PLOT TWIST

WEEK 4 — THE PRODIGAL SON

NOVEMBER 8, 2026

Main Point:
God celebrates those who repent.

This Week's Message:
This familiar story delivers quite the plot twist. The good son slugs away diligently day in and day out while the younger son gets a huge party after squandering his inheritance and indulging in his flesh. But the key here is that a heart was changed and repentance was the reason for celebrating.

Scripture:
Luke 15:11-32

This Month's Memory Verse:
"So then, everyone who hears my words and puts them into practice is like a wise man. He builds his house on the rock." Matthew 7:24 NIRV

Videos: See www.glendalechristian.org/summitvolunteerresources

- Game Video
- Bible Story Video
- Review Quiz Video
- Worship Videos

Suggested Order of Service:

1. Game Video – 3 Min
2. Icebreaker Activity - 5 Min
3. Message – 25 Min Total
    a. Lesson – 15 Min
    b. Bible Story Video – 2 Min
    c. Discussion Time – 5 Min
    d. Review Quiz Video – 3 Min
4. Memory Verse Activity – 10 min
5. As time allows:
    a. Work on Take-Home Page
    b. Worship Videos

Game Video:

Food Fight 5

Icebreaker Activity

Using plastic cups, have a cup stacking relay race. You can have them stack one “pyramid” of ten cups with four on the bottom, three in the next row, then two, and one on top. Or you can supply twelve cups so that they can stack two “pyramids” with three cups at the base of each one. If you are not familiar with cup stacking, an online search will show you more about it than you ever wanted to know.

Say, **“Today’s lesson refers to a big party. Any good party uses these, right? I don’t think they had plastic cups back then, but if they could have had them, they would have. Ha! We’re going to have teams compete to see who can finish this cup stacking relay first. Each student will run down to the table, stack the cups in a pyramid, and then collect them back on top of each other in one stack. They’ll run back and tag the next person in line. Whichever team gets through everyone first, wins.** *(Select students. Teams of 4-6 depending on the size of your group.)* **Line up here for me, please. Ready? Go!”**

LESSON:

Main Point:
God celebrates those who repent.

Scripture:
Luke 15:11-32

Introduction
Who doesn't love a party? Food, fun, friends, music, cake, ice cream, games, goody bags - all good things. What are some reasons we throw parties? *(Let them give a few responses.)* See? All good things - babies, graduation, birthdays, anniversaries. We love to celebrate! And you know who else loves to celebrate? God! He had parties written into his law for the Jewish people throughout the year, and he was always the guest of honor. But not everyone in the Bible loved to party. At least not for every reason.

Transition
Sometimes people want to celebrate someone or something and others don't think it's worth it. Many times, this happens because the person who doesn't want to celebrate takes issue with the person being celebrated, or reason for the celebration. But celebrating for reasons that God finds worthy is always a good thing, even when it might not make sense to us. Let's look at how this plays out in our story today.

Play Bible Story Video Here

Jesus told a story about a man who had two sons. The older son was responsible, faithful, and worked hard for his father. He was "the good kid." But the younger son was "the bad kid." He just couldn't wait to leave home and start his own life. So, one day he asked his father to hand over his inheritance.

In those days, the older son would receive a double portion of the inheritance, and control the family estate. But that happened only ***after*** the father had died. So the younger son went way out of bounds by demanding his share. He just couldn't wait

till his father died to get the money that he had coming to him. Surprisingly, the father allowed him to make that choice. He gave his younger son the money. And as with many people who are young, immature, and have too much money, the kid didn't know how to manage it well, so he ended up broke.

The Return

He was hungry, dirty, and feeding filthy pigs for a living. So eventually, he decided to head home and beg his father to take him back as a servant. So he swallowed his pride and started back home. At least he wouldn't be hungry anymore.

As the kid made the final stretch of his journey, his father spotted him way off in the distance. Imagine the father's disappointment. Imagine his anger. Imagine how hurt he was by what his son had done. As the young man approached, his father could see that he was dressed in fifthly rags, and that he had obviously wasted all of his money.

The young man was disobedient and rebellious. According to the law of Moses, this father had every right to drag his son before the elders of the town and have him stoned to death. Is that what he would do? Or would he just disown his son? Or, would he yell at the rebellious kid for all of his terrible mistakes? Or would there be a plot twist?

Luke 15:20b

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him."

Never in a million years did this younger son think that his father would be so warm and welcoming after the horrible things he had done. This was the exact opposite reaction he was expecting. He was hoping that his dad would just let him work as a servant.

Plot Twist

Then there was another plot twist – a celebration. The father insisted on throwing a party to celebrate his son's return.

The Older Son

But when the older brother found out about the party, he became angry. And it's not hard to understand why. His father came and pleaded with him to join the party. But his anger burned hot, and he let his father know exactly how he felt. He said, "Look. I've worked hard for you all these years. I've never disobeyed you. And I never got a party! But this rebellious kid runs away and blows your hard-earned money on a shameful life of sin, and you throw a celebration in his honor?"

There's another plot twist. The "bad kid" was the one who had a party. That doesn't seem right, does it? But the father had an explanation for this…

Luke 15:31

"'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.

The father reminded his older son that he got to enjoy the benefits of being his son, and living in his home. He never withheld anything from his son. All the riches of the father were available to him. Every day is like a party when you stay close to the father! But still, the older son still felt betrayed. The father continued…

Luke 15:32

"But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

Sometimes people are just like this younger son, who took all the good things that his father had to offer, and used them selfishly and foolishly. God provides good things like wealth, health, our bodies, and opportunities. But people misuse these things for their own pleasure. That's called sin.

Ephesians 2:1,4&5

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins… But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

But when we confess our sins and return to God, he chooses mercy for us instead of wrath, because of his great love for us. He takes us from lost to found; death to life! And as he does, he rejoices in our return.

We've all been like that younger son who took all the goodies from his father in order to serve ourselves. But God chooses mercy for us instead of wrath because of his great love for us.

Luke 15:10b
"...there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

And each time one of us repents from living for ourselves, God and the angels in heaven celebrate. Isn't that amazing? It isn't a shame-fest. God doesn't shake his finger in our faces to reprimand us when we come home ready to submit to his authority. He scoops us up with open arms and lets us enjoy his goodness!

Conclusion

This is the welcome of God. This kind of reception is totally opposite from how we humans usually respond to someone when they admit they have messed up. It seems right to punish them, and give them a good tongue lashing with a heavy dose of shame. But that's not God's way.

God's plot twist ends up being just what we all need – his amazing grace!

SIMPLE PRAYER

Dear God,
Thank you for celebrating us when we repent!
In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Discussion Questions

1. What would your dream picnic basket have in it?
2. What did the younger son ask for from his father?
3. What kind of job did the younger son get after he spent all of his money?
4. What emotion did the older son have when he realized there was a party for his brother?
5. What do you think the younger son's goal was when he asked for all that money?
6. How do these brothers seem to operate differently?
7. What part of the younger son's story do we need to copy when we are astray?

Review Video

Memory Verse Card Game Activity:

"So then, everyone who hears my words and puts them into practice is like a wise man. He builds his house on the rock." Matthew 7:24 NIRV

Printed cards are provided for the memory verse games. There are 3 stacks of cards - one is easier, one is harder, and one is words that are not in the verse to make it harder for kids as needed. See the Memory Verse Card Games Guide for a variety of games you can choose from to help your students memorize the verse in fun and interactive ways.