

# Series: Who is Who

## Lesson 1—The Prodigal Son

### OVERVIEW

Bible Passages: Luke 15:11-32

Key Verse: Luke 19:10—“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”

### BEFORE CLASS

**Preparation:** *Your preparation will determine the direction your class will go.*

- Consider what the idea of a “Heavenly Father” means to you.
- Consider when you gave your life to Christ and how that decision has altered your life.
- Study and prepare your lesson so that you are familiar with the teaching outline.
- Use the Contact 1-2-3 system to the right to follow up on students who have recently missed Sunday School.
- Pray for each student by name.

### **CONTACT 1-2-3 SYSTEM**

*The first time a student is absent, give them a call. Following the second absence, send them a postcard. The third week they are absent, pay them a visit.*

*Think about it: What does it say to a student when they miss multiple weeks in a row and are never contacted? It says, “It really doesn’t matter if you’re here or not.”*

*Small things communicate great messages. Let the three “small” things above communicate that you care and miss your students when they are absent.*

### OPENING ACTIVITY

#### **Activity: Lost and Found**

*(Before students enter the room, hide a small object such as a penny or a paper clip. Hide it well and make it very difficult for the students to find the object.)*

**SAY:** Somewhere in this room I have hidden (name of the object) and I am going to give you one minute to find it—Go!

*(Some of the students will search thoroughly; others will search half-heartedly. Watch for how they search and then use the following questions to comment concerning it.)*

- *Why did some of you searched hard and others search half-heartedly? (Because it really didn't matter if you found the item or not. There was no value in finding it except the pride of saying, "I found it first." In other words, some of your hearts weren't in it.)*

- *Likewise, how hard—how diligently—do you think God seeks for those who are spiritually lost?*

- *How hard—how diligently—do YOU seek for those who are spiritually lost?*

- *Would you say that you share God's passion and zeal for lost people to come to Christ or, like the game, is "your heart just not in it"? If so, what does this say about your heart?*

*SAY:* Today our lesson is going to paint a picture for you of God's heart towards you and all people everywhere, but first I want you to know that *for the next several weeks we are going to be talking about who God is and who you are*, but let's first begin with who you think God is.

### **Activity: Who is God?**

*SAY:* In one minute I want to see how many descriptions of God you can give me. In other words, who is God? Ready...Go!

*(Let the students randomly give descriptions. Here are some examples: God is...a Rock, a Refuge, a Shepherd, a Friend, a Fortress, my Strength, my Savior, etc.)*

- *What do you think the Bible is trying to picture when it talks about God being a Heavenly Father?*

- *Is everyone a child of God?*

*SAY:* No, everyone is *NOT* a child of God. This is a huge misconception that even many Christians have. Everyone is a creation of God, but not everyone is a child of God.

#### **Choose a volunteer—To Read John 1:12**

*SAY:* The only people who are children of God are those who have given their lives to Him.

- *How do you think someone who doesn't know Christ might misinterpret what the Bible means when it talks about God as a Father? (In today's society there are so many "bad" fathers that many people don't truly understand what a "good" father should be. To someone who has only known an abusive and harsh dad, might picture God as abusive and harsh when they picture him as a Father.)*

*SAY:* Think about the following statement by a man who is describing his image of God before he gave his life to Christ:

“My father left my home when I was young, so when I was introduced to the concept of God as Father I imagined Him as a stiff, oily man who wanted to move into our house and share a bed with my mother. I can only remember this as a frightful and threatening idea. We were a poor family who attended a wealthy church, so I imagined God as a man who had a lot of money and drove a big car. At church they told us we were children of God, but I knew God’s family was better than mine, that He had a daughter who was a cheerleader and a son who played football. I was born with a small bladder so I wet the bed till I was ten and later developed a crush on the homecoming queen who was kind to me in a political sort of way, which is something she probably learned from his father, who was the president of a bank. And so from the beginning, the chasm that separated me from God was as deep as wealth and as wide as fashion.”<sup>1</sup>

- *If someone said this to you, what would you say to him?*

## **BIBLE LESSON—part 1**

### **Ask your students to turn to Luke 15.**

[BIBLE SKILLS] While turning there, *ASK*:

- *What are the Gospels?* (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John—where the life of Jesus is presented.)
- *What is the easiest way to find the Gospels in the Bible if you don’t already know where they are?* (Turn to the middle of the Bible and you’ll be in or near Psalms. Then turn to the middle again on the New Testament side. This will put you in or near the Gospels.)

After reading the Scripture passage, *SAY*: This is a parable of Jesus—a parable is a story that paints a picture of a spiritual truth.

### **Choose a volunteer—To Read Luke 15:11-13**

- *So far what do you think Jesus is trying to picture? How is the younger son like a lot of people today?*
- *How do some Christians run away from or turn their backs on God?* (Through any form of sin or rebellion.)
- *What are sins of commission?* (Sins that you commit. These are actions—things you do such as stealing or lying or cussing.)
- *What are sins of omission?* (Right things that you “omit,” or leave out. These are sins that come by your in-action—things you don’t do that God tells you to do such as tithing, witnessing, etc. These are sins of neglect.)

- *Which type of sin are you more prone to have—Bad things that you do (sins of commission) or good things that you don't do (sins of omission)? (Either way, sin is sin and both lead down a destructive path that God doesn't intend for you.)*

**Choose a volunteer—To Read Luke 15:14-19**

**SAY:** Sin always leads to a place that God doesn't intend for you. Look at the son in the story—He's wasted everything; He's in need; He's working with pigs, which were an unclean animal and about the lowest and most humiliating job a Jew could have; He's so hungry he wants to eat the pigs' food. Then "he comes to his senses" and realizes that he needs to go back to his father.

- *How is this like life for those who choose to run away from God and hold onto their sin?*
- *Sometimes what does it take for a person who is in sin to "come to their senses"?* (Sometimes it takes a very painful experience.)

**Choose a volunteer—To Read Luke 15:20-24**

**SAY:** The father had been waiting for the son and when he saw him, he ran to him. Running for an older man was culturally inappropriate in that day but this father was so overwhelmed to have his son back, it didn't matter how he looked or what others said, he took off running as if he had lost control of himself.

Then the father in the story:

- (1) Threw his arms around the son and kissed him.
- (2) Basically ignored his pre-prepared speech about how unworthy he was.
- (3) Ordered for the best robe to be brought—His son wasn't going to keep going around in tattered clothes or rags.
- (4) Ordered for a ring to be put on his finger. This was a signet ring— anything that was stamped with it ensured payment from the owner of the ring. In a way it was like an early credit card.
- (5) Ordered for sandals to be put on his feet. To not have sandals was a sign of poverty.
- (6) To bring a fattened calf and have a feast!

- *How is this like our Heavenly Father when someone repents of their sins and comes to Him?*

A Christian song writer once wrote wrote:

"Almighty God, The Great I Am, Immoveable Rock, Omnipotent, Powerful, Mighty God, and the only time...I ever saw Him run was when He ran to me, took me in His arms, wiped the tears from my face and said, 'My son's come home again.' It was the only time...I ever saw Him run." <sup>2</sup>

**SAY:** God celebrates when someone comes to Him.

## KEY VERSE

### Choose a volunteer—To Read Luke 15:10

• *Who is the rejoicing in this verse?* (Tell them to look at it closely—Many people say that the angels are rejoicing but that’s not what this verse says. It says that there is rejoicing in the “presence” of the angels. Yes, this could imply that angels rejoice but the angels are in God’s presence. The celebration comes from God. Many of the things Jesus said He spoke to counter the false teachings of the scribes and Pharisees. These religious leaders taught that God rejoiced when a sinner was thrown into hell. In this passage Jesus is correcting them to show that God not only seeks the sinners but rejoices when they repent and come to Him.)

• *What is your most prized possession in the entire world?*

• *How would you feel if you lost it?*

• *How would you feel if you found it again?*

**SAY:** This is God’s heart for those who are spiritually lost.

### Choose a volunteer—To Read Luke 19:10

• *Do you find yourself desiring to seek and save those who are lost?*

• *Do you share God’s heart for the lost and dying of this world—the longing for them to come to Christ and the celebration when they do?*

• *If you do NOT share God’s heart in these matters what do you think it says about your heart?*

## BIBLE LESSON—part 2

### Choose a volunteer—To Read Luke 15:25-31

**SAY:** The older son did not share his father’s heart of celebration when his brother returned. The younger brother had run away from his father but he had returned humble and broken, never expecting to be a son again but only a servant. The older brother had been faithful in serving his father and keeping his rules but he had never received a feast such as this. He was jealous of how the younger son was being treated and frustrated because his faithful service appeared to have gone without recognition.

• *In the story, the father obviously represents God; the younger son represents those who are in sin; but who does the older brother represent?* (He represents the religious leaders who are more concerned about themselves than the souls of others.)

• *Which do you care more about—yourself or the souls of others?*

• *In what ways might you be like the older brother?*

• *How much would you give to see one soul come to Christ? (An hour, a dollar, a thousand dollars—What’s the price you’d put on a person’s salvation? Would you give everything you own to save one soul from hell? Would you give your life that one soul might be saved?)*

## **WRAP IT UP**

### **A Moment of Silence**

*Let your students decide who they identify with the most:*

- (1) The younger brother who ran away from the father.
- (2) Or the older brother who couldn’t celebrate at his return.

**SAY:** In a moment we’re going to take a moment of silence. *If you identified with the younger brother the most* I want you to silently pray during this time either for yourself if you are like the son who has run away from the Father or to pray for others who have left the Father. *If you identified with the older brother the most* the I want you to silently pray for those who serve God out of obligation instead of a full heart and that God will give you and others His heart to seek and save those who are lost.

### **Take a Moment of Silence**

### **Prayer Time**

List prayer requests below and on the back of this page and pray for your students throughout the week. *Ask if any of your students want to pray today.*

<sup>1</sup>Donald Miller, *Blue Like Jazz: Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003), 1-2.

<sup>2</sup>Benny Hester’s song, “When God Ran.”