesn't have to pay

Basic Truth: I can trust God no matter what.

Video (Media Package): Countdown

SLIDE: Theme Loop

OPENER

LEADER: "What's up, everyone? I'm so glad we're back here at [your environment's name], where no matter what happened this week, you get a redo! You see, we're talking all about forgiveness this month. Who remembers what forgiveness is? Say it with me."

Video (Media Package): Theme Transition to Virtue

LEADER and KIDS: "Forgiveness means deciding that someone who has wronged you doesn't have to pay."

Video (Media Package): Virtue Transition to Theme

LEADER: "Yes, we all love to be forgiven and get a fresh start—a do-over! That kind of reminds me of the game of freeze tag. You might mess up and get tagged, but all it takes is someone reaching out to touch you and you get a redo!"

"Let's play freeze tag now. But of course, we have to have a twist or two. For one thing, this is slow-motion freeze tag, so everyone show me your best slow-mo move. (*Demonstrate.*)

"I'll be 'It,' so remember, if I tag you, you have to freeze. The only way to get unfrozen and back in the game is to have someone who is NOT frozen tag you. AND you have to snort like a pig. Everyone, do your best pig impression. (*Do it with them.*)

"That's amazing. Now, you might be wondering why we're snorting like pigs. You'll find out soon. But for now, let's play 'Slow-Mo Pig Freeze Tag'!"

"Everyone up on your feet, and remember, only slow-motion movements! AND, when someone tags you back in, you have to snort like a pig. When the song ends, the game is over. The players who are unfrozen when the music ends are the winners! Let's go!"

AUDIO: "Chariots of Fire" by Vangelis

When the music starts, move toward the kids in an exaggerated slow-motion run, tagging them as you go. Make sure everyone is moving in slow motion and snorting like pigs when they get tagged back in.

When the song ends (or fades out), recognize those who are still “unfrozen” as the winners.

SLIDE: Theme Loop

“That was hilarious. And even if you got tagged, you still got a chance at a do-over! I love that about freeze tag. If you’re still wondering what pigs have to do with it, you’ll have to wait just a bit longer. For now, everyone pop back up on your feet. Let’s sing and worship God together!”

WORSHIP

LEADER: “Who remembers our memory verse for this month, Colossians 3:13? Say it with me!”

SLIDE: Memory Verse

LEADER and KIDS: *“Put up with one another. Forgive one another if you are holding something against someone. Forgive, just as the Lord forgave you.” (Colossians 3:13, NIV)*

LEADER: “We can love like God loves, because Jesus has taught us a brand-new way to live! When we put our trust in Jesus, we can also forgive, because WE’VE been forgiven! This song says, ‘I live my life to show that I know, You’re everything to me.’ Let’s sing to God from our hearts.

Video: “Everything to Me” / track 9 from Everything to Me

SLIDE: Theme Loop

Video (Media Package): “All of the Ways” Dance Moves Music Video

SLIDE: Theme Loop

BIBLE STORY

SETTING UP THE STORY

LEADER: “If you’ve been hanging out with us at [your environment’s name] this year, you know we’ve been making our way through God’s Big Story, which we can read about here in the Bible. *(Hold up your Bible.)*

“The Bible is a collection of stories, poems, and letters, but when you put it all together, it’s God’s Big Story—the story of how God made us, loves us, and sent Jesus to be our Savior.

If you’re using a Bible timeline on your wall, you can reference it here as you recap.

“We started back in the beginning, when God made the world and everything in it. People turned away from God, but God had a plan to make things right again. God promised to bless the world through the family of a man named Abraham. When the time was right, Jesus, God’s Son, was born in Bethlehem.

“Lately, we’ve been looking at the life of Jesus, including some really important stories Jesus told. Jesus’ stories are often known as parables, and Jesus told these stories to help people understand something important. *(Hold up Bible.)* In this story, Jesus explained how much God loves and forgives us.”

THE SON LEAVES

LEADER: “On this particular day, as Jesus was teaching, a group of tax collectors and others who were considered outcasts gathered around Him. The Pharisees and religious leaders were totally SHOCKED by this. They were upset that Jesus spent time with people they considered sinners.

“Jesus then told a series of parables. One story was about a lost sheep, and how a shepherd would leave his other sheep to go find it. Jesus also told a story about a lost coin, and how the woman who had lost the coin would search EVERYWHERE until she found it. The third story Jesus told was about a lost son.

Move in front of the storytelling board. Hold up one of the emojis.

“I’ve brought these emojis to help me share this story that Jesus told that day.

Open the Bible to Luke 15:11 (NIRV) and read.

“There was a man who had two sons.

Place the father and two sons emojis (#1-3) on the far right side of the board.

(referencing the board) “Okay, there’s the father and his two sons.

Open the Bible to Luke 15:12 (NIRV) and read.

“The younger son spoke to his father. He said, ‘Father, give me my share of the family property.’ So, the father divided his property between his two sons.

Place the money bag emoji (#4) on the bottom of the board. (You'll place these bottom emojis in a horizontal row across the bottom of the board so that the kids can see them but they don't clutter up the action of the story.)

"This was a very rude thing for the younger son to do. Back in those days, family money would only be passed on to the children AFTER the father died. But here, the son was basically saying, 'Dad, give me my money now!'

Place the grimace emoji (#5) on the bottom of the board.

"Jesus continued.

Open the Bible to Luke 15:13 (NIRV) and read.

"Not long after that, the younger son packed up all he had. Then he left for a country far away."

Place the backpack emoji (#6) on the bottom of the board. Then move the younger son emoji to the far left side of the board.

THE SON STRUGGLES

LEADER: "When the younger son arrived in this faraway country, he started spending all his money and living it up—big time.

Place the celebrate, party food, and money emojis (#7-19) on the bottom of the board. Take your time placing the emojis; it's okay to pause the action of the story for a bit while you do this.

"As Jesus said . . .

Open the Bible to Luke 15:13-14 (NIRV) and read.

"There he wasted his money on wild living. He spent everything he had. Then the whole country ran low on food. So the son didn't have what he needed.

Remove ALL of the emojis from the bottom row except the grimace emoji, and place them all back in the box.

"ALL of the son's money was gone! So what did he do?

Open the Bible to Luke 15:15-16 (NIRV) and read.

"He went to work for someone who lived in that country. That person sent the son to the fields to feed the pigs. The son wanted to fill his stomach with the food the pigs were eating. But no one gave him anything.

Place the pig emoji (#20) on the bottom of the board.

“Okay, gross! Now you know why we made silly pig sounds in our game earlier. But this was no laughing matter for the son in Jesus’ story. The younger son was so desperate that he actually wanted to eat pig slop!

Place the sick face emoji (#21) on the bottom of the board.

“I know. Disgusting. But THEN . . .

Open the Bible to Luke 15:17-20 (NIRV) and read.

“Then [the son] began to think clearly again. He said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough food! But here I am dying from hunger! I will get up and go back to my father. I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven. And I have sinned against you. I am no longer fit to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.’” So he got up and went to his father.

“Yes, the younger son set off for home.”

Move the younger son emoji halfway back to the right side of the board.

Remove ALL of the emojis from the bottom row and place them back in the box.

THE SON IS FORGIVEN

LEADER: “But while the son was still a long way off, his father saw him! Here’s how Jesus told it.

Open the Bible to Luke 15:20 (NIRV) and read.

“While the son was still a long way off, his father saw him. He was filled with tender love for his son.

Place the heart emoji (#22) on the bottom of the board.

“He ran to him. He threw his arms around him and kissed him.

Move the father emoji to the center of the board, next to the younger son emoji.

“The son didn’t think he deserved his father’s love. 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 was so happy that his son had come home! He called out to the 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.

Place the robe, ring, and sandal emojis (#23-25) on the bottom of the board.

“Bring the fattest calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate.

Place the celebrate emoji (#7) on the bottom of the board.

“This son of mine was dead. And now he is alive again. He was lost. And now he is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

“In no time at all, the younger son was dressed in fresh clothes instead of rags. He found himself the guest of honor at a feast!

Remove ALL of the emojis from the bottom row and place them back in the box.

“BUT in the meantime . . . we can’t forget the older brother.

Reference the older brother emoji on the right side of the board.

“The whole time his little brother was out living wild and wasting money, the older brother was working hard for their dad.

Place the pickax emoji (#26) on the bottom of the board.

“The older brother had been out in the field all day, so when he came home to the sounds of music and dancing, he was shocked.

Place the shocked emoji (#27) on the bottom of the board.

“He called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. The servant told him that his father had thrown a party because the younger son had returned, safe and sound.

“Just think what you’d feel like if you were the older brother. The whole thing seemed SO unfair. When the father came out and begged his older son to join the celebration, the son was angry!

*Place the angry emoji (#28) on the bottom of the board.
Then move the father emoji over to the right side of the board, next to the older son emoji.*

“The older son explained to his father how upset he was. But the father said to him . . .

Open the Bible to Luke 15:31-32 (NirV) and read.

“My son . . . you are always with me. Everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad. This brother of yours was dead. And now he is alive again. He was lost. And now he is found.”

Remove ALL of the emojis from the bottom row and place them back in the box. Then place the heart emoji (#22) on the bottom of the board.

Move to the front of the stage as you wrap up.

WRAPPING UP THE STORY

LEADER: “That was the end of the story Jesus told the crowd that day. Jesus didn’t tell them what happened next, so we don’t know either. Maybe the older brother had a change of heart and came inside to celebrate with his brother. Or maybe he stayed angry and stayed outside because he refused to forgive.

“It was clear from Jesus’ story, though, that God is always there to forgive us. God is like the father in the story. It doesn’t matter what we’ve done. God always, ALWAYS welcomes us home—with love.

“Remember . . .

SLIDE: Bottom Line

[Bottom Line] “God will always forgive you.

SLIDE: Bible Story

SLIDE: Theme Loop

“Let’s pray and thank God for that!”

PRAY

LEADER: “Dear God, thank You SO much for always forgiving each of us. We are all trying to be more and more like You every day. But still, we mess up, and we need Your forgiveness. We feel safe and secure in Your love. We know that You can restore us and help us rewrite our stories. You love us and You forgive us, and we are so thankful! We love You, and we pray these things in Jesus’ name. Amen.”

CLOSER

LEADER: “Jesus’ story of the lost son is such an amazing reminder of God’s love and forgiveness! God is the Father who forgives us, no matter what we’ve done or how we’ve messed up.

“We can always come back to God and know that God will forgive us, because we know that we **can trust God no matter what.**

“Remember, **God will always forgive you.** Say that with me.”

LEADER: “Isn’t that SO good to know? I mean, sometimes we’re like the younger brother in the story. We mess up and need to be forgiven. Other times, we’re like the older brother. We might feel angry and jealous when we think that others have gotten away with THEIR mistakes. But no matter what, I hope you’ll always remember that **[Bottom Line] God will always forgive you.**

“I’m so glad to know that God has forgiven me. And the same is true for you. You can have absolute confidence that **[Bottom Line] God will always forgive you** and welcome you back, no matter what. You can always talk to God and be completely honest, because God LOVES you. What an amazing truth to know! Let’s head to Small Group and talk about that some more.”