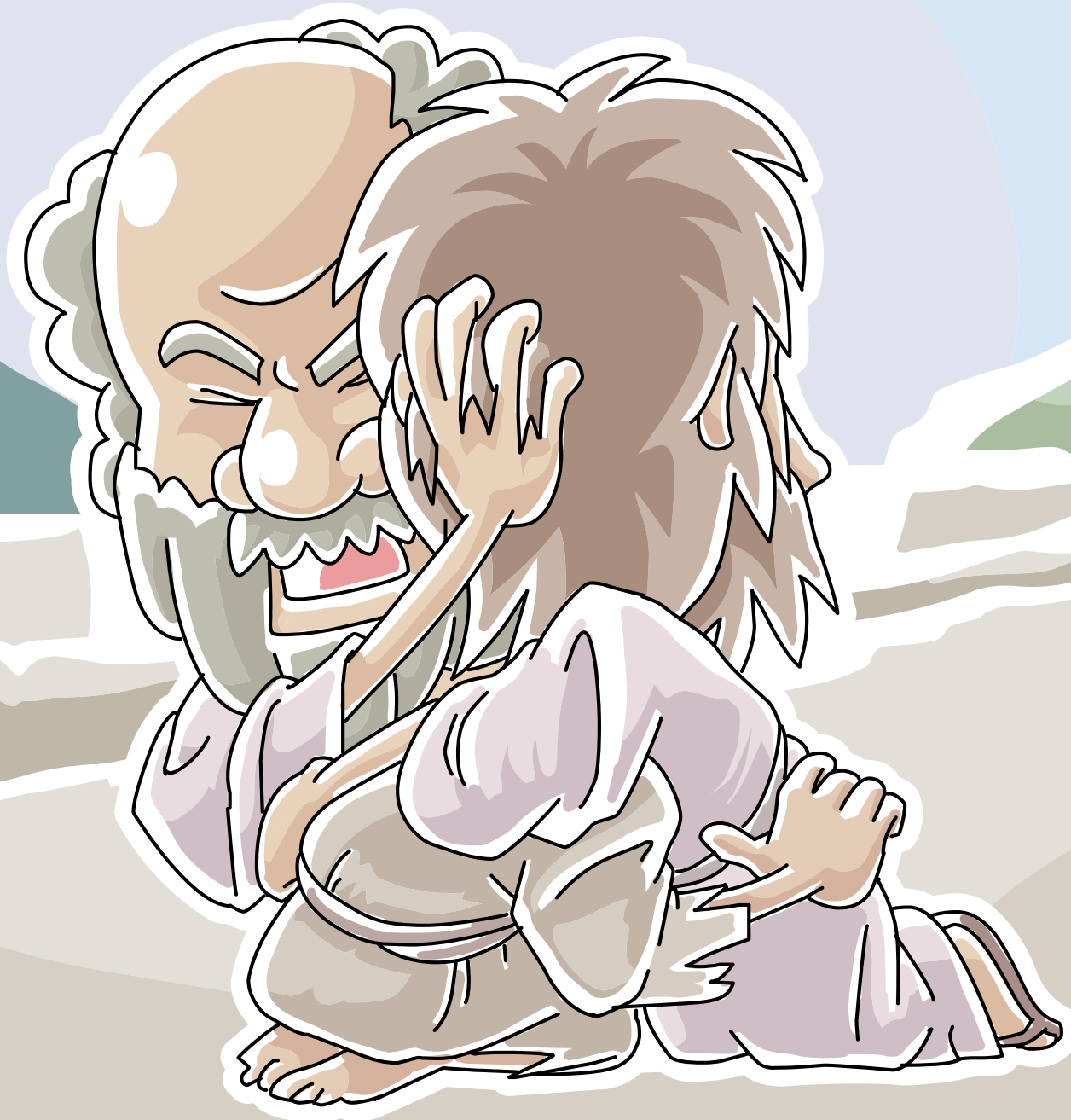


The lost son



Colour me!



Luke 15:11-24

Jesus also told them another story: Once a man had two sons. The younger son said to his father, "Give me my share of the property." So the father divided his property between his two sons. Not long after that, the younger son packed up everything he owned and left for a foreign country, where he wasted all his money in wild living. He had spent everything, when a bad famine spread through that whole land. Soon he had nothing to eat.

He went to work for a man in that country, and the man sent him out to take care of his pigs. He would have been glad to eat what the pigs were eating, but no one gave him a thing. Finally, he came to his senses and said, "My father's workers have plenty to eat, and here I am, starving to death! I will go to my father and say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against God in heaven and against you. I am no longer good enough to be called your son. Treat me like one of your workers.'"

The younger son got up and started back to his father. But when he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt sorry for him. He ran to his son and hugged and kissed him. The son said, "Father, I have sinned against God in heaven and against you. I am no longer good enough to be called your son." But his father said to the servants, "Hurry and bring the best clothes and put them on him. Give him a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. Get the best calf and prepare it, so we can eat and celebrate. This son of mine was dead, but has now come back to life. He was lost and has now been found." And they began to celebrate.

Commentary

This is possibly the most well-known of Jesus' parables. Most people know it as the story of "the prodigal son". As so often, Jesus doesn't give any explanation of its meaning, but lets the story speak for itself. He was telling it for the religious leaders in particular to hear. They were upset that Jesus was the sort of teacher who welcomed all types of people to be his followers, including those with messy lives and unacceptable behaviour.

This is also part of a series of 'lost and found' stories, in each of which Jesus gives clues as to what God is like. In this story, the father never gives up hope that his younger son will come home. He never disowns or forgets him, but waits patiently. When the son does come back, it is interesting that the father says nothing to his wayward boy. There are no words of rebuke or anger; he doesn't say 'I told you so' or even offer words of forgiveness, simply an extravagant welcome. The gifts of ring and sandals mean that he is fully accepted back into the family—just like the people with messy lives who had been welcomed back to God through the ministry of Jesus.

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Questions

- ▶ What is it that finally prompts the younger son to go home?
- ▶ Why does the father never give up on his lost son?
- ▶ Jesus adds a further section to the story, which you can read in a complete Bible version, describing how upset the older son is that the younger son's return is being celebrated. Do you think the father is treating his two boys fairly?
- ▶ The people listening would have realized that this parable was really about them. What sort of reactions do you think it received?



Visual aid

Find the following three simple visuals for the story: a bag of coins, a toy pig (perhaps from a farm set) and a golden ring. Use them to help you retell the story to each other.



Activity idea

Create some party sound effects and activities to go along with a rereading of verses 22–24. Put on some dance music, share some favourite food and drink; use party hats and streamers, and include lots of laughter and cheering. Catch the excitement of the father's joy that his son is back home.



Prayer idea

On a large piece of paper, draw a map with 'home' in one corner. Now draw a wandering line from home all around the map, covering as much area as possible without crossing your own line, and eventually coming back home. As each of you traces this line for him- or herself, pray something like this: "Father God, help me not to wander away from you and your love. If I do, bring me back safely. Help me to remember that you are always waiting for me."

Key verse

But when he was still a long way off, his father saw him... ran to his son and hugged and kissed him (Luke 15:20).

Old Testament story link

Genesis 33:1-15: Brothers Jacob and Esau meet again as friends after being enemies for many years.



Colour me!

