

God as Our Father

Memory verse: "How great is the love the Father has given us so freely! Now we can be called children of God. And that's what we really are!" (1 John 3:1).

Bible Story: **Luke 15: 11-24** **The Prodigal Son**

Today we will talk about God as our Father. Several stories and verses are in the Bible which talk of God as a father. Ask the kids what they think of when they hear "Father". Keep in mind that some children don't have a father in their home or a positive image of a father, and so this may become an opportunity to illustrate a distinctly positive image of a father. Fathers help provide shelter, food, protection, a sense of belonging, a name, encouragement, discipline, and most of all love to their children. Help your class come up with the functions of a father, and see how they relate to God in our lives.

Read through the story of the Prodigal son and highlight the main points: (It may be helpful to define the term "prodigal" for them. "Prodigal" means wasteful or extravagant.

- **A father had two sons**
- **The younger son asked to receive his inheritance early so that he could leave his home and family**
- **The younger son leaves home and spends his money**
- **Without any more income, the younger son gets a job caring for pigs**
- **He decides it would be better for him to return to his father's house as a servant rather than live in that way**
- **He goes home prepared to ask forgiveness**
- **His father is waiting for him as he approaches, even runs toward him!**
- **His father joyfully receives him back as a dearly loved son**

Some questions to consider with the children:

- Why did the younger son want to leave home?
- How do you think he felt when he left?
- How did the father feel?
- In what ways did the son waste his money?
- Why did he end up lonely?
- Why was it so awful for him to end up working with pigs?
- How important was it that he felt truly sorry?
- Did the father know he was coming home?
- How do we know his father received him as a son and not a servant?

FATHER=On this day I think your class will be able to come up with good definitions! Some things that are associated WITH fathers include: a sense of belonging, taking care of your family, security, a home, advice, discipline, love, encouragement.

EXPLAIN: Encourage the children to make the connection between the father in the story and Our Heavenly Father. Just like the father in the story who rushed to welcome his son, even after his son made some really bad choices and turned away from his father. God is always right there, waiting for us to turn back to Him even when we have sinned and turned our backs on Him.

MEMORY VERSE: This week our memory verse is 1 John 3:1, which tells us how GREAT God's love for us is that He freely gives it to us as the best **father** we could ever have! And because of His love we can be called the children of God! Read the memory verse together a few times.

CROSS CONNECTION:

Do you know the clearest way we can understand God's love for us as a father? We can understand it best when we remember that He sent His son Jesus to live with us and even die for us. God loves the world so much that He sent His Son into the world to save everyone who turns to Him. And this story reminds us that just like the Prodigal Son, we can trust that our Father in heaven REALLY WANTS to have a relationship with us! He WANTS us to become His children and to turn back to Him when we've made mistakes. Even though our earthly fathers love and care for us, they aren't perfect! But God in heaven is the PERFECT father, full of compassion and patience and forgiveness. And when we become His children by believing in His Son, Jesus, He promises us that we will always be with Him—He will never leave us or forsake us!

REVIEW:

Give each child a piece of paper and provide markers or colored pencils. Encourage them to write the word father somewhere on the paper and then draw or write something to help them remember this attribute of God. After a few minutes bring the group back together and give kids time to share what they have drawn or written.

PRAYER:

Pray that the kids in the group would begin to understand God as the very best father we can imagine. It would also be great to encourage them to pray for and be thankful for their earthly fathers, who often give us examples of God's love for us!