



I Spy

The Lost Son Returns

BIG IDEA: Jesus wants me to forgive.

BIBLE BASIS: Luke 15:11-24

KEY VERSE: “Forgive, just as the Lord forgave you.” Colossians 3:13 (NirV)

SCHEDULE

2S & 3S CLASSES

ARRIVAL & PLAYTIME

10:30-10:55

2S & 3S LARGE GROUP

10:55-11:10

SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES

11:10-12:00

PRE-K & K CLASSES

SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES

10:30-11:15

PRE-K & KINDER LARGE GROUP

11:15-11:40

REVIEW ACTIVITIES

11:40-12:00

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LEADER DEVOTIONAL

The parable of the Loving Father and the Prodigal Son is an excellent section of Scripture to read if you want to understand how much God loves us despite our tendencies to wander away from His perfect love and toward s“l”n. No — that’s not a misspelling! You see, I’ve found that s“l”n is the result of an “I” attitude. It’s the attitude of “I want to do what I want to do, when I want to do it.” The prodigal son suffered from it, and so do we.

I don’t know exactly how old the youngest son was — probably in his early 20s — but he decided that he wanted his freedom from the confines of his family. Normally, he would need to wait until his father died and then he would inherit 1/3 of his father’s estate, but that could be years away. Not wanting to be delayed by a technicality, he asked his dad for an advance on his money. Basically, he was telling his dad that he wanted him dead so that he could have his share of the estate NOW!

It’s interesting to me that the dad didn’t try to talk his son out of his request. The father gave his son the freedom to make his own decision and to live with the consequences of that decision. That’s actually the way that God relates to all of us. He says, “I love you, I want the best for you, I have given you my Operations Manual to live your life by, but you’re the one who has to make the decision to follow Me or not.” In the case of the prodigal son, he chose “not.”

Unfortunately for him, the freedom he sought and obtained wasn’t what he thought it would be. Freedom from his father only brought heartache, personal failure, spiritual emptiness, and an inner longing for something to fill the vacuum in his life. I can identify with this young man. I’ve sought after that same kind of freedom. The freedom to do what I want, when I want, regardless of what the Father wishes. And just like the younger son, I’ve found that there are consequences to that kind of “freedom.”

Fortunately, our Father is full of grace. And when we decide with a sincere heart that we want the true freedom that comes with abiding in Him, He runs to us with arms wide open and embraces us with an unimaginable forgiveness. It’s so good to be home!

Bob Norwood
GO! Contributor



LARGE GROUP SKILL BUILDING

How to Prepare Like a Champ for Large Group

Here's a short story for you: A man gets up in front of a room full of kids and, with no forethought or preparation, he delivers a spellbinding and life-changing message. The kids are so grateful that they carry the man out of the room on their shoulders as confetti cannons explode. Great story, right? Unfortunately, you'll find it under "fiction." Great messages don't just happen without a little work on the part of the communicator. In short, your goal as the Large Group Leader is to communicate God's truth to kids in an engaging way so that life change can happen. To do that effectively, though, you've got to do a little prep work. Here are a few ways you can prepare:

Live the message. Authenticity is one of the most important traits of a good communicator. When we tell kids that they need to be pursuing God, they need to know we're doing that ourselves. That doesn't mean you have to be perfect; it just means that you have to be working towards living out the message in your own life.

Memorize. Sounds scary, right? It doesn't have to be. We'll spend more time in the future talking about how to memorize, but for now let's just say this: Effective communicators memorize. When you're tied to a script, you lose eye contact and your body becomes less animated. And when that happens, your level of engagement goes down. If you've never memorized before, start small. Pick a section of the lesson to memorize and pay attention to the difference it makes with your audience.

Rehearse. In short, don't let service time be the first time you've ever delivered your message. It might seem awkward at first, but run through your message a few times in advance. If possible, do it in the actual space where you'll be teaching.

Pray. When we deliver God's message, we're not alone. Ask for the Holy Spirit to be your co-teacher!

7.4 Large Group Lesson | Preschool



UNIT DESCRIPTION

I spy with my little eye — I spy down low, and I spy up high! During “I Spy,” preschoolers will need to put on their looking eyes to look high and low for the hidden objects. Once found, each object will help tell a portion of the Bible story. It’s an eye-opening experience that teaches kids to follow and obey Jesus, our all-powerful Savior.

SET-UP INSTRUCTIONS

- Place the following items somewhere in the preschool room:
 - Play money
 - Suitcase
 - Apple
 - Toy house
 - Robe
- Additionally, place a bowl of dog food in the storytelling area.
- Choose an upbeat song to play during the “I’m Forgiven Dance Party.” The teacher should be able to play and pause the music from the storytelling area.
- Create a “Super Duper Bible Box” and place your storytelling Bible inside. This box will be used every week. See the Resource Folder for details on how to make the “Super Duper Bible Box.”
- If using the non-video options for the Topher segments of the lesson, print the Topher’s Storytime Rules signs and Topher’s Big Idea signs on 8½” x 11” cardstock paper and place in the story time area. See “Getting Started” in the Resource Folder for the printable signs and for more instructions on how to perform the non-video options.
- Note: Any media repeated throughout the unit, such as the Topher videos and the title slide, is located in the Lesson 1 Resource Folder only.

7.4 Large Group Lesson | Preschool



★ LARGE GROUP LESSON

WELCOME AND MUSIC

Music: Play one or two upbeat worship songs

BIG IDEA AND BIBLE VERSE

Large Group Leader: Hello, my friends! I spy with my little eye...some kids with two hands. Who do you think it is? (*Children respond.*) That's right — it's you! If you're happy to be here, clap your hands one time. (*Children clap once.*) If you're happy to be here, clap your hands two times. (*Children clap twice.*) I'm happy to be here too, and I can't wait to tell our Bible story.

Say: Today's true Bible story is going to teach us that **Jesus wants me to forgive**. That's our Big Idea for the day. Let's say it together. (*Repeat Big Idea with children.*) **Jesus wants me to forgive**. It's true! **Jesus wants me to forgive**. In fact, that's what our memory verse from the Bible tells us. Let me teach it to you.

*“With people (point to all the children),
this is impossible (two thumbs down and shake head “no”).
But with God (point up),
all things are possible (two thumbs up and shake head “yes”).”
Matthew 19:26 (extend hands like you're holding a book).*

Say: Let's do that together. (*Repeat memory verse with children two or three times.*)

2s & 3s - STORY TIME RULES

Say: Wow — nice job! I think you are ready for the Bible story. Before we get started, though, I think we should go over our three story time rules.

Video: Play “Topher the Gopher Story Time Rules” video

(Note: Play the “Topher the Gopher Story Time Rules” video or use the Story Time Rules script found in the Resource Folder.)

Pre-K & K - Bible Trivia

- Who Wrote the book of Matthew? (Matthew)
- Who wrote the book of Mark? (Mark)
- Who wrote the book of Luke? (Luke)
- Who wrote the book of John? (John)
- Who wrote the book of Acts? (Luke)
- Who wrote the book of Romans? (Paul)
- The Bible is split into two parts. What are they called? (The Old & New Testament)
- What is the difference? (Jesus was born in the New Testament)

7.4 Large Group Lesson | Preschool



ISPY INTRO

Say: When you're a little kid, there are so many special words to say — words like "please." I have an idea. Let's all say "please" together. (*Say with children.*) Hmm...let me think of another one. I know — "thank you" is a special word to say too. Let's all say "thank you" together. (*Say with children.*) Can you think of some other special words to say? (*Take answers, then repeat words with children. Words might include "I love you," "You're my friend," "I'm sorry," etc.*)

Say: Those were some great ideas! I have one more very, very special word to say. Listen carefully, I'm going to whisper it. (*Whisper words.*) "I forgive you." Let's whisper those words together. (*Whisper words with children.*) When someone does something we don't like, Jesus wants us to say, "I forgive you." In fact, there's a dad in today's true Bible story who says those special words.

Say: If you're ready to hear that story, wiggle your fingers in the air. (*Children wiggle fingers in the air.*) Great! First, let's get our Bible out of the Super Duper Bible Box. (*Move to the Bible Box.*) I need your help getting the Bible out, though. We need to say our special Bible words together. Repeat these special words after me: It's true, it's true, the Bible is true!

Slide: Show the "The Lost Son Returns" slide

7.4 Large Group Lesson | Preschool



BIG BIBLE STORY — THE LOST SON RETURNS

(Ahead of time, place the story objects around the room. Make sure they are visible from the seating area. When it's time to spy an object, give clues such as color, shape, and what it's used for. Retrieve the object once it has been spied by the children.)

Say: Let's play "I Spy." I spy with my little eye something... **(Give clues about the play money.)** In the Bible, Jesus told a story about a man who had two sons. *(Choose a child to play the role of the younger son.)* The younger son said to his dad, "I want your money!" *(Prompt son to repeat line.)* So the dad divided all of his money and belongings between the two sons. *(Give son half of the play money.)*

Say: Let's do another "I Spy." I spy with my little eye something... **(Give clues about the suitcase.)** A short time later, the son packed up all of his things and left home for a country far, far away. *(Hand suitcase to son.)* Let's stand up and pretend like we're all walking to a faraway country. *(March in place with children while chanting the following lines.)* We're walking, we're walking, we're walking to the country. We're walking, we're walking, we're walking to the country. We're walking, we're walking, we're walking to the country. And stop! *(Have children sit down.)* When the son got there, he spent all of his money on silly things. *(Take money away from son.)*

Say: It's time for another "I Spy." I spy with my little eye something... **(Give clues about the apple or other piece of food.)** Then the whole country ran low on food. The son didn't have anything to eat — not even one tiny apple. *(Hold up apple.)* So he went to work feeding pigs. Even the pigs had more food to eat than he did. The son was so hungry. Can you all show me what you look like when you're really hungry? *(Children look hungry.)* He even thought about eating the pig food. *(Hold up bowl of dog food to the son.)* Would you ever think about eating pig food like this? *(Children respond.)* The son did. That's how hungry he was!

Say: I spy with my little eye something... **(Give clues about the toy house.)** The son thought to himself, "Even my dad's servants have more food than me. *(Hold up toy house.)* I'll go back home and beg him to forgive me. Maybe he'll let me be a servant in his house." So he got up and walked back home.

Say: I spy with my little eye something... **(Give clues about the robe.)** When the dad saw his son coming, he ran to him and gave him a big hug. *(Give son a hug.)* The son said, "I'm sorry, Dad! I've done something bad. Please let me be your servant." But the dad didn't want another servant — he wanted his son back! The dad said, "My son was lost, but now he is found." The dad forgave his son and had his servants put a special robe on him. *(Put robe on son.)* Then he threw his son a big party with lots and lots of food.

7.4 Large Group Lesson | Preschool



MUSIC AND CLOSING

(Encourage the children to stand up. Lead them in a worship song of your choice. Following the song, use the rhyme from earlier to help the children sit down again.)

Music: Play one worship song

Say: In the story that Jesus told, the son did something bad — *(hold up some play money)* he took his dad's money, he left home, and he spent it all on silly things. When the son came back home, was the dad angry or did he forgive his son? *(Children respond.)* You're right — he forgave his son!

Say: You see, we're kind of like the son and the dad is kind of like God. When we do bad things, we can always go back to God. If we say, "I'm sorry" to God, He always says, "I forgive you." Then it's like God throws a big party for us. You know what — that gives me an idea. Let's have an "I'm Forgiven Dance Party!" When you hear the music play, let's dance. When the music stops, let's freeze, then shout, "Hip, hip, hooray! I'm forgiven!" *(Play upbeat music. Pause occasionally, shout, and then play music again.)*

Say: When we sin or do bad things, God says, "I forgive you." And because God forgives us, **Jesus wants us to forgive others.**

7.4 Large Group Lesson | Preschool



TOPHER'S BIG IDEA

Say: Hey — that's our Big Idea for today! I think we should tell it to our parents when we see them. Maybe we should practice first. (*Appear to be thinking.*) Hmm...who could we practice telling? I know! We could tell our friend, Topher the Gopher. Let's see if we can find him.

Video: Play "Topher's Big Idea Video "

(Whisper.) Uh-oh. It looks like Topher is asleep. I think we should wake him up. When he wakes up, we can all tell him that **Jesus wants me to forgive**. On the count of three, let's all yell, "Topher the Gopher, wake up, wake up!" (*Count to three and yell with kids. Then play "Topher's Big Idea Video 2" or hold up card #2.*)

Topher: Hey, what's the Big Idea?

Children and Large Group Leader: **Jesus wants me to forgive.** (*Repeat the Big Idea several times. When finished, play "Topher's Big Idea Video 3" or hold up card #3.*)

Topher: Wow! That is a Big Idea! Thanks for telling me! Goodbye, kids. (*Encourage kids to wave goodbye to Topher as he disappears back into his hole.*)

Large Group Leader: Let's say a prayer together and ask God to help us forgive. (*Encourage kids to repeat the following prayer after you.*)

**Dear God,
You love me so, so much.
Thank You for forgiving me.
Please help me forgive others.
I love You, God!
Amen.**