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# THE FATHER IS LOVE

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## SERIES: FREE

Join us throughout the month of May as we learn stories that show us that Jesus is our freedom. We will be going through the books of Matthew and Luke.

## REMEMBER VERSE

JOHN 17:3—Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

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## SCHEDULE

### *All Services*

0:00—0:10	Welcome/Check-In
0:10—0:15	Transition to Large Group
0:15—0:30	Large Group (B Playground)
0:30—0:35	Transition to Small Group
0:35—1:05	Small Group (Lesson/Activity/Respond)
1:05—1:15	Dismiss

## NOTES

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# LEADER RESOURCES

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## SERIES OVERVIEW

WEEK 1: God Is the Lord of the Sabbath

*Sabbath*

WEEK 2: Jesus Is Freedom

*Rich Fool*

CURRENT WEEK: The Father Is Love

*Prodigal Son*

WEEK 4: Remember & Celebrate

*ZONK!*

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## EQUIP

In Luke 15, Jesus tells a memorable story that we refer to today as the parable of the prodigal son—a story that might better be called the parable of the unloving brother. We can see the specific reason why Jesus tells this parable as we look at the story in context.

In the beginning of the chapter, we see tax gatherers and sinners coming to Jesus—something that greatly bothered the Pharisees and scribes. Pious Jews didn't have anything to do with these kinds of people. In direct response to the Pharisees' unloving attitude, Jesus tells a series of three parables, all of which together point to one clear message: God rejoices when the lost are found. He is love.

In the first two stories, we read about a man who loses a sheep and a woman who loses a coin. Both stories end with rejoicing over the lost object being found. This third climactic parable also tells the story of something lost—this time, a wayward son who finds his way home, and great rejoicing ensues (by almost everyone).

While we can take away many possible applications from such a story, the main point Jesus was making is that God rejoices when the lost are found and wants us to do the same. The end of the story makes this clear as it closes with the father teaching a poignant lesson to his older son, who doesn't rejoice when his brother returns.

This lesson points directly at the religious leaders grumbling about Jesus spending time with sinners; it tells the leaders that they should have the same attitude toward the lost. This lesson, from an earthly father, reveals the heart of love our heavenly Father has for His children.

God loves it when His children come home. God is love.

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## ENCOURAGE

The parable of the prodigal son is one of the most touching stories in Scripture. We can relate to the son in the story because we may know what it's like to have done something wrong and feel absolutely ashamed. We may know what it's like to have a sibling or a friend who appears to be getting more than we feel is deserved, and we may know what it's like to feel wretched and in need of God's total love and forgiveness.

Spend some time this week praising the God who offers Himself freely to those who repent and turn to Him. Praise Him for the times He offered you grace and forgiveness, even though you didn't deserve it. Praise Him for the blessings He has given you that are far greater than anything you could have imagined—when God forgave you, rejoiced over you, and called you His child.

## WELCOME

*Some fun ideas to welcome kids as they check-in to your room at the beginning of service.*

Invite the kids to color on the provided coloring page or work on the provided activity page.

As kids arrive, feel free to ask them this week's Connect Question. Feel free to write the question on the board and encourage some fun dialogue before you start your lesson.

QUESTION: What's a time when your family threw a party or you attended a fun party?

## RESPOND

*A chance for kids to respond to what God is putting on their hearts through creative expression.*

When the Prodigal Son came home to his father, his father threw him a party and celebrated his arrival. Though his son had sinned and made mistakes, his father welcomed him home and wanted to celebrate him. This is what God is like: He loves us no matter what and wants us to know Him.

INSTRUCTIONS: Hand each child a door template. Have the child color the template however they would like. Cut out each piece of the template. Glue the heart in the center of the door. Glue the verse on top of the rectangle at the bottom of door like it is a welcome mat. Enjoy the reminder of how God celebrate when we return home to Him!

SUPPLIES:

- Door Template
- Glue
- Crayons/markers

## REFLECT

*A chance to reflect on what kids have just learned about The Big God Story.*

Today we heard a parable about a father who welcomed his son home even after the son wasted his inheritance. Instead of being angry, the father had compassion on his son and showed love to him. Jesus told this parable because He wanted people to know what God the Father is like. He wanted people to know that God is loving, gracious, forgiving, compassionate, and giving. God is all of these things because He is the perfect Father.

- What did the son ask his father for? *Luke 15:12*
- Why did the son return home? *Luke 15:14-18*
- What did the father do when he saw his son? *Luke 15:20*
- What does this story tell us about God's love?

## BLESS

*A powerful way to bless the kids and parents by sending them off with a benediction.*

INSTRUCTIONS: Invite the parents into your room at the end of the service to say one last prayer together with the whole family. Instruct them to find their child and sit/stand by their side. Explain what their child learned today and read the verse below. Pray together and then dismiss.

1 JOHN 3:1 – See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know Him.

BLESSING: May you know that you're a child of God. May you experience His love when you feel sad, confused, or lost. May you remember your Father will always respond to you in love, for He is love.

## NOTES

This script serves as an outline of what your storytelling might sound like. Items written in italics are cues for the storyteller and are not meant to be read out loud. You are fully encouraged to make it your own and add a personal touch.

The script serves as an example, however if you would like to teach based on the script and are in need of any supplies mentioned, we would be happy to supply those for you! Storytelling images mentioned will always be provided in your basket each week, but if you need any other supplies for your lesson, contact a Grove KIDS Staff member beforehand so we can supply it for you! You are also welcome to bring in your own props if you would like!

## RESOURCES PROVIDED

- None

## STORYTELLING

What's a parable? *Invite answers.* Yes, a parable is a story that shows us something true. In today's part of The Big God Story, Jesus told three parables in a row. The third parable—the story we'll look at—is a parable about a lost son. This parable shows us that the Father is love and wants all of us to know that He cares about us. Today, every time I say the words "The Father is love," let's all do this motion together. *Show children how to cross their arms over their chest in the shape of an "X," the ASL sign for "love."* Before we start, let's take a few minutes to ask God to teach us today. *Lead the children in a Prayer of Release to pause, be still, and ask the Holy Spirit to quiet their hearts and minds.*

*Invite kids to turn to Luke 15 in their Bibles. Ask a volunteer to read Luke 15:11-12 aloud.* The younger son wanted to take his inheritance—the money his father would give him one day—really early. During Bible times, sons often lived where their parents did for a long time. So it would've been a surprise that the son wanted to leave his father's land. This probably made the father sad. His son was choosing to leave him and go spend his money in another land. He wasn't thinking about what his father wanted. But the father did what his son asked. He gave the son his inheritance.

So the young man left and found his way to another country. He spent lots and lots of money. Eventually he ran out of money. He became so poor that he couldn't buy anything to eat! This young man, who had just been so wealthy, had to become a servant to stay alive. He worked with the pigs, which are very dirty animals. *Ask a volunteer to read Luke 15:16 aloud.* Before he'd had plenty of food to eat, but now he was very hungry. He was so hungry that he wished he could have just bite of what the pigs ate! If this young man had chosen to stay with his father, he would have had plenty to eat. His father would have taken care of him because he loved him. *Invite the kids to cross their arms over their chests.* Instead, the son had selfishly chosen to ask for his inheritance and then leave.

One day the young man had an idea. He knew that his father's servants had plenty to eat. Even though he had taken his money and left, he wondered if he could go back and be a servant for his father. He didn't expect to be treated like a son again, but at least he could work and not be hungry. *Ask a volunteer to read Luke 15:20 aloud.* The father saw his son when he was still very far away. The father ran out to meet him and hugged him and kissed him! This was a very important part of Jesus' parable. Why do you think Jesus wanted people to

know that the father ran to hug his son? *Invite responses from the kids.* That's right! Jesus wanted everyone listening to know that this is what God the Father is like. The Father is love! *Prompt kids to make "X."* He loves us so much and always forgives us, even when we've run away from Him.

The young man told his father that he didn't expect him to treat him like a son anymore after what he had done. But the father was so excited to have his son home! *Read Luke 15:22-24 aloud.* Instead of treating his son like a servant, the father treated him like an honored guest! He prepared food and got him new clothes and invited everyone to celebrate. The father loved his son so much and was so excited that he had returned. The young man knew that his father loved him, just like we know that the Father is love. *Invite kids to make "X."*

But the father's oldest son wasn't happy about this. He had stayed with his father and not run off like his younger brother. He didn't think it was fair that the younger son should get a party. But the father talked to the older son. He explained that he was so happy his son had returned home. *Read Luke 15:31-32 aloud.* The father knew that the older brother had stayed and worked as he was supposed to, and that was a good thing! The younger son did not do what he was supposed to and had made many mistakes, but the father loved and forgave him! The younger son had been lost, but now he was found. He had left, but now he had come home. This was a great reason for the father to celebrate! From this parable we can see that the Father is love. *Prompt kids to make "X."* He loves us so much and always forgives us, no matter what we've done. In fact, Jesus came to die for our sins, even when we had chosen to disobey Him.

God's love for us is so amazing, and He invites us to know Him. When we come back to Him, He treats us just like the father in the parable treated his lost son. It's so amazing that we can know our Father who loves us and forgives us! *Share a personal story about a time you were particularly aware of God's love for you.*