*The Big Picture*

*Study 7: God’s Overwhelming Love (A Parable)*

*Luke 15:11-24*

**Icebreaker**

Go around the circle, everyone say your name, where you are from, and what you are studying.

**Introduction**

Tonight we are going to read a story from the Bible together. As Christians, we study the Bible because we believe that it is God’s word to us. We believe that humans wrote the different books of the Bible, but they did that with God’s help and guidance. God gave us the Bible so that we could use it to learn who he is and understand His plans. So the Bible is full of lots of different stories and teachings, but they all help tell a bigger story about God and about the world we live in, and how He is going to restore the brokenness we see through Jesus. It is the story of God and the story of us!

In this series we have been looking at the big picture story in the Bible, starting from the beginning. The passage we are going to look at tonight is from the book of Luke, which is all about the life of Jesus. Because we believe that God wants to help us understand His story, we are going to pray and then we will get started!

**Pray**

**Intro to the Passage**

Last week we read about how Jesus was tempted by the devil and then how he began his public ministry. He had a strong understanding of his own identity and shared with people that He was the one that they had been waiting for, the one who was going to make things right. After that, Jesus went around from place to place teaching people about God. However, some of the religious leaders were bothered by Jesus because he would spend time with people they thought were bad or sinful. In the passage we are going to look at tonight, Jesus responds to those religious leaders by telling a story in order to teach them about God.

*Have everyone read the passage silently to themselves, and write down questions they have as they read. Then, read the passage out loud, each person reading one verse.*

**Now we are going to look at questions to help us understand this passage.**

**1. When the son asked for his share of the inheritance, it was very culturally inappropriate-he was basically saying that he’d rather his father be dead. Why do you think the father then gave the inheritance money to the son (instead of forcing him to stay)?** It’s difficult to explain…it probably brought the father great sadness and disappointment, but he would rather have his son choose to stay than be forced to stay. He also might have hoped that his son would learn his lesson and someday come back to him. (Think about when you are forced to do something vs. when you freely choose)

**2. So the son goes off and spends all his money pretty recklessly. He does not think about his father until things go downhill and he ends up desperate and in trouble. How did his troubles help him come to his senses?** The son’s troubles included ones he brought on himself and also the famine. He had lost everything and was starving. This caused him to think and see how good his life really was with His father. He wanted to leave his father and do things his own way and be “free”, but really his father provided for him and cared for him*.*

**3. When the son finally came to his senses, he was able to see how he was living selfishly and had been wrong. He prepared a speech…what was he going to tell his father when he saw him?** “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.”

**4. How had the son sinned against his father?** He was rebellious, selfish, immoral, and foolish

**5. How do you think the son’s attitude was different now?** When he saw his own sinfulness, he was able to see his father’s goodness. He recognized he screwed up and wanted to return home to his father. He was now humble and repentant.

**6. What kind of welcome did the son hope for when he went back? What kind did he receive?** He hoped that his father would at least take him back as a servant.His father was waiting for him, and when he saw him, he ran to him (which is something a father in that culture wouldn’t normally do). He was so happy he didn’t care. He welcomed him as a son and celebrated that he had come back home.

**7. What’s the difference between a son (or daughter) and a servant? How are they treated differently?**Parents love their children because they are their children, not because they earn it or do the right things. You care for and provide for a child free of charge, because you love them. But Servants have to work in order to earn their pay. And if they aren’t good enough, you can fire them. But your son is always your son.

**8. What do you think about the way the father responded to his son coming home?**

**9. Like we said earlier, Jesus told this story to teach people about what God is like. What do you think Jesus was trying to tell us about God with this story?** God loves us no matter what. Even when we run from him, and disobey him, and completely forget about him, He is always waiting for us with open arms. He is always willing to take us back, not just as a servant, but as a child that He loves deeply. And His love for us is unconditional…it is not dependent on what we do or say.

**10. What do you personally think about a God who loves people like that?**

**11. Do you have any other questions?**

**Closing**

If you met the younger son in the city, you might have said, “That man has a bad father!” But is that true? Maybe the wise father knew that the son was already “lost” before he left his father’s house. Maybe he knew that the only way to save his son was to let him learn the hard way. It was a very costly plan. God also made a very costly plan. God created us with the ability to love him freely, even though he knew that we would choose to live for ourselves. Refusing this relationship with God is the beginning of sin, and sin brings death. We need to “come to our senses,” like the younger son, and turn towards “home,” but we cannot make it back to God by ourselves.

That’s where God’s plan comes in. The Bible says that God sent Jesus to earth. He lived a perfect life and never sinned but he chose to take the punishment that *we* deserved for all of our disobedience. He allowed the Jewish authorities to arrest him and eventually execute him on a cross. When Jesus died on that cross, he paid the price for us, so that we might be saved. And when Jesus rose from the dead, he defeated the power of sin and death over us. Now, when we turn from our sin like the son in this story and choose to follow Jesus and accept his free gift of salvation, God welcomes us as his sons and daughters with open arms.

**Pray**