

PATHMAKERS: UNIT NINE: JUDGES

Basic Truth(s): *Basic Truth(s):* The Lord is, and always has been, full of mercy and faithfulness.

Unit Overview: The promised land wasn't completely conquered; After Joshua the Lord used Judges to rule the people and rescue them from the other nations that remained by them.

New Testament Connections: The Lord's prayer; The faith of the Canaanite woman; Jesus is baptized; The Prodigal Son

Unit Memory Verse:

Psalm 145:8

“The LORD is gracious and compassionate,
slow to anger and rich in love.”

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LESSON ONE

Lesson One Focus: The Israelites faced problems because of their lack of obedience to the Lord: We too need to be careful to be obedient to all that the Lord tells us to do.

Lesson One Introduction Activity: Do a class treasure hunt. Make a “map” with clues as to where the treasure is. Be creative. Have the students work together to figure out each step. Each clue should reveal an additional clue until the end. Tell the students that if they hadn’t followed the map, they wouldn’t have received their treasure. Just like we miss out on treasure the Lord has for us if we don’t follow the “map” or instructions that He gives to us, step by step.

Lesson One Teaching: *This lesson is based off of Judges 1:27-2:5. Read this passage and then prepare or find a version to share with the students. Then discuss it with them as follows.*

It is easy to see, from our position, where the Israelites messed up. They didn’t do what the Lord had asked. From where they stood, though, things probably didn’t seem quite so clear. You see, it is easy to lose sight of what the Lord has asked us to do when things are going well. Sometimes the Lord asks us to do something hard and we step out in faith and do it. Then, guess what? Things go well! Just like the Lord promised they would. So, we kind of relax and take it easy. We don’t really think about what the Lord asked us to do anymore. We haven’t forgotten, exactly, but it isn’t at the forefront of our minds. And, that is when the problems begin.

You see, when the Lord asks us to do something, there is always a reason for it. His ways are always for our good and the good of those around us. What happened when the Israelites didn’t completely get rid of the other people that lived in the Promised Land? Bad things happened to the Israelites, right? Would those things have happened if they had obeyed the Lord?

What do you think happens when we disobey the Lord? Do you think that our lives end up being what the Lord planned them to be? You see, the Lord had great plans for the Israelites. He had given them a great place to live. It was right in the middle of the world at that time. He planned for them to be powerful and leaders of the world. They were set up to be His light, shining over and for everyone else. His plans for them were all good.

Just like His plans for you are all good. And the good news, is that even if we mess up, do you know what happens? God offers us forgiveness. The Israelites messed up and the Lord sent them people to help rescue them from the problems they caused themselves. These were the judges that ruled over Israel following Joshua’s death. We are going to learn about some of them during the rest of this unit. Time and time again the Israelites would mess up and God would raise up a new person to rescue them. That is how good He is! The same is true for us. Except we only need one rescuer--Jesus. After Him, no others are needed! However, when we choose to disobey the Lord, we face sadness and pain in our lives just like the Israelites did. And the Lord doesn’t want that. We don’t want that, do we? So, let’s learn

from the Israelites and *not* do what they did. Let's learn to trust completely in the Lord and the importance of doing things His way. We have been rescued by the ultimate rescuer. Let's live the life that He died to give us!

Close in prayer: Praise the Lord for His great kindness. Thank Him for sending us the Great Rescuer to save us from our sins. Thank Him for having a great plan for each student's life. Ask Him to teach them how to clearly hear His voice and be obedient to it. Ask for His blessing to be released over them as they learn to do things His way, and not their own.

Optional Journal Activity: Play some "soaking" music and give the students a chance to be "alone" in the Lord's Presence. As they are spending time with Him, have them ask if there are any area in which they haven't been completely following God's "recipe". You may also want to have them ask the Lord where He wants to take them. As they see bits of the future He has for them, they will be encouraged to keep on the path He has set before them, so they can get there.

Lesson One Optional Activities:

1. Bring in the ingredients for a cake or something similar. Don't follow them all the way, though. As you get toward the middle of the recipe, begin to add whatever you feel like adding in in whatever amounts you desire. Ask the students if they think it will turn out. Give them a taste of something you baked before the class that did not have the correct ingredients and does not taste good. (Leaving out the sugar may be a good idea.) Tell them that even though the dough looked the same, and even if the cake looked the same, it wasn't the same at all. That's because it is important to follow the recipes. The person that wrote it knows that things won't turn out if you don't do what they have said. Tell them that is how it works with the Lord, also. We may not even realize when we stop following "the recipe" He has given us, because things still look good. In the end, though, the result will be different than what His plan for us was. (Have a treat that does taste good to share with the students, too.)
2. Have each student create a small treasure map that can fit into their Bibles. (You may want to laminate them, so they are protected from wear and tear.) Tell them to keep these as a reminder of the importance of following God's path all the way to the end.

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LESSON ONE: NEW TESTAMENT CONNECTION

New Testament Connection Focus: The Lord's Prayer: why it is important to pray like He instructs.

Introduction Activity: There is no introductory activity for this lesson.

New Testament Connection Lesson: *Begin by reading Matthew 6:9-13. Then discuss it with them as follows.*

How many of you have heard the Lord's prayer before today? How many of you have prayed it before? How many of you completely understand what it means?

Tell the students that you are going to split up into groups (make sure that there is one adult per group) and each group is going to be assigned a section of the prayer. It will be the groups job to figure out what that section of the prayer is really saying / asking for. They are also supposed to figure out why they think that it is important to pray for that. Split the prayer up into as many sections as allowed by your class size, making sure that each part still makes sense on its own. If your class is small, you may need each group to cover more than one part. After a set period of time, bring the groups back together into one large group. Give each group a chance to explain what their section means and why it is important. As they are doing that, write out the prayer (using their words) on a marker board or piece of butcher paper hanging at the front of the classroom. Once all groups have gone, read what the class has come up with.

How often do you think the Lord wants us to pray like this? Every day. What would happen if you lived your life, every day, the way this prayer describes? Do you remember how we talked before about the Israelites and how they didn't always obey the Lord completely? Do you think if they prayed a prayer like this every day, they might have made different choices? Their circumstances might have changed?

The Lord wants our lives to match up with His heart. He taught us how to pray to help make that a reality. While the Lord wants us to talk to Him all the time, about everything, it is important to take His words to heart and learn how to pray like this. So, I am issuing you a challenge. It is: pray a prayer like this every day. As you do, look for the Lord to answer them. Then next week I want to hear about how the Lord answered your prayers. *(Make a note to yourself to remember to follow-up and ask the students for testimonies next week. You pray for them during the week, as well. That they would be faithful in the challenge and they would see results.)*

Close in the Lord's Prayer. Give the students a chance to pray along with you, in their own words.

Optional Journal Activity: Play some "soaking" music and allow the students time with the Lord. Have them ask Him to show them what their life will look like as it lines up with His heart. Give them time to journal and /or create an art piece based on what He showed them. After, get into small groups and have the students share their experience with one another and the pray over each other to enter into the fullness of the reality God desires for them.

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LESSON TWO

Lesson Two Focus: Deborah and Barak: We are supposed to fight from high ground. Leading the enemy there will always lead to our victory.

Lesson Two Introduction Activity: Prepare a mock trial for the students to participate in. Choose one student to be the judge, one to be the defendant, etc. Have the other students watch as those participating present the case and come to the conclusion. Afterwards, ask the student who played the judge if it was easy or hard to come to their final judgement. Discuss how important the role of judge is: how their job is to be fair and make sure justice is served to the best of their ability. Tell the students that after Joshua died, Israel began to be ruled by judges. They were chosen to help the Israelites in their disputes with one another as well as guide them how to go and even rescue them from their enemies.

Lesson Two Teaching: We have recently been learning about Joshua and the conquest of the Promised Land. Joshua was a great leader who remained faithful to the Lord all his days. While he was alive, Israel stayed true to the Lord also. However, after Joshua died, Israel began to do things their way instead of staying true to God's ways. As a result of their sin, time and time again they would be oppressed by the nations surrounding them that had not been driven out of the land while Joshua had been alive. Each time this happened the Israelites would cry out to the Lord to rescue them. In Judges 2:16 it says, "Then the LORD raised up judges who delivered them from the hands of those who plundered them." We are going to learn about one of those Judges today, a woman named Deborah.

This lesson is based on Judges 4. Prepare a version or read it to the students. Then discuss it with them as follows.

During this period in Israel's history, they were being oppressed by King Jabin's army that was led by a man named Sisera. This army was quite intimidating to Israel, because they possessed 900 chariots. Do you know how many the Israelites had? None! This would be quite an advantage for Sisera and his army. The Lord, however, had a plan to deal with this. When He sent Barak out to fight this army, where did He send him? To Mount Tabor. *(If possible, find a picture of this area and share it with the students.)*

Why would this have been an advantage for Barak and the Israelites? What effect would this have had on the army's chariots? The high ground removed the advantage from Sisera and his army. Not only did Barak and the Israelites win the battle, but the fight wasn't even close!

Do you know that the Lord gives us the same advantage today? Let me explain. Sometimes there are battles that we have to fight. Who are these battles against? They are all against the enemy. And sometimes it seems as though he has the advantage. After all, he is very good at fighting. And he doesn't fight fair either. But do you know what? The enemy only has the advantage if we are fighting using earthly weapons. And we aren't supposed to do our fighting from earth. Where do we do our fighting from?

Just like Barak, we are supposed to be on high ground. Our advantage comes when we position ourselves from above--our battles are won in heavenly places! When we fight from heaven, there are no weapons that the enemy has that can prevail over us.

Take some time to brainstorm what the weapons of the enemy are. For example: lying, sickness, causing bad things to happen, sin (like pride, disbelief, and so on) etc. Then discuss what heavenly weapons look like: truth, love, healing, and so forth.

Close the lesson in prayer. Thank the Lord that He has given us heavenly weapons that assure us victory. Praise Him for His faithfulness. You may want to give the students time to repent for using the enemies weapons instead of heavenly ones. Ask the Lord to release grace over the children to fight their battles from heaven, rather than from earth.

Optional Journal Activity: Play some “soaking” music and give the students time to soak quietly in the Lord’s Presence. As they are there, have them ask the Lord if there is a battle in their life that they have been trying to fight from low ground. They should then ask the Lord for divine wisdom as to how to move the fight to “high ground” and fight with heavenly weapons. After, give the students a chance to get together in small groups and share what the Lord showed them. Have them end the time praying over one another.

Optional Activity:

1. Have the students create small booklets with a brief description and picture of one heavenly “weapon” on each page.
2. Give the students clay to create Mt. Tabor or a representative of “high ground”.

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LESSON TWO: NEW TESTAMENT CONNECTION

New Testament Connection Focus: The faith of the Canaanite Woman: Our hunger for the Lord often determines our experiences with Him.

New Testament Connection Introduction Activity: Bring in a glass to pour water in, along with a pitcher of water. Tell the students that the pitcher represents all the good that Jesus had to pour out to the Israelites/Jewish people when He walked on earth. His miracles, forgiveness, love, etc. The cup represents what He was actually able to pour out among the Jewish people. Ask them if they think that the cup can hold all that the pitcher has to offer. Then demonstrate. (Be prepared to make a mess! Make sure there is nothing around that can be damaged by the water.) Tell them that even though Jesus came to rescue the Jewish people, those that were hungry for what He had were able to receive from Him also. Each person that received from him had to desire what He had to give though. He didn't force Himself on anyone. Tell them today you are going to learn about a miracle that happened because of one woman's hunger.

New Testament Connection Lesson: *This lesson is based off of Matthew 15:21-28. Begin the lesson by reading the story. Then discuss it with the students as follows.*

This story can be a little bit hard to understand. At first it seems like Jesus is being harsh or uncaring to the woman in this story. After all, her daughter is in need of a miracle. Who else but Jesus could help her? Yet, Jesus seemed unmoved by her situation. It wasn't that He didn't care. The truth is that Jesus understood the way things were supposed to happen. He came for the Jewish people first. *Then* the gospel would go out into the gentile nations. This woman though, wasn't prepared to take no for an answer. She was desperate and knew that she had no hope other than Jesus. So, what happened?

Do you know that we are supposed to posture ourselves just like the woman from Canaan? It isn't that we need to beg for Jesus to touch our lives. He already has. He is with us and is faithful to us. However, we need to be hungry for what He has. We are supposed to not want even one drop of the water that He carries to be spilt. We are supposed to have our hearts so hungry that we receive everything that He has to give. You see, we often determine what it is that we receive from Jesus. Instead of waiting around for Him to "magically" drop everything we need and want in our laps, we are supposed to pursue Him. The hunger in our hearts will determine how much we receive from Him.

Some people are content simply entering into salvation. So they live their whole lives hardly changed by Jesus at all. Isn't that sad? Others know that there is more than that and they put some effort into entering into a deeper relationship with Him. However, there are some that are hungry, desperate even, for all of what the Lord has to offer. These are the people who are radically changed by Him and end up changing the world because of the lives that they live. Which type of person do you want to be? The choice is yours. I suggest that we all learn from the Canaanite woman and position our hearts to be hungry and chase after Jesus for all that He can give us. We are going to break into small groups now and figure out what

it looks like to have a hungry heart. *Have the students break into small groups. Make sure there is one adult per group. Discuss practical ways to pursue hunger of the Lord. Close the time in prayer. Thank the Lord that all that He has is available to us. Ask Him to mark each student to be among those that change the world as a result of their radical faith and hunger for Him.*

Optional Activities:

1. Have each student make a picture or sculpture of a cup flowing over. Remind them that this is what their life is supposed to look like, as they pursue the Lord.
2. Bring in video clips or pictures along with short stories about people who have been radical followers of Christ and changed the world. If you want, make a "Hall of Inspiration", with pictures of some of these people. Allow the students to add heroes of their own. Remind the students that what set these people apart for the Lord was their hunger and willingness to run after the Lord.

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LESSON THREE

Lesson Three Focus: Gideon: We need to make godly choices at home before other opportunities will open to us.

Lesson Three Introduction Activity: Bring in a glove and put it on. Ask the students which empowers which--does the hand empower the glove? Or does the glove empower the hand? Tell them to imagine that they are the glove, with the Father as the hand. Ask them what their lives would look like if that were the case. Tell them that today you are going to learn about someone who had this experience with the Lord. Scripture says that the Lord "put [him] on like a glove" and then he went on to win a great victory. (See Judges 6:34) However, before that happened, he had to step out in obedience. Often the Lord requires a first step or lifestyle of obedience before He will empower us for the next "great" victory.

Lesson Three Teaching: *This lesson is based off of Judges 6-8. Read through these chapters before class starts and prepare or find a version to share with the students. Then discuss it with them as follows.*

This is such an amazing story for so many different reasons. Gideon does not seem to be all that "important", yet he is chosen by the Lord for a great task. And not only was he chosen, but he was honored--the angel of the LORD greets him as "O valiant warrior". The Lord patiently lets Gideon process through all that he is told, confirming His words to Gideon more than once. Then Gideon goes up against a huge army with only 300 men. (Three hundred men and a God-given strategy that included trumpets, torches and pitchers.) And let's not forget the dream God gave to the enemy. This is a *great* story full of all kinds of crazy and exciting things! And it had a happy ending to top it all off. After this, Israel lived in peace for forty years. Isn't this a good story?

There is one part of it that I want you to think about, though. What did the Lord ask Gideon to do before he went up against the Midianites? The Lord told him to take down the altar to Baal and Asherah pole that belonged to his father. These were used to worship false gods by Gideon's family and others in Israel. Gideon did it, but it wasn't easy for him. He was so scared that he took men with him and went at night to do it. He knew that people would be upset about it, and he was right.

Why do you think that the Lord had Gideon do this before he went up against Midian? If Gideon couldn't be brave and make godly choices in his own town, among his own family, how easy do you think it would be for him to do so when he was leading the army against the Midianites?

You see, God starts with us where we are at before He brings us somewhere else. If we can be who He has called us to be right where we are, then He knows that we can do it in another situation too. But, if we can't be godly among our own family or friends, then we have a problem, don't we? It is right where we are that we learn the skills and develop the character that we will need later on.

Sometimes we may have dreams of doing great things for God, but we end up wondering why He doesn't seem to choose us. We don't realize that He is choosing us, but He is waiting until we complete the first step--being who He has called us to be right where we are at. I'm not saying that you are supposed to go home and tell your parents what they are supposed to be doing, by the way! But, you do control *yourself* and you need to choose to make godly choices in your every day life.

Close in prayer: Thank the Lord for choosing each one in the room for greatness. Ask Him to release grace for the students to enter into their true identities. Ask Him for opportunities for the students to choose godliness in their everyday lives. Praise the Lord for His goodness and patience and plans for each student.

Optional Journal Activity: Play some "soaking" music and give the students time to soak quietly in the Lord's Presence. As they are there, have them ask the Lord if there are any areas in their lives that need to come into obedience to Him before they can move to the next thing. Have them ask Him to teach them how to be obedient in the "little" things.

Lesson Three Optional Activities:

1. Do a puzzle (or several puzzles, depending on your class size). Discuss how our lives are a lot like puzzles. Each small choice leads to what the end result looks like.
2. Make duct tape gloves. You can find instructions for this on the internet.
3. Do a piece of art based off of today's lesson.

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LESSON THREE: NEW TESTAMENT CONNECTION

Lesson Three New Testament Connection Focus: Jesus was baptized: I should be too.

New Testament Connection Introduction Activity: Bring in a picture of the day that you were baptized. Tell the children about it. Ask them if any of them have been baptized or been to a baptism before. Give them an opportunity to share their experiences. Then tell them that today you are going to learn about a very special baptism.

New Testament Connection Lesson: *This lesson is based off of Matthew 3:13-17. Begin by reading this account to the students. Then discuss it with them as follows.*

After Jesus was baptized, two significant things happened. First, He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the enemy. We all know that He was successful in not giving in to sin! After that, Jesus started His public ministry. Do you think that those things were at all connected?

When Jesus got baptized, there were several significant things that occurred. First of all, did He get baptized in secret or out in public? So, His baptism was a public statement of sorts. Do you know that one of the reasons we get baptized today is to make a public statement / commitment to follow the Lord? When we get baptized we are saying “The Lord is my Savior. I am no longer my own, but I belong to Him. My life is His.”

Secondly, during His baptism The Holy Spirit landed upon Him as a dove. There is a separate baptism that we all need called the baptism of the Spirit, but the Spirit is a part of water baptism as well. In fact, without Holy Spirit we are basically just getting wet. He is a part of it though, and being baptized is an important step in our journey with the Lord. It opens up the next part of our journey . The Spirit’s Presence at our baptism marks us and empowers us for the next step.

Finally, when Jesus was baptized, He heard the Lord speak over Him, right? Do you know when we get baptized we are affirming the fact that we are God’s children? Baptism has more significance than this even, but we won’t get into the rest of it today. Today I just want you to realize that baptism is an important step in following the Lord. It is much more than just getting wet. When the time is right, it is important for all of us to take this step of obedience.

Close in prayer:

Optional Activities:

1. Make a Dove picture. Give each student a picture of a dove. Have them paint it and then add pieces of white tissue paper to the picture while the paint is wet. Otherwise, provide craft feathers for them to glue on to the picture.
2. Do a piece of art based on Jesus baptism or baptism in general.

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LESSON FOUR

Lesson Four Focus: Samson: A lesson in guarding our hearts.

Lesson Four Introduction Activity: Bring in a few pictures of people that have impacted your life in a positive way. (Make sure they are people you personally know. If possible have the pictures of you and them together.) Tell the students how they have impacted your life. Share a few real examples. Ask them to think of people that have impacted their lives in a good way. Tell them that the Lord created us to be family, so that we could encourage and love one another and make each others lives better. Tell them that although we are supposed to love those that don't yet know Jesus, we aren't supposed to live with them like "family". Tell them that today you are going to learn about someone who learned that lesson the hard way.

Lesson Four Teaching: *This lesson is based on Judges 15-16. Read it and prepare a version to share with your students. Then discuss it with them.*

How many of you have heard the story of Samson before? It is a pretty exciting story in a lot of ways, isn't it? We have a hero, chosen before birth to be a rescuer for his nation. He is a man of superhero strength. There is even a love story or two--of sorts. And, what a dramatic ending! It has all the elements of a hollywood blockbuster, doesn't it? God's graciousness and mercy allow Samson to have victory even in death, but sadly, this wasn't a movie. It was real life and it didn't go according to the original plan. So, what went wrong?

Samson had everything going for him. But, something goes terribly wrong. What is it? Well, it starts with his heart. Samson does not guard his heart, does he? And he ends up falling in love with someone that doesn't have his best interests in mind. Someone that does not know the Lord. Reading the story it seems so obvious that Delilah is not a good choice for Samson, doesn't it? She deceives him more then once and yet he doesn't seem to grow wise as to her true character. How can that be? It's because Samson's feelings were leading him, rather then wisdom. He loved her, so he didn't see the bad qualities that pointed out "DANGER!". It wasn't just love that blinded him, though. Before he told her his secret, the Bible tells us that Samson's "soul was annoyed to death" by her nagging and begging him every day to tell her his secret. What do you supposed Samson's life would have been like without Delilah in it? What if he had found instead a wife that was from Israel and knew the Lord and his ways?

Samson's life was greatly impacted by who he gave his heart too. Do you know what, yours is too. It wasn't Delilah's fault that Samson made poor choices, he is still responsible for that. But she certainly influenced him wrongly. As Christians we are not supposed to hide away and not be friends with people that don't know that Lord. How are they ever going to experience His love if we do that? However, we are supposed to be careful about who we give our hearts to--in friendships of all types. If your best friend is someone that doesn't know the Lord, what sort of impact do you suppose that person is going to have on your life? What

if most of your time is spent with people that don't care about God or His ways? You may not see the impact they are having on your life, but trust me, they are impacting you.

Now, what if you surround yourself with people that love the Lord and love to do things according to His ways? What kind of impact do you think that will have on your life? Do you know why church is important? It isn't just because its fun, although it is fun. It is because the Lord instructs His people to regularly meet together. He created us to become family with one another. We are to love the people in the world that don't know Him, but they aren't our family--at least not yet. This is for our own good. As we spend time together we actually grow stronger. We encourage one another in ways that those that don't know the Lord simply aren't able to do. The body of Christ is a gift. As we join together in family we will find that we are encouraged to becoming our best. We are able to become who God created us to be, rather than be distracted along the way. Isn't God good to give us each other?

Close in prayer. Thank the Lord for giving us one another in family. Ask Him to strengthen the bonds between the students and between them and the rest of the body of Christ. Ask Him to protect their hearts and to teach them how to protect their hearts.

Optional Journal Activity: Play some "soaking" music and give the students time to soak quietly in the Lord's Presence. As they are there, have them ask the Lord to show them who they can encourage and love within their church family. Have them write down some practical things they can do over the next several weeks to do so.

Lesson Four Optional Activities:

1. Do some "strong man" type competitions. Be creative. You could play tug-of-war; arm-wrestling; thumb-wrestling; leg-wrestling; etc. If you want to you could even create some awards and prizes to give out at the end.
2. Bring in a couple wigs of crazy hair for the children. Take a picture of each child with the wig on. If the technology is available, do a "slide show" on a computer of all the children in their wigs. Pick some fun music to play during this time.
3. Do a class mural that depicts "family".
4. Do a time of "family encouragement". Lead the students in blessing and prophesying encouraging words over one another. Make sure to record these words in some way for the students to keep at the end of the time. This can be done either as a large group, or several small groups depending on the size of your class. Make sure that there is one adult per group. Remind the children of your class values: no corrective or discouraging words, etc.

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LESSON FOUR: NEW TESTAMENT CONNECTION

Lesson Four New Testament Connection Focus: The prodigal son: embracing the love of the Father.

New Testament Connection Introduction Activity: Have the room decorated for a party. Tell the students that today you are going to celebrate something very special. First, however, you need to do your lesson.

New Testament Connection Lesson: *Begin by reading Luke 15:11-32. (Or find a version of the story to share with the students.) Then discuss it with the students as follows.*

Do you think it was easy or hard for the son to return home after he left? It probably was very difficult to face his father after the way he acted. That was only part of it, though. Returning home was showing everyone that he had failed. He had been wrong. He couldn't make it on his own and he had acted like a fool. Going home was telling everyone he knew--both at home and in the new land--what a major mess-up he had been. But, what was the alternative? Nothing good. The desperation of his situation make him take drastic steps. And, not everyone celebrated his homecoming, did they? His brother is the one that was the most upset. But there were probably others that thought badly of him and held him in disdain. (At least at first.) The most important person, though, was his father. And his father had such big love for him that the rest didn't seem to matter so much.

Do you know that sometimes we find ourselves acting like the prodigal son? Instead of turning back to the Father as soon as we realize the error of our ways, we wallow with the pigs. It may be fear or shame that is keeping us there, or maybe simply our pride. It is usually a combination of all three, actually. So, how do we force ourselves to go "home" before that point? If the son had known how his father was going to receive him, do you think he would have waited so long to go back? He probably would have gone at the first sign of trouble. The first pang in his heart that he was making or had made a terrible mistake. Maybe he wouldn't have even made it as far as the distant country!

What we need to learn from the prodigal son is to concentrate on Father's face. Father's voice. Look to Him as His lovingkindness leads us to repentance and back to Him. Rather than any fears that we may have inside or any faces along the way that are not as kind. It is our Father whom we belong to, It is His response that is needed, and only His. His response to us will always lead us out of the pig pen and into His palace.

Close in prayer. Praise the Lord for His great kindness. Give the children a chance to run into His arms as needed. Let His Presence wash over the room and bring repentance and deep joy. Then tell the students that the rest of the class time you are going to have a party, to be a reminder of how the Lord celebrates over us all.

Optional Activities:

1. Find appropriate party games / activities for your class size and age group.