



Resourcing work among children and families

## The Prodigal

### On your marks:

Many children's leaders have found the style of storytelling that has been developed within Godly Play to be a very helpful and effective way of opening up the Bible with children. In the *Barnabas* Ministry Team we have been experimenting with some additional stories from scripture presented in this style, which we have used at *Barnabas* events and on Quiet Days. We are making them available so you can try them out with your children's group and we would be interested in any feedback on how they were received. Remember to tell the story slowly, focusing on the objects and on the story itself, **not** on the children who are listening. When you have finished telling the story, leave a short space and then use the wondering questions written out for you at the end of the piece.

### Get set:

The parable of the prodigal son is found in Luke 15:11-32. It is a firm favourite with many and the image of the waiting father rushing out to welcome and forgive the son, who had once wished him dead, is a memorable and moving one. But that wasn't how Jesus' story ends. What about the elder brother and his reactions? Jesus told this parable in the presence of the religious leaders of his day (Luke 15:1-2) who were upset to see this young rabbi mixing with 'undesirables'. The sting in the tail/tale was meant to make them and us think again about just how amazing and inclusive God's love really is. In common with all the parables it is a story that is intended to turn us upside down so we see things differently.

As this is a parable, we suggest you use the opening lines about the gold box that introduce all the six parables that are published in the original Godly Play corpus. See the Complete Godly Play volume 3

For this presentation you will need the following items, choosing or making 3-D objects that are both simple and attractive:

- <sup>cream</sup> Green base cloth;
- ~~four small felt squares~~ for the farm in shades of brown and yellow;
- ~~four small felt squares~~ for the city in shades of light and dark grey;
- ~~four strips of brown felt~~ for the pigsty;
- two large pigs; + <sup>fence</sup>
- approximately twelve small gold chocolate coins and an equivalent number of brown felt circles of the same size as the coins;
- stacking cups for the city; <sup>tiles</sup>

cloth

• party poppers, miniature bottles of champagne, party streams and blowers.  
All this should go into a box painted gold.

**Go!**

**1** Take the base cloth out of the gold box and lay it out in the centre of the story space. Take the four felt squares representing the farm and lay them out on the right hand side of the cloth half way down.

*cut  
cloth  
e get handles  
of \$\$\$*

Once there was a farmer who had two sons. He invested in his sons as much as he did in his farm, in the knowledge that one day they would inherit everything. But the youngest son could not wait that long. He was fed up with living on a farm – he wanted to see the world. So he said to his dad, 'Give me my share of the money now'. And because he loved his son, that is what the father did.

*took all this money & left*  
**2** Soon after, the young lad ~~packed his bags and went travelling~~. He headed for the bright city lights. As he walked along, his excitement grew and grew – ~~it was as if the road were pathed with gold...~~

Lay four coins from the farm along the right hand perimeter of the cloth towards the bottom centre position (nearest the children). Lay out the four felt squares representing the city. Place the stacking cups on the squares to represent buildings.

**3** Arriving in the city he set about getting his life together. Spend, spend, spend. New flat... new phone... DVD... wide screen telly... new car. You know the sort of thing.

Put a fresh coin on the city squares for every item mentioned.

New friends gathered around. Life became wall-to-wall parties... a shopping spree that never ended... except that it did. He was having so much fun, he hadn't noticed that his money was running out.

Lift the stacking cups and make the coins disappear under them until there is only one left.

When he was down to his last fiver, he turned to his friends... and they melted away into the distance.

Hide the last coin under a stacking cup.

**4** Along with the money everything else disappeared too. Alone and with nowhere to go he desperately started to look for work, but no one wanted farming skills in the city. Then he heard that a farmer outside the city was looking for someone to work for him. He took the job.

Lay three coins from the city around the perimeter of the left hand side of the cloth to a point opposite the farm.

He was to look after the pigs.

Set out the pigsty on the middle left hand side of the cloth and place the pigs inside.

5 He was so hungry he would have gladly eaten pigs' swill, but no one gave him anything. Cold, miserable and muddy, his thoughts turned to home.

*Lay your hand over the farm.*

'Dad's workers have plenty to eat, and here I am, starving to death!' he mused. Then a thought struck him: Perhaps his dad would take him on as a hired hand – at least he'd be treated properly. When he thought about how he had run through his father's hard earned cash he felt hot with shame. How could he ever be forgiven for that? Full of remorse, the boy headed for home.

*used all the money from the farm*

*With your hand, retrace his steps along the gold coin path and through the city. As he travels along, cover up the gold coins on the paths with pieces of brown felt, which are his muddy footprints.*

6 He rehearsed his little speech as he stumbled along. At last he could see the farm nestled in its valley far away in the distance.

*Bring your hand to the coin path leading up to the farm.*

But his father spotted him coming along the road, ragged and bedraggled, and his heart went out to him. He ran to his son and enfolded him in his arms.

*Bring your arms into a hugging position.*

The son began to apologise for the way he'd behaved, but his father wouldn't hear a word of it. He had been so sure his son was dead – and here he was alive and home at last! He was filled with joy. After so many months of worry it was time to celebrate!

*Lay the party poppers, miniature bottles of champagne, party streams and blowers on the farm squares.*

7 You may find it helpful to put a solitary wooden figure to represent the elder brother at a point just down from the farm, near you as the storyteller

The elder brother didn't see it quite like that. He'd stayed at home working hard whilst that good-for-nothing little brother of his had been running through the family fortune. Celebrate? He deserved to be taught a lesson, not welcomed home! I'm the one who deserves a party – but fat chance of that, he thought bitterly.

*half the family property*

*Move your hand close to where the elder brother is and gently cup your hand over him, as if in blessing*

Noticing his absence, the farmer sought out his elder son. He told him how much he loved him – always had. Everything he had was his. But it didn't matter now what the young lad had done. The important thing was that he was home at last. He had been dead, but now was alive. He had been lost and now was found.

*I wonder if the two brothers have names?*

*I wonder if the father has a name?*

*I wonder where this farm really is?*

*I wonder if you have ever been near a place like this?*

*I wonder why the younger brother wanted to leave the family home?*

*I wonder why the father gave him his money and let him go?*

*I wonder if you have ever wanted to run away from somewhere?*

*I wonder if you have ever had to let someone you loved go away?*

*I wonder if this city has got a name?*

*I wonder if you have ever been near a place like this?*

*what the city is like to live in*

*I wonder ~~where this pigsty really is?~~*

*I wonder if you have ever wished you were somewhere else?*

*I wonder where home really is?*

*for you*

*I wonder why the father was still waiting for him?*

*I wonder what the younger son felt about what the father said to him?*

*~~I wonder if you have ever run away and then come home again and been welcomed like this?~~*

*I wonder if you have ever felt like the elder brother?*

*I wonder what the elder brother did next?*

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