

# Moving to Forgiveness

## STEP 1 Life Need (5–10 minutes)

- Read and respond to stories about hurtful choices.
- *Optional:* Tell personal stories.
  - ☐ Pencils or pens
  - ☐ “I’m Not Sorry???” worksheet from *Middle School Creative Teaching Aids*

## STEP 2 Bible Learning (15–20 minutes)

- Complete a Bible study.
- Discuss repentance and God’s forgiveness.
  - ☐ Bible
  - ☐ *The Rock*

## STEP 3 Bible Application (5–10 minutes)

- Write endings to the stories.
- *Optional:* Talk about what to do when restoration is sought, yet refused.
  - ☐ Pencils or pens
  - ☐ “I’m Not Sorry???” worksheet from *Middle School Creative Teaching Aids*

## STEP 4 Life Response (about 5 minutes)

- Complete a symbol-drawing exercise.
- Identify people with whom restoration is needed.
  - ☐ Bible
  - ☐ *The Rock*
  - ☐ Pencils or pens
  - ☐ “I’m Not Sorry???” worksheet from *Middle School Creative Teaching Aids*

## Memory Verse

Blessed is the one whose sin the LORD does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit.

—Psalm 32:2

## Bible Basis:

The prodigal son returns from a sinful life to a forgiving father (Luke 15:11–24)

## Bible Truth:

God is ready to forgive those who confess their sins and seek His forgiveness.

## Lesson Aim:

To reassure your students of God’s love and encourage them to seek forgiveness for their sins.

## Understanding the Bible

At the beginning of Luke 15, the Pharisees and teachers of the Law were grumbling about Jesus’ association with “tax collectors and ‘sinners’.” In response, Jesus told three parables: the parable of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. In each story, one sees the contrast between God’s love and the exclusiveness of the Pharisees.

This week’s lesson is the parable of the prodigal son. When the younger son asked his father for his share of the estate, it was unusual for the father to give it to him. The inheritance specified a double portion for the firstborn son (Deut. 21:17), so the younger son would be entitled to about one-third of the family estate. In Luke 15:13, the younger son’s motives became apparent when he took all of his possessions and left nothing behind to come back to. He was out of there, and off to a distant country to live the way he pleased.

Once in the big city, the son squandered his money in “wild living.” When a famine hit the country, the son was forced to hire himself out to a citizen of the country. Then to add insult to injury the son’s job was to feed the man’s pigs—the ultimate indignity to a Jew because not only was the job distasteful, but also pigs were “unclean” animals.

The parable is normally called the parable of the

—continued on next page

☐ indicates items you will need to prepare before class

## Understanding the Bible —cont'd

prodigal son, but it could just as properly be called the parable of the prodigal father, for "prodigal" also means "extravagant." The heavenly Father is lavishly extravagant with His generosity showered upon us. God is like the loving father—arms outstretched, ready to welcome home the wandering son or daughter.

## Tips

### classroom

As you teach, demonstrate the abundance of God's grace in light of the seriousness of sin. Like the prodigal son, people often experience forgiveness after sin has taken its toll; sometimes consequences follow God's pardon. Sin never fulfills what it promises, and usually surprises us with hidden costs.

To help your students think through the consequences of sinful actions, present some open-ended situations and have students discuss what might happen next.

## PRESESSION ACTIVITY



### Show and Tell

• **Objective:** To help students affirm others.

Have a stack of blank paper on hand. As students arrive, suggest they write cinquains about people who mean a lot to them. Explain that a cinquain is a five-line poem. The first line is one word that describes the topic of the poem. The second line is a two-word description of the topic. The third line is a three-word description of the topic. The fourth line is a four-word description of a feeling that is brought about because of the topic. Finally, the fifth line is a one-word summary of the topic and is often the same as the title.

#### For example:

Stan  
is cool  
He likes sports.  
I'm glad we're related.  
Brother.

Stress that positive, affirming things should be said. Talk informally about how positive comments make people feel good about themselves.

## Understanding Your Students

Many young people have a loose attitude about personal responsibility and sin. This can produce problems in the Sunday school class. A common reaction to a study on forgiveness is "What have I done that needs forgiving?" The assumption is that forgiveness is warranted only for serious acts; if it isn't illegal, it isn't wrong.

The whole notion of sin is unclear to most adolescents. While some may take God's grace lightly, others may go overboard in the opposite direction. They may think, "What I've done is so bad, even God can't forgive me." Your job is to help your students avoid both extremes.



# STEP 1

Life Need  
5–10 minutes

## Lesson Aim:

To reassure your students of God's love and encourage them to seek forgiveness for their sins.

**Objective:** That your students recognize and identify with the feelings they experience when they hurt

### Materials:

- ☐ Pencils or pens
- ☐ "I'm Not Sorry???" worksheet from *Middle School Creative Teaching Aids*

Give an "I'm Not Sorry???" worksheet from *Middle School Creative Teaching Aids* to each of your students. Explain that you are going to read some true-to-life stories about students in familiar situations. After you read each story, ask your students only the first two questions printed on the worksheets (the final question will be used in Bible Application).

### ■ From MIDDLE SCHOOL CREATIVE TEACHING AIDS— I'm Not Sorry???

- ▶ What is the person feeling?
- ▶ Is this person hurting anyone? Who?



All of us feel these things sometimes because we all commit sin. Sin means missing the mark, not measuring up. In the lessons we did on the Ten Commandments, we saw how destructive sin is. It violates the way we were meant to be. When we sin, we hurt ourselves and others too. God is also hurt because He loves us and wants us to live the kind of fulfilled life He intends for us.

Even so, God the Father wants us to be restored to Him when we disobey. Today's Bible lesson about the prodigal son will help you understand His response to you and your sin.

### OPTIONAL ACTIVITY

If you have time and your students are willing, you may want to have them tell a personal story about a time they may have hurt or cheated someone. They'll be more willing to open up if you get things rolling with a story of your own.



Free! Downloadable  
Options for Steps 1 and 4.  
[RealLifeDownloaded.com](http://RealLifeDownloaded.com)

# STEP 2

Bible Learning  
15–20 minutes

## Bible Basis:

The prodigal son returns from a sinful life to a forgiving father (Luke 15:11–24)

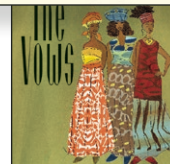
**Objective:** That your students analyze and discuss the story of the prodigal son.

### Materials:

- ☐ Bible
- ☐ *The Rock*

A lot of you probably have heard the story of the prodigal son before. Let's take a look at the action of the story in three scenes.

Hand out this week's issue of *The Rock* and ask students to turn to the Bible study, on pages 4 and 5. Read the introduction to the study and then work through the questions. If you'd like, announce each scene and title (for example, call out, "Scene 1, Home on the Ranch . . ."); give students a few seconds to look at the cartoon frame; then call out "Cut!" and complete the Bible study questions. The answers in this study are based on student opinion; be careful not to discourage their responses. Encourage students to support their answers from Scripture.



### ■ From *THE ROCK*—The Runaway

#### A Parable in Three Scenes

The real turning point in this story doesn't involve the runaway son, but his father who was waiting at home. Read the action in these three scenes, based on Luke 15:11–24.

#### Scene 1—1. Home on the Ranch . . .

- ▶ Cut. Read Luke 15:11–12. What made the son ask for his share of the estate? *(Greed, foolishness, need for independence, jealousy. Perhaps the son was tired of living at home and listening to his father.)*

- ▶ Why do you think the father gave it to him? *(He loved his son, wanted him to be independent, didn't want to argue, wanted to let him discover what was really important in life.)*

- ▶ Did the son deserve his share of the estate? Why or why not? *Some of your students may say, yes, he would have gotten it eventually anyway. Others may say, no, he just wanted an easy life.*

#### 2. Leaving the Ranch . . .

- ▶ Cut. Read Luke 15:13. Describe the son's decision. *(He decided to leave home, get away as far as possible, and spend his money on wild living.)*

#### Scene 2—3. Missing the Ranch . . .

- ▶ Cut. Read Luke 15:14–16, and describe what happened to the son. *(He spent all of his money and had to take a job tending pigs. He was very hungry.)*

#### 4. Really Missing the Ranch . . .

- ▶ Cut. Read Luke 15:17–18a. How did the son "come to his senses"? *(He realized what a mess he'd made of his life. He knew he would be better off at home.)*

## TODAY'S SCRIPTURE

Luke 15:11-24

<sup>11</sup>Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup>The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

<sup>13</sup>"Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. <sup>14</sup>After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. <sup>15</sup>So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. <sup>16</sup>He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

<sup>17</sup>"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! <sup>18</sup>I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. <sup>19</sup>I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' <sup>20</sup>So he got up and went to his father.

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

<sup>21</sup>"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

<sup>22</sup>"But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. <sup>23</sup>Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. <sup>24</sup>For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate."

- ▶ **Did he have a good idea? Why or why not?** *(Yes, he knew he would at least have a roof over his head; his dad's servants were better off than he was. No, he was setting himself up for possible rejection.)*

Scene 3—5. Back at the Ranch . . .

- ▶ Cut. Read Luke 15:20-21. Why do you think the father forgave his son so quickly? *(His great love for the son. He was happy to have his son home.)*

- ▶ **Was the son sorry for his actions? Why?** *(Yes, he said he was not worthy to be a son. He was willing to be a servant.)*

The End

- ▶ Cut. Read Luke 15:22-24. Did the son deserve what his father did for him? Why or why not? *(No, the son had been foolish and selfish. He was rebellious and made bad decisions.)*

- ▶ **What kind of father did this son have?** *(He had a loving and forgiving dad, one who was waiting all the time to welcome him back.)*

After discussing this story, we can agree that this son had a very loving and forgiving father. In spite of the son's foolishness, the father still welcomed him back and didn't punish him.

- ▶ **Why do you think Jesus told this story?** *(Because it's a description of what God is like. Jesus wanted the people to know that their sins could be forgiven.)*
- ▶ **How can this story relate to us?** *(It can help us realize that God loves us and wants us to come back to Him. God is waiting to forgive us when we repent and turn to Him.)*
- ▶ **Because of God's great love, He wants to forgive us of our sins so we can be close to Him. But just like the prodigal son, there's one thing we need to do. Think about the Bible story again. What did the son need to do before he could receive the forgiveness his father was waiting to give?** *(The son had to return to his father and say he was sorry.)*

When the son said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son" (vs. 21), he was repenting of his sin. Repentance involves admitting we're wrong and turning away from our disobedience. God longs to give us His love and forgiveness.

- ▶ **First John 1:8-9 explains repentance and God's forgiveness this way.** *Ask a student to read the verses.*

So the bad news is that we have all sinned. But the good news is that God is always waiting for us. We simply need to turn to God, away from our disobedience, and receive His forgiveness.



# STEP 3

## Bible Application

(5–10 minutes)



**Objective:** That your students complete four stories, assuming that restoration is attempted, and forgiveness is received.

### Materials:

- ☐ Pencils or pens
- ☐ “I’m Not Sorry” worksheet from *Middle School Creative Teaching Aids*

Have students answer the final question to the stories in the “I’m Not Sorry???” worksheets.

### ■ From *MIDDLE SCHOOL CREATIVE TEACHING AIDS—I’m Not Sorry???*

- ▶ How can this person solve the problem in an honest way?

Encourage your students to frame their answers as endings to the stories, making them similar to the parable of the prodigal son. You might ask questions like these:

- ▶ How could the main character act if he or she were to turn and seek restoration?
- ▶ How would the offended person respond if he or she were to act like the prodigal son’s father?

The following are suggested endings:

1. The person who threw the toy could admit that his actions were wrong and dangerous. He could go to his sister and apologize for fighting with her. He could explain that he was acting out of anger and thank his sister for caring enough to feel bad when she hurt him. The sister could respond graciously and not rub it in but continue caring for her brother.
2. The young teen could admit to the father how he is feeling and how he misses the time of peace between them. The dad could respond compassionately and perhaps give some advice about choosing friends and trusting God’s promise of forgiveness.
3. The person could go to Jill and admit to starting the bad rumors. She could go a step farther and try to correct the lies being spread. Jill could forgive her, and their original friendship could be restored.
4. The student could admit to the administration and her parents that she copied the paper—before the assembly gathered. She may suffer some consequences, but her conscience will be clear, and her parents should respect her willingness to admit that she did something wrong.

### OPTIONAL ACTIVITY

If you have time, discuss what might happen if the main characters sought restoration and they were refused forgiveness. Talk about people’s responsibility after they’ve done all they can to make something right.

If an apology is not accepted, it then becomes the problem of the offended person. There’s nothing more one can do. Some people prefer to harbor a grudge, but that always proves to be self-destructive. Those who will not forgive often become very bitter. Although our relationship with them will continue to be strained, we should keep praying earnestly for them.

# STEP 4



Life Response  
(5–10 minutes)

## Bible Truth:

God is ready to forgive those who confess their sins and seek His forgiveness.

**Objective:** That your students identify people whom they have hurt, and consider restoration.

### Materials:

- ☐ Bible
- ☐ *The Rock*
- ☐ Extra paper
- ☐ Pencils or pens
- ☐ "I'm Not Sorry???" worksheet from *Middle School Creative Teaching Aids*

▶ Have you ever had any of the feelings expressed by the people telling these stories? What is it you need when you feel like this? (*Forgiveness.*)

On the back of your worksheet, write the name or initials of a person you may have hurt in some way.

Under this, draw a picture-symbol that would remind you of the problem you have had with this person.

For instance, the person in Story One might have drawn a toy, or the person in Story Four might draw a trophy or award of some kind. The picture doesn't need to be elaborate; all that matters is that the symbol drawn is meaningful to the student.

When you think of the first step you can take to be restored to this person, put an X through the symbol.

As the prodigal son realized, when we sin against others, we ultimately sin against God. It's His forgiveness that we need for our sins.



Direct students' attention to today's memory verse, Psalm 32:2. The verse is printed on page 8 of *The Rock*, or students may look it up in their Bibles.

### Psalm 32:2

**Blessed is the one whose sin the LORD does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit.**

Another word for "blessed" is "happy." Think about how you feel about God's forgiveness. Maybe you're not sure He'll forgive you. Maybe you still feel guilty about something. Or perhaps you feel happy as Psalm 32:2 says.

Let's close today in prayer, silently asking God for His forgiveness, and then thanking Him for His great love.

If you know some of your students do not have a child-father relationship with God, encourage them to talk with you after class. You will find guidelines for leading a student to Christ on the inside back cover of this teacher's commentary.

Close the class with a time of quiet prayer.