TEACHER’S GUIDE

GRADES 3-4
YEAR 1 | SPRING

Sunday School
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 the father show love for his younger son?

The father forgave his younger son and joyfully celebrated his return.

Application: God rejoices when we come to him in repentance and gladly forgives us for Jesus’ sake.

Response: We repent of our sins and confidently ask God to forgive us for Jesus’ sake.

Lesson Summary: Jesus taught a parable about a young son who took his inheritance, left his father’s home, and wasted his money in sinful living. When he realized his sinfulness, he returned home, and his father forgave him and welcomed him back. The older son, feeling self-righteous and jealous, was upset, but his father said it was time to celebrate because the younger son had been lost and now was found.

**Aim**

Isaiah 64:6a
* Ephesians 2:8,9
* The Conclusion to the Commandments (with explanation)
* Hymn 304:1† (See p. 75.)

**Memory Treasures Choices**

famine—a time when there is a great shortage of food

Gracious heavenly Father, I have sinned against you time and time again. But your love and forgiveness have sought me out and are greater than all my sins. You alone make me worthy to serve, and my heart rejoices in your forgiveness. Amen.
Sing: “By Grace I’m Saved” (hymn 384:1,2,5). The hymn reminds us that God’s grace (his love for us, which we don’t deserve) is complete and sure. We can always be certain of God’s grace to us.

Pray: Dear God, I do not deserve your wonderful grace. Thank you for your great love and forgiveness through Jesus my Savior. Amen.

Ask the children whether they have ever done something so bad that they were afraid to talk to their parents about it. Ask why they were afraid. [I was afraid of being punished. I didn’t think my dad would forgive me. Etc.] Acknowledge that sometimes it is scary to talk to our parents on earth about a sinful thing we’ve done. Then point out that we have another parent that we talk to about our sins: God, our heavenly Father. And sometimes that might seem scary too.

In today’s lesson, we’ll learn what God the Father does when sinners come to him. Listen to today’s parable to answer this question: How did the father show love for his younger son?
Show the first five pictures from Copy Master 1 (duplicated, cut apart, and if necessary, enlarged) as you tell the lesson. Save picture number 6 for the Discuss section.

Very often people who were known to be living sinful lives came to hear Jesus preach. Jesus always welcomed them. He was glad to have the opportunity to lead them to know him as their Savior. But the Jewish leaders grumbled because he did this.

To correct their wrong idea of what a Savior should do, Jesus told this parable: “A certain man had two sons. One day the younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me now the share of the money that you plan to leave me when you die.’ So the father gave each son his share right away.

“A few days later the younger son packed up all his belongings and traveled to a faraway country. There he wasted his money on wild parties with bad men and women. Soon he had spent everything he had. About that same time, a very bad famine came to that land, and the young man was left with nothing. So he found a job feeding pigs. He became so hungry that he wished he could eat some of the food that the pigs were given to eat, but no one would give him even that.

“Finally he came to his senses and saw how foolish he had been. He said to himself, ‘Back home even my father’s servants have more than enough food to eat, and here I am starving to death! I will go back to my father and say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against God and against you. I do not deserve to be your son. Just let me stay here and be one of your servants.’”

“So the young man started on his way home to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father looked down the road and saw him coming. The father’s heart was filled with love and pity for his son. He ran to his son, threw his arms around him, and kissed him.

“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against God and against you. I do not deserve to be your son.’

“But that was as far as he got, because the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring out the finest robe and put it on my son. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the calf we’ve been saving for a special occasion and get it ready
You will need the six people shapes from Copy Master 2, duplicated, enlarged, and cut out. Attach them to the board.

Do Point out the people shapes on the board, and read what is written inside each. Have volunteers draw lines to match the people from the parable with those whom they represent. [Younger son—Us sinners; Father—God the Father; Older son—Jewish leaders and others who look down on “sinners.”]

Ask How is the younger son like us? [He sinned against his father, just as we sin against God. He was sorry for his sins, just as we are sorry. He was forgiven by his father, and we are forgiven by our heavenly Father because Jesus died for us.] How is God the Father like the father in the parable? [He loves his children, gives us good things, rejoices when we repent, and forgives us our sins.] When might we be tempted to act like the older son? [When we think someone else is a worse sinner than we are, and when we wish that someone who did something terrible wouldn’t be forgiven.]

Discuss If you showed the first five pictures from Copy Master 1 when telling the story, have picture 6 available to show during this section of the lesson.

Ask Why did the Jewish leaders grumble whenever Jesus welcomed people who had lived sinful lives? [They looked down on such people and wanted nothing to do with them.] Why is it comforting for us to know that Jesus welcomes sinners? [Because we are sinners. Jesus welcomes us to come to him!]

Say In Jesus’ parable, the younger son wanted his inheritance—the money he would receive from his father when his father died—and he wanted it right away.

Ask What does this show about the younger son? [He was not satisfied with the blessings he already had from his father.] Say That son soon traveled to a faraway country, where he used the money to have wild parties with sinful people.

Ask How was the son sinning by doing this? [He was wasting God’s gift of money, not showing respect or love for his father, and taking part in sinful acts.]

Say When are we like the younger son who left his father? (Note: Help the children answer this question by filling in the missing words from the sentences that follow as you say them.)
• When we sin, we are turning away from [God], our heavenly [Father].

• We act like the younger son when we hate living [God's] way and are not satisfied with what he has [given] us.

• We also act like the younger son when we want to get out of God's sight and do [sinful] things.

Say The younger son used up his money and had to survive during a famine by feeding pigs. In his father's home he had been warm, clean, and well fed. Now he was homeless, filthy, hungry, and doing a job most people would not want.

Ask What did the younger son finally realize? [That the servants at his father's house had plenty to eat and he was starving!]

How did the son feel about his sinful way of life? [He knew it was wrong, and he was sorry for the sins he had done.]

How did he think he deserved to be treated when he got home? [Like a servant.]

When are we like the younger son returning home? [When we are sorry for our sins, turn away from our sinful ways, and come to God for forgiveness, knowing that we don't deserve his mercy.]

Say As he approached his home, the younger son must have felt shame, fear, and doubts about whether his father would take him back.

Ask But how did the father act toward his son? [He ran to his son, threw his arms around him, and kissed him.]

Say The son told his father he was sorry for his sins. But the father told his servants to put his best robe, a ring, and sandals on his son and to kill a calf to have a special celebration.

Ask What did the clothes, the ring, and the celebration show the son? [His father forgave him and welcomed him back, not as a servant but as his son.]

Do Ask the children to imagine that a classmate is having a hard time understanding the loving, forgiving father in today's lesson because her father is not like that. Her father often gets very angry with his family. Sometimes when he gets angry, he leaves them and doesn't seem to care what happens to them. Ask what the children could tell her about God the Father. [While fathers here on earth may sometimes let us down, we can always depend on our heavenly Father. God the Father loves us and always rejoices when we come to him in repentance. He rather than another in a sentence can slightly change the sentence's meaning. Have them read each of the sentences out loud, accenting the underlined word as they do so. After they have read each sentence, ask them to explain what emphasizing that particular word did to change the meaning of the sentence. Some example explanations are given.

• God forgives me. [Only God can give forgiveness. There is no other way we can be saved.]

• God forgives me. [Even if we think our sins are too many or too bad, God always forgives us.]

• God forgives me. [Each of us can say, “God forgives the sins of the whole world, and he also forgives my sins.”]

Say How thankful we are that God rejoices when we come to him and repent—and that he forgives our sins for Jesus' sake!
If you used Introduce (Alternate), you will need your construction paper heart again.

**Do** Ask the children to name some ways parents often show love for their children. *(Optional: Refer to the ideas written on the paper heart.)*

**Ask** How did the father in today’s parable show love for his younger son? *[The father forgave his younger son and joyfully celebrated his return.]*

What does God our Father do when we come to him in repentance? *[God rejoices when we come to him in repentance and gladly forgives us for Jesus’ sake.]*

**Say** We repent of our sins and confidently ask God to forgive us for Jesus’ sake.

**Do** Close by singing the hymn 304:1 memory treasure.

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If you used Introduce (Alternate), you will need your construction paper heart again.

**Ask** How did the older son react to his brother’s return home? *[He became angry.]*

**Say** The older son stands for people like the Pharisees who don’t think that “sinners” should receive God’s forgiveness.

**Ask** But what did the father expect his older son to do? *[To love and forgive his brother.]*

**Do** Have the children react to this story:

When Mr. Everett was very sick, he began to realize what a sinful life he had led. So he talked to his pastor and then confessed his sins to God and received God’s forgiveness. Several weeks later Mr. Everett died, and a funeral service was held for him at church. One church member got very upset and said, “Mr. Everett hasn’t attended church for more than ten years. I can’t believe the pastor is having a funeral service for him in this church!”

Lead the children to see that whenever a sinner repents, God rejoices and gladly gives forgiveness. God also wants us to rejoice whenever someone comes to faith in Jesus as the Savior.

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**Ask** How might the younger son have felt when he was on his way home to apologize to his father? *[Scared of how his father might react.]*

But how did the father show love for his younger son? *[The father forgave his younger son and joyfully celebrated his return.]*

Do we need to be afraid to confess our sins to God, tell him we are sorry, and ask him to forgive us? *[No.]*

What does God our Father do when we come to him in repentance? *[God rejoices when we come to him in repentance and gladly forgives us for Jesus’ sake.]*

**Say** We repent of our sins and confidently ask God to forgive us for Jesus’ sake.

**Do** Pray: Dear Father, we have sinned many times against you and do not deserve to be called your children. Forgive us, not because we deserve it but because Jesus is our Savior from sin. Give us joy in knowing that we are saved by your grace. Thank you, Father. Amen.
The Conclusion to the Commandments

*Isaiah 64:6a*

What does God say about all these commandments? He says, “I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.”

What does this mean?

God threatens to punish all who transgress these commandments. Therefore we should fear his anger and not disobey what he commands.

But he promises grace and every blessing to all who keep these commandments. Therefore we should love and trust in him and gladly obey what he commands.

The Conclusion tells us that God expects us to be entirely devoted to him. He will punish those who hate him; when parents don’t teach God’s Word, their children suffer also. But God also promises to show his love to those who love him and obey his Word.

*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.

This hymn stanza says that all who have been tempted by sin’s delusions (false promises) and who grieve over (are sad about) their many sins have this hope to ponder (think about): Jesus always receives (gladly welcomes) sinners who come to him.

† Because of space limitations, the text of the memory treasure hymn is not in the student lesson. For hymn texts, use the hymnal or the electronic memory treasure files for your grade level.

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**Optional Mid-Week Lesson**

- Begin by praying the Lord’s Prayer together. Remind the children that in this prayer we speak to God, our heavenly Father, and we ask him to forgive our sins.

- Use Activity 2 to study more of what the Bible teaches about God’s love and forgiveness.

- Ask God for his mercy and forgiveness by singing Psalm 130 (hymnal, page 114).

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

1. Review

Pictures With Partners

*Purpose:* To review the lesson by telling what is happening in pictures from the lesson.

*Procedure:* Have the children work with partners. Duplicate Copy Master 1 for each pair of students, and have them cut apart the pictures. Have them mix up the pictures and lay them upside down in front of them. The children should then take turns drawing a picture from the pile and telling their partners what is happening in each.

2. Application

*We Are God’s Forgiven Children*

*Purpose:* To have the children discover more of what the Bible teaches about God’s love and forgiveness.

*Procedure:* Have the children work in small groups to complete Copy Master 3. The answers are as follows:

1. All people need forgiveness.
2. God’s law shows we are sinners.
3. We ask God to forgive us.
4. We are forgiven through Jesus’ blood.
5. He welcomes us as part of his family (sons/children).
6. He wants us to be kind, compassionate/tenderhearted, and forgiving.

3. Music

*“O Lord, Our Lord”*

*Purpose:* To examine the meaning of a liturgical song that emphasizes the mercy and forgiveness of God the Father.

*Procedure:* Have the children open their hymnals to page 28 and read the words to the liturgical song “O Lord, Our Lord.” Ask them to find the part of the song when we sing to God the Father, and ask what adjectives are used to describe him. [Almighty, merciful.] Have the children name the things that the song says God the Father has done and still does for us. [Loves us, takes away our sin, comforts us, makes us pure and holy, gave up his only Son for us.] Then sing the song together.

4. Art

*“God Forgives” Plaque*

*Purpose:* To have the children make plaques that will remind them that God forgives them.

*Procedure:* Follow these directions:

• Using a permanent ink marker, write “GOD FORGIVES” on a 1 1/2" x 3" paper strip.
• Cut 12 pieces (2" x 2") from several bright colors of tissue paper.
• Use a 5" x 7" piece of wood or poster board as the background for the plaque. With a paintbrush, spread glue that has been thinned with water over the plaque.
• Glue the tissue paper squares onto the plaque one piece at a time, spreading more glue over the top of the pieces to hold them securely.
• Overlap the pieces until the entire plaque is covered with tissue paper.
• Glue the paper strip to the plaque and cover it with glue.
• If desired, use a blow dryer to quickly dry the glue on the plaque.
• Attach to the plaque a variety of appropriate stickers picturing, for example, praying hands, a cross, Jesus, a Bible, flowers, smiling faces. Do not put glue over the top of the stickers or they will get filmy.

• Use a 1" x 2" cardboard strip to make a hanger tab. Fold the strip in half and punch a hole in the top. Glue the bottom half to the back of the plaque.

5. Review and Apply

A Father Shows Great Love

Purpose: To review the parable by completing sentences and a word search and to tell how God our heavenly Father is like the father in the parable.

Procedure: Have each child complete Copy Master 4. The answers are as follows:

Part One: 1. parable; 2. sons; 3. wasted; 4. famine; 5. pigs; 6. sinned; 7. father; 8. loved; 9. feast; 10. older; 11. dead, lost; 12. forgive

Part Two: Wording will vary, but should have the idea that God the Father loves us and forgives our sins.

Welcome Home (Challenge)

Purpose: To write paragraphs about the lesson and its truth.

Procedure: Have each child complete Copy Master 5. The answers will vary.

6. Other Ideas

Same Occasion, More Parables

Purpose: To have the children use their Bible reading skills to learn more about how God feels toward repentant sinners.

Procedure: Have the children read two other parables that Jesus taught on this same occasion. Luke 15:4-7 is the parable of the lost sheep, and Luke 15:8-10 is the parable of the lost coin. These parables also teach that Jesus came to save those who are lost in sin and that God rejoices when sinners repent.

Bible Study

Copy Masters 6.1–6.4 contain an age-appropriate, theme-related Bible study. The Bible studies are from the original Christ-Light (© 1998) and use the 1984 edition of the New International Version Bible translation.