*This is a resource to help teachers to explain the passage the story of ‘The Prodigal Son’.*

The Prodigal Son - Story Summary:

The story of the Prodigal Son, also known as the Parable of the Lost Son, follows the parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin.

Parable’s Main Theme

The parable's major theme is the unconditional love of the father, which reveals God's love of the sinner and justifies Jesus' own relationship with sinners. Luke addresses it to the Pharisees and Scribes who object to Jesus keeping company with sinners. "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

The parable

Jesus tells the story of a man who has two sons. The younger son asks his father to give him his portion of the family estate as an early inheritance. Once received, the son promptly sets off on a long journey to a distant land and begins to waste his fortune on wild living. When the money runs out, a severe famine hits the country and the son finds himself in dire circumstances. He takes a job feeding pigs. He is so destitute that he even longs to eat the food assigned to the pigs.

The young man finally comes to his senses, remembering his father. In humility, he recognizes his foolishness, decides to return to his father and ask for [forgiveness](http://christianity.about.com/od/whatdoesthebiblesay/a/bibleforgivenes.htm) and mercy. The father who had been watching and waiting, receives his son back with open arms of compassion. He is overjoyed by the return of his lost son! Immediately the father turns to his servants and asks them to prepare a giant feast in celebration.

Meanwhile, the older son is not one bit happy when he comes in from working the fields and discovers a party going on to celebrate his younger brother's return. The father tries to dissuade the older brother from his jealous rage explaining, "You are always with me, and everything I have is yours."

Points of Interest from the Story:

• Typically, a son would receive his inheritance at the time of his father's death. The fact that the younger brother instigated the early division of the family estate showed a rebellious and proud disregard for his father's authority, not to mention a selfish and immature attitude.

• Pigs were unclean animals. Jews were not even allowed to touch pigs. When the son took a job feeding pigs, even longing for their food to fill his belly, it reveals that he had fallen as low as he could possibly go. This son represents a person living in rebellion to God. Sometimes we have to hit rock-bottom before we come to our senses and recognize our sin.

• The father is a picture of the Heavenly Father. God waits patiently, with loving compassion to restore us when we return to him with humble hearts. He offers us everything in his kingdom, restoring full relationship with joyful celebration. He doesn't even dwell on our past waywardness.

Reading from the beginning of chapter 15, we see that the older son is clearly a picture of the pharisees. In their self-righteousness, they have forgotten to rejoice when a sinner returns to God. Bitterness and resentment keeps the older son from forgiving his younger brother. It blinds him to the treasure he freely enjoys through constant relationship with the father.

Key verses and their background:

Give me the share of the property that will belong to me (v12). The younger son's request for his share was in keeping with the custom of the day though traditional wisdom counseled against it, of giving an inheritance before one's death.

distant country (v 13). A place far removed from the family's religious and cultural background.

feed the pigs (v 15). A shameful task for a Jewish boy, as according to Jewish law, pigs are unclean animals.

when he came to himself (v 17). The son's motivation was both self­preservation and genuine conversion.

he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him (v 20). This expresses the father's unconditional love for the son.

bring out a robe (v 22). Symbols of honour.

put a ring on his finger (v 22). A sign of authority in the family.

sandals on his feet (v 22). A sign of membership of the family as servants went barefooted.

get the fatted calf and kill it (v 23). Meat was not often eaten, so killing the fatted calf was a sign of an extravagant celebration.

was dead…is found (v 24). The son was fully restored to the family life.

his elder son… (v 25­32), This son shows attitudes of jealously and self-righteousness even though his inheritance rights are protected. The father reassures him of his constant loving presence 'you are always with me'. (Adapted from Lent and Easter units Diocese of Broken Bay)

Questions for Reflection:

Who are you in this story? Are you a prodigal, a pharisee or a servant? Are you the rebellious son, lost and far from God? Are you the self-righteous pharisee, no longer capable of rejoicing when a sinner returns to God? Maybe you've hit rock-bottom, come to your senses and decided to run to God's open arms of compassion and mercy? Or are you one of the servants in the household, rejoicing with the father when a lost son finds his way home?