

The Prodigal Son: A Tale of Two Leftovers

This free Hands-On Sunday School Lesson is offered by Summer Kinard, M.Div., Th.M.

When the Prodigal son was in the foreign land, he was left with the results of his bad choices. He was far from home, alone, had no friends, no purpose, and no way that he was good for anyone except to feed pigs. Eventually, the bits of food in the pig slop looked appetizing to him. Why? Because pigs are fed leftovers. He could see that even the pigs were benefitting from a virtuous life, and he started to envy them.

What are the leftovers the pigs ate? The remains of a virtuous life:

- **Prayer**
 - The crumbs from the weekly bread that families would pray over might have gotten swept up for the animals to eat.
- **Almsgiving**
 - Families who were able would make a special giant loaf of bread each week to give to the poor. If there was a bit left that went stale, it would have gone into the pig's trough.
- **Kindness**
 - If a neighbor had a bumper crop of zucchini to share, the rinds would have gone to the pigs.
- **Moderation (Just enough)**
 - A family practicing the virtue of moderation, having a little of things instead of overindulging, would have thrown out crumbs from a wide variety of simple foods.
- **Hard work**
 - Grain for bread had to be grown and ground and mixed and baked. Any bread crusts or burned edges that made their way to the pigs represented hours of hard work.
- **Fasting**
 - Melon rinds and vegetable peels would fill the trough when the family was abstaining from richer foods.
- **Self Control**
 - Families who disciplined themselves wouldn't have been wasteful, but they also wouldn't have been too greedy about foods. The prodigal son might have seen the rinds of cheeses discarded from broth, for instance, or the stale bits of spiced cakes.
- **Hospitality**
 - A family who offered their best for guests might have tossed out the stems of figs or other special fruit. This would have reminded the son about the generosity of his father's house, as well as the way he should have spent his money.

What does "prodigal" mean?

Prodigal is part of the ancient language of virtues and vices. It means spending unwisely or beyond one's means.

Its opposite is moderation, which is spending with wisdom. When you line up your actions based on love, you avoid prodigality. Christian actions are meant to be guided by the highest virtues of faith, hope, and love.

Activity 1: Virtuous Pig Slop Paper Craft

Using the virtues listed above, have children cut out pieces of colored paper in the shape of leftovers. Label them with each idea as you go. Talk with the children about how the prodigal son saw that he didn't have those virtuous actions in his life any longer. Have the children

assemble their leftovers into a bowl or a central pile. Point out how even the leftovers of a good life were more than the prodigal son had left as a result of his bad choices.

Background:

But the son remembers that even the lowliest servant in his father's house had more to eat than he did. That's when he decides to stop feeding the pigs better food than himself. He decides to go back home, start practicing the virtues himself, and to enjoy the plentifulness that comes with love and humility.

Discussion:

Ask the children to pick out one of the leftovers and draw the whole item instead. For instance, if they drew bread crusts for hard work, have them draw a big, whole loaf. Do this for a few items (bread, fruit, cheese). These whole, big foods are what everybody could eat in his father's house. Which one is better? What would he have to do in his father's house to eat these good foods?

Activity 2: Leftovers and Abundance Game

Materials for outdoor version:

- Label small boxes, rocks, cans of soup, or any heavier object that won't blow off in the wind with the virtues listed above along with a food that represents them. For instance, "hard work, bread crumbs."
 - Optional Variation 1: If you happen to have them, you could even use real out of date foods like wilted celery or moldy bread (in its bag). This option is good for groups of kids who like to be grossed out a little, like older elementary/junior high kids or Boy Scout groups. It's probably not the best idea for a Sunday school, though.
- Label large boxes with the corresponding virtue and whole food, for instance, "hard work, bread loaf."
 - Optional Variation 2: Limit the virtues to a few that are easy to assemble in real life. For instance, use a real loaf of sourdough bread paired with a baggie of bread crumbs (plus a rock to weigh it down if outdoors), a bag of figs or apples matched with a baggie of fig stems or apple cores, a chunk of wrapped cheese matched with a cheese rind in a baggie. As long as you keep it not gross, this should go over well with all ages/circumstances. Make sure to add a virtue label to whichever foods you choose.

Materials for indoor version:

- Use the drawings the children have already made of leftovers and big foods. Or you can use the same materials suggested for outdoor play, but without the need for extra weight.

To Play:

- Have all the children assemble in a large open space (indoor or outdoor). Pair the children up numerically (age does not matter, so long as at least one child can follow directions well). Have the pairs of children line up in the middle of the room or open space.

- On one side of the space, have leftovers lined up. On the other, the good/big foods that go with them. They do not need to be matched up by child pair. It's okay to stagger the foods along the line.
 - Alternative: If you are playing with younger children, match the foods so that each child pair runs to his/her virtue food/leftovers.
- When you say "Go," have one child from each pair run toward the leftovers, the other toward the good/big foods. The children pick up the nearest leftover/big food.
- Have the children stop where they are. The child holding the leftovers holds it up and calls out the virtue. (You might need to help the little ones).
- The child with the good food that goes with the leftover runs to the child holding the leftover. This represents the father running to the son when he starts to come back to himself.
- Switch the groups so that the leftovers kids get a chance to find the good foods and run to the new leftovers kids.

End class session with The Lord's Prayer, and notice how we ask our Father God for daily bread.