I am the light of the world.
Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness,
but will have the light of life.

John 8:12
(NIV 1984)
How did a father show love for his sinful son?

The father showed love for his son by forgiving him.

* Application: God loves us and forgives all our sins.
* Response: We daily confess our sins and ask for God’s forgiveness.

Lesson Summary: Jesus told a parable to show the great love that our heavenly Father has for sinners. A son left his father’s home to live a wicked and sinful life. When he finally realized how foolish he had been, he returned home. His father welcomed him home and forgave him.

* Ephesians 2:8,9
* The Lord’s Prayer
* Hymn 304:1


Dear heavenly Father, I sin against you so many times each day! I do not deserve your love and care. How thankful I am that you love me so much that you are willing to forgive me over and over again! Help me show the children your great love as I teach them the parable of the lost son. Help us show our thankfulness to you by speaking and acting in ways that please you. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.
**Aim**

God, your heavenly Father, loves you most of all. Today you will hear a parable that Jesus told to teach about his heavenly Father’s love. **Listen to Jesus’ story to find out how a father showed love for his sinful son.**

**Introduction**

Ask the children to name some ways that their parents show them love. **[Provide a home, food, and clothing; teach about Jesus; show kindness; give help when hurt; punish when necessary.]**

**Discuss**

Have the children name ways people show love for one another. **[Hug, kiss, give gifts, show kindness, provide help.]** Write (or have the children write) their responses on the heart. Leave room for writing more during **Discuss.**

**Close**

Make a large (about 2 feet wide) heart out of **poster board** or **paper.** **Save for Discuss and Close.**

In our lesson we will hear one of the parables Jesus told. It shows how much God loves each and every one of us. **Listen to Jesus’ story to find out how a father showed love for his sinful son.**

**Worship**

**Sing:** Ask why someone might step on a bug that is in his or her home. **[To get rid of the bug so it won’t be a bother.]** Explain that God gets rid of something for us every day through Jesus our Savior. God forgives our sins so they don’t worry us. We trust in him to save us. **Sing “I Am Trusting You, Lord Jesus” (hymn 446:1).**

**Pray:** Dear Father in heaven, we are sorry for all the times we have sinned against you. Crush our sins and forgive them through Jesus so that they will never bother us again. Amen.

**Sing:** Explain that Psalm 47 (hymnal, page 85) praises God as King over all the earth. He is the one and only God and the Savior from sin. Teach the refrain to the students. Then sing or say the verses and have the children join in on the refrain.

**Pray:** Dear God, we praise you, because only you can save us. Keep us faithful to you. Lead us to worship and serve you gladly each day. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

**Sing:** Explain that Psalm 47 (hymnal, page 85) praises God as King over all the earth. He is the one and only God and the Savior from sin. Teach the refrain to the students. Then sing or say the verses and have the children join in on the refrain.

**Pray:** Dear God, we praise you, because only you can save us. Keep us faithful to you. Lead us to worship and serve you gladly each day. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

**Sing:** Explain that Psalm 47 (hymnal, page 85) praises God as King over all the earth. He is the one and only God and the Savior from sin. Teach the refrain to the students. Then sing or say the verses and have the children join in on the refrain.

**Pray:** Dear God, we praise you, because only you can save us. Keep us faithful to you. Lead us to worship and serve you gladly each day. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

**Sing:** Explain that Psalm 47 (hymnal, page 85) praises God as King over all the earth. He is the one and only God and the Savior from sin. Teach the refrain to the students. Then sing or say the verses and have the children join in on the refrain.

**Pray:** Dear God, we praise you, because only you can save us. Keep us faithful to you. Lead us to worship and serve you gladly each day. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.
On the board draw large stick figures with happy faces. Label one “father” and the other “son.” Make the father’s face sad when the son leaves home to lead an evil life. Make the son’s face sad when telling that he had no money and little food. Make the father happy when telling that he sees his son coming home. Draw a robe, sandals, and a ring on the son. Then add a smile.

Jesus wanted the people listening to him to know that God loves sinners and wants them to be saved, so he told them this parable:

“A man had two sons. One day the younger son said, ‘Father, give me the part of your money that will be mine when you die. I want to have it now.’

“The father divided his money between his two sons. Not long after that, the younger son took everything he had and went to live in a country far away. There he lived a wicked and sinful life. He foolishly spent his money until it was gone.

“Now the son was very poor. He didn’t even have enough money to buy food. And because there had not been rain for a long time and nothing was growing, he couldn’t find anything to eat in the gardens or fields. At last he got a job taking care of pigs. As he did his work, he was so hungry that he wished he could have some of the pigs’ food. But no one would even give him that.

“The son saw how foolish he had been. He thought, ‘My father’s servants are never hungry. They have all the food they want. And here I am, dying of hunger! I’ll go back to my father and tell him how sorry I am that I have sinned against God and against him. I’ll say that I am not good enough to be called his son and ask him to let me be one of his servants.’

“The father had not forgotten about his son. He still loved him very much. While the son was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. At once the father ran out to meet him! He threw his arms around him and kissed him.

“The son said, ‘Father, I have sinned against God and against you. I’m not good enough to be called your son.’

“But before the son could say any more, the father called for his servants. ‘Hurry!’ he said. ‘Get the best robe, and put it on my son! Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet! Bring the best food we have, and make a special meal. Let’s have a party and be happy! For my son was lost, but now he is found!’”
At the beginning of the parable, what did the younger son want from his father? [The money that would be his when his father died.]

How do you think the father felt when the son asked for this money and then went away? [Sad.]

Why do you think the son went to a country far away? [Probably so that he could do whatever he wanted; his father would not be there to correct him.]

After a while, the young man’s money ran out and he had no food.

How would this have made the son feel? [Sad, lonely, homesick, etc.]

What did the son wish he could eat? [The food that pigs were eating.]

The son realized that his father’s servants had plenty to eat, yet he was starving. So he decided to go home.

Whom did the son realize he had sinned against? [God and his father.]

What did the son plan to ask his father? [He wanted to ask if he could live as one of his father’s servants.]

Why didn’t he think he was good enough to be called a son anymore? [He had wanted to leave home; he had lived a sinful and wicked life; he had wasted his father’s money.]

How did the son feel about his sins? [He was sorry.]

Sin is serious. We too feel sad after we have sinned because we know we have disobeyed God. God hates sin, and we feel bad inside because we know what we did was wrong.

What does God want us to do when we feel this way? [God wants us to tell him we are sorry and ask him for forgiveness.]

The father watched for his son and showed love to him as soon as he saw him.

What did the father do when he saw his son? [He ran to him, hugged him, and kissed him.]
Do Circle “hug” and “kiss” on the heart if the children suggested these earlier as a way to show love. If they did not suggest them, write them on the heart now.

Ask What did the father tell his servants to put on his son? [A robe, a ring, and sandals.]

Say In those days, only sons in the family, not servants, wore such things. The father gave his son these gifts to show everyone that the boy was still his son and that he had forgiven him.

Do Circle “give gifts” on the heart if the children suggested it earlier, or add it now.

Ask What do you think was the most important thing the father gave his son? [Forgiveness.]

Do Circle “forgive” on the heart if the children suggested it earlier, or add it now.

Say In the parable, the father reminds us of [God]. God loves us as his dear children. Each day he wants us to tell him we have sinned and to trust in him for [forgiveness]. He forgives us just as the father in the parable forgave his son.

Say We are all sinful just like the children in these stories. We need to realize and admit our sins. Listen to a prayer said by a girl who realized she had sinned:

Karen prayed, “Dear Jesus, I'm sorry I yelled at my mom today. Please forgive me!”

Ask Where did Karen go when she realized she had sinned? [To God.]

Say Only God forgives sins and gives us peace.

Ask Whom did the son realize he had sinned against? [God and his father.] What did the son plan to ask his father? [Can I please be one of your servants?]

Say The father ran to meet his son, forgave him, and had servants give him gifts. He didn’t
even give his son time to ask to become a servant.

Ask Why did the father want to celebrate? [His lost son had been found.]

Say God is also happy when we come to him, confess (tell him about) our sins each day, and trust in him to forgive us. He gladly forgives us through Jesus!

Ask How did the father in this parable show love for his sinful son? [He forgave him.] How is God like the father in the story when he deals with us? [He loves and forgives us.]

Say The son realized his sin and came to his father for help.

Ask What do we want to tell God about each day? [Our sins.]

Say God forgives our sins through the work of [Jesus].

Do Sing memory treasure hymn 304:1.

Parent Idea: Teach your child the short rhyming prayer on the student lesson.

CLOSE You need the heart you used in Discuss. Cut a paper cross to put on the heart.

Say The son in Jesus’ parable sinned against God and his father. Later, the son realized his sin and was sorry.

Ask What gifts did the father give his son when he returned home? [A robe, a ring, and sandals.]

Although those gifts were nice, what was the best gift the father gave his son? [Forgiveness.]

Say Forgiveness is also the best gift our heavenly Father gives us. God wants us to confess our sins and ask for forgiveness each day. That forgiveness has already been earned for us by Jesus.

Ask How did Jesus take away all our sins? [He died on a cross for us.]

Do Attach the cross to the heart. Then close with the following prayer.

Jesus, Savior, wash away All that I’ve done wrong today. Make me ever more like you, Good and gentle, kind and true. Amen. (hymn 593:2)

Parent Idea: Talk about how serious one sin is. Then make a “sin estimate” as you do the second student lesson activity.

at Home
* Ephesians 2:8,9

* The Lord’s Prayer
Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who  
sin against us.  
Lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory  
are yours now and forever. Amen.

* Hymn 304:1
Jesus sinners does receive;  
Oh, may all this saying ponder  
Who in sin’s delusions live  
And from God and heaven wander.  
Here is hope for all who grieve—  
Jesus sinners does receive.

Are you consistent with your classroom rules and discipline strategies? Do you model God’s forgiveness? Do you make sure that when your children disobey, they understand

- what they did and why it was wrong?
- what the consequences of their sins are?
- that they are forgiven by God and by you?

Ask the Father for patience, forgiveness, help, and a large measure of his love.

- Begin by singing “Jesus Sinners Does Receive” (hymn 304:1). Remind the children that we receive forgiveness through our Savior Jesus, who lived, died, and rose for us.

- Use Activity 1 under Lesson Activities to review the story.

- Before class write “I sinned against you when I ______. Forgive me for Jesus’ sake, dear God” at the top of a sheet of paper. Then make two copies for each child.

During class remind the children that God wants us to think about the sins we have done each day, know they are serious, tell him we are sorry, and ask him for forgiveness. Then distribute the pages. Have the students write about and draw (nonreaders can just draw) a specific sin on each page. When the children are done, have them pray about their sins and ask God for forgiveness. Then set out a sack,
have the children drop their papers into it, draw a cross on the outside, and then put the sack of sins in the trash. Lead the children in thanking God for taking away their sins through Jesus.

• Pray:
  Jesus, Savior, wash away
All that I’ve done wrong today.
Make me ever more like you,
Good and gentle, kind and true. Amen. (hymn 593:2)

• Choose and use the Lesson Activities that best meet the needs of your students.

Lesson Activities

1. Review

Switcheroo

Purpose: To trade places with the students and allow them to tell the lesson as the “teacher.”

Procedure: To review the lesson, tell the children that you will trade places with them. You will play the part of a student, and they will be the teachers. Allow several children to tell different parts of the lesson to you. Let the other children take turns asking you a question or two about the lesson.

2. Application

Secret Message

Purpose: To review the lesson application by solving a secret message.

Procedure: On the board draw a short line for each letter of the message, “God loves us and forgives our sins.” Leave a space between words. Call on a child to pick a letter that might be in the message. If the letter is in the message, write it on the appropriate line(s). If not, call on another child to make a different suggestion. Make a list of letters that don’t work so they won’t be chosen again. Continue until a child can solve the secret message. Suggestion: Use this procedure to review memory treasures.

“I Am God’s Child” Projects

Purpose: To make items the father in the parable gave his son.

Procedure: Give each child a copy of Copy Master 1. Read the directions. Provide the materials needed for making the items.

3. Music

Songs to Sing

Purpose: To sing songs that reinforce the application of the lesson.

Procedure: Teach and sing one or more of the following songs:

• Parts of the worship liturgy, such as the “O Christ, Lamb of God” (hymnal, page 35) and the “Lord, Have Mercy” (hymnal, page 15), are good reminders that Jesus takes away our sins.

• “A Psalm for Children” (Copy Master 2) tells how great God’s love is for sinners. Speak the verses (for nonreaders; responsively with readers), and sing the refrain together.

• “Jesus Loves Me,” stanza 3 (Let All the People Praise You, Northwestern Publishing House), is a familiar song, which tells that heaven is ours because of what Jesus has done for us.
4. Art

“God Loves Me” Hearts

Purpose: To remind the children that just as the father in the parable loved his son, so our heavenly Father loves us.

Procedure: Give each of the children a large heart cut from red construction paper. Tell them to print “God Loves _____ (child’s name)” across the top of the heart. Ask the children to write sentences (or draw pictures) on the hearts, telling how they know God loves them. Then let the children decorate their paper hearts using markers, beads, glitter glue, sequins, and other craft items. Suggestion: Hang the hearts on a bulletin board along with the words “God Loves Me.”

5. Review and Apply

Nonreader

Purpose: To draw pictures of the gifts the father in the parable gave his son and gifts God gives us.

Procedure: Duplicate Copy Master 3 for the children to complete.

Answers: The children should draw sandals, a robe, and a ring on the son; finish the other pictures; and trace the dotted letters. Drawings in the box will vary.

Reader

Purpose: To review with a code how the father in the parable helped his son; to explain what the parable teaches.

Procedure: Duplicate Copy Master 4 for the children to complete.

God’s Word in the Lesson: I HAVE SINNED; FORGAVE

God’s Word in My Life: God, us, Jesus, forgives

Challenge

Purpose: To complete sentences and draw pictures about story events; to explain what the parable teaches.

Procedure: Duplicate Copy Master 5 for the children to complete.

God’s Word in the Lesson: 1. wicked (sinful, evil); feeding pigs. 2. robe; ring (order may be switched); sandals; special meal. Drawings will vary.

God’s Word in My Life: 1. sinful; 2. sinned; 3. forgiveness (help); 4. food; 5. forgiveness; 6. sins; 7. heaven; 8. Jesus

6. Other Ideas

The Eraser Memory Game

Purpose: To aid in the memorization of a memory treasure.

Procedure: Play the eraser memory game to help the children learn the Ephesians 2:8,9 or the hymn 304:1 memory treasure. Write the memory treasure on the board. Say the memory treasure with the children. Allow the children to come to the board, one at a time, and erase one or several of the words. The class should repeat the memory treasure after each erasure until there are no words left.

Bouncing Memory Treasures

Purpose: To review a memory treasure while playing catch.

Procedure: Divide the class into pairs. Give each pair a basketball or playground ball. Have the children in each pair stand about 6 to 10 feet apart, facing each other. Then assign a memory treasure to each pair. One child should bounce pass the ball to his or her partner. As the ball hits the ground, both children should say the first word of the memory treasure. The other child should then catch the ball and return the pass. As the ball bounces again, both children should say the second word of the memory treasure, and so on.