

# CHAMPS



## CHILDREN'S MINISTRY

**8/29- 8/30**

### **GOD IS A LOVING AND FORGIVING GOD**

#### **PURPOSE**

Children learn that God is a loving and forgiving God.

#### **LEARNING ACTIVITIES:**

Invite a child to give the opening prayer.

#### **Lesson:**

Our story today is about a father who had two sons. For some reason the younger son was not happy at home with his family. Our story doesn't tell us why he wasn't happy, only that he wanted to leave. Does anyone have any ideas why the younger son might not have wanted to stay home with his father and older brother? (Let the children give their ideas.) He had everything he needed. His father provided for all his needs. He had food, clothes, and servants. Maybe he was bored at home. Or maybe he felt like he couldn't be good enough. Maybe his big brother was always doing things better than him. Maybe he wanted to prove to himself that he could make it on his own, that he didn't need anyone to depend on for his clothes and food. Maybe he was tired of doing things his father's way and wanted to do things his own way. Maybe he thought his father made him work too hard.

It doesn't really matter why he wanted to leave, we only know that he did. One day he went to his father and persuaded him to give him his inheritance now instead of waiting for him to die. His father divided up his land and all the possessions he had worked for all his life between the two brothers and gave each half.

The younger son sold everything he had been given and left his family. He bought himself the best clothes he could find. Everyone wanted to be his friend. Everybody liked him because he threw wild parties with lots of food and drinking and dancing. He thought only about what he wanted and how he could please himself.

After a while though his money began to run out and he found that the people he thought were his friends only liked him for his money.

About that time there was a famine in the land. There wasn't much food to go around and jobs were hard to find. He went everywhere looking for a job, but no one wanted to hire him. Finally he persuaded a local farmer to hire him to feed his pigs. The son was so hungry that the pigs food began to look good to him. Does anyone know what pigs eat? They are fed the parts of the plants that aren't very edible to humans. The pods that are

left over after collecting the beans or the husks and cobs left over after eating the corn and other things like that. By this time this poor son was in pretty bad condition. Can you imagine what he looked like? What he smelled like? What do you think he was thinking at this point in his life? He had everything he wanted when he lived with his father. Now he was living with the pigs and eating their food. He began to realize that he had made a big mistake. This was not at all what he wanted to do with his life. He had no friends, or family, or even food. He knew that his father was kind and made sure that the people who worked for him had plenty to eat. He thought to himself, "I have sinned against God in heaven and my father. I have wasted all the money my father worked so hard to save for my future. I don't deserve to be called his son. I will go back home and ask him to hire me as one of his servants so that at least I won't starve to death.

The younger son picked himself up and headed back to his father's house. When he was still a long way off his father had seen him and felt sorry for him. He ran to his son and hugged and kissed him and held him in his arms. The son told his father how he felt -- that he didn't deserve to be his son anymore. He just wanted to work for him so that he would not starve. But his father wasn't listening. He was so excited to see his son. He had been waiting and praying a long time for his safe return. He had been worried and was constantly watching and waiting for the moment he would appear over the horizon.

The young man's father didn't yell at him, or reject him. He didn't tell him how stupid and wasteful he had been. Instead he had his servants bring his son the best clothes he had and put them on him. He put a ring on his finger symbolizing that his father had forgiven him and accepted him back into the family. He prepared a big party and invited everyone he knew to celebrate the return of his son. He celebrated as if his son had been dead and had now come back to life.

The father in this story was a great father wasn't he? We don't always get this response from our own fathers when we make mistakes, do we? Sometimes they yell at us and tell us that we didn't make a very good choice or weren't being very smart. Sometimes they give us a lecture about what we should have done. Sometimes we even get punished. But our fathers don't do these things because they want to hurt us, they do them because they want the best for us. They punish us because they love us and want us to do the right thing.

The father in this story knew that his son had learned his lesson. He knew that he was sorry for what he had done. He probably thought that his son had been punished and shamed enough. He didn't have to tell him he was so stupid and wasteful; the young man already knew it.

When Jesus was telling this story, he wasn't talking about our fathers here on earth, he was talking about our Father in Heaven. He was trying to show us how God loves us unconditionally. He loves us no matter what we do. He is sad when we do wrong and turn away from him, but he never rejects us and anxiously waits for our return. David said it perfectly when he wrote in Psalms 86:5, "You are kind and forgiving, O Lord, abounding (overflowing) in love to all who call you.

**Outside Activity:**

The object of this game is to pass a snort around the circle as fast as you can without laughing. Have the children sit in a circle. Start by snorting at the children to your right. That child then snorts to the person on his right. Have the children keep going until someone laughs when they are snorting or receiving a snort. If a child laughs while someone is snorting at him or he is snorting, he is out of the game. He can laugh at all other times. If a child does not want to snort he can say "oink" The object of the game is to get the person you are snorting at to laugh so making faces while snorting or acting silly is okay. Keep up the snorting until there is only one child left

