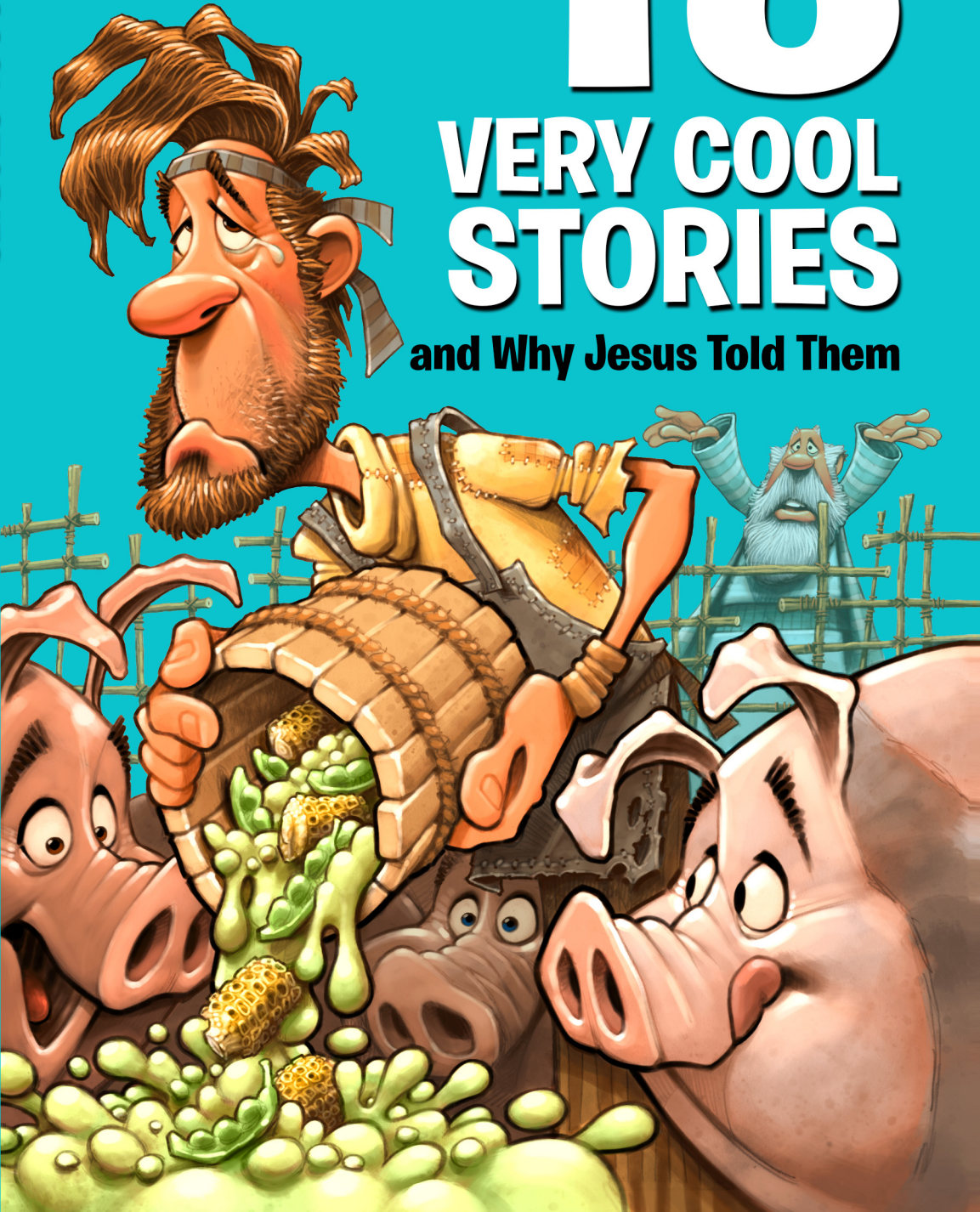


13

VERY COOL STORIES

and Why Jesus Told Them



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13 VERY COOL STORIES AND WHY JESUS TOLD THEM

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**“I will speak to you in parables. I
will explain things hidden since
the creation of the world.”**

Matthew 13:35

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How to Use These Sessions

First, thanks. Thanks for caring about children and for helping your kids dig into 13 cool stories that Jesus told. You'll get to share with kids the meaning behind these stories and what they tell us about Jesus, the kingdom of heaven, and our place in God's big story.

Welcome to Easy

These sessions for elementary kids are carefully designed to make your life easy. They're light on supplies, quick to prepare, and long on fun. You'll find most supplies in the church's supply closet or kitchen or at home in your garage, pantry, or junk drawer—no need to spend time ordering materials online.

Because these sessions are created so beginning teachers or mature teenagers can lead them confidently, you won't need highly trained teachers. And the variety of options in each session will snag the attention—and hold it—of first-grade through six-grade children, including the boys!

Best of all, you'll see kids grow in their faith as they open their hearts to what God shares with them through these 13 sessions.

Welcome to Simple Learning

Preparation is easy too. Each week you'll focus on one key Bible truth, which children will explore and apply. You'll drive that point home through Bible exploration, fun discussion, giggle-worthy games, and "Oh, wow!" activities that engage kids in multiple ways through multiple learning styles.

Welcome to Deep Bible Discovery

Each week, your children will actually *experience* a Bible story. They'll discover it, ponder it, talk about it, pray about it, and apply what they learn. If that's what you're looking for—for your children to *do* God's Word instead of just hear it—you're in exactly the right place. And here's a tip: supersize the learning by using a kid-friendly version of the Bible to make sure the stories are understood by children.

Welcome to Flexibility

We get it: sometimes you have to punt. A sermon goes long ... or short. Kids are quick to dive into a lesson or need some time to warm up to being together. Older kids might zip through an activity while their younger friends take longer.

Relax. We've got you covered.

You can use these sessions with kids in practically any setting: in Sunday school, children's church, evening programs, or while kids' parents are attending an adult class or small group. There's maximum flexibility because each session is written to last 45 minutes and then provides enough extras to fill a full hour. These sessions stretch to fit exactly what you need, when you need it. They're ...

- **multi-aged**—suitable for mixed ages of elementary children;
- **easily adapted**—sessions work for just a couple kids or a packed classroom;
- **relational**—children grow close to Jesus *and* one another
- **flexible**—brimming with options to fit varying time frames; and
- **fun**—even easily distracted kids can engage, learn, and grow!

So are you ready for some fun? Let's dive in!

The Story of the Found Son

The Point: God is forgiving.

Scripture Connect: Luke 15:11–32

Supplies for all Session 5 activities options: pencils, prepared poster, paper, tape, safety scissors (several pairs), 5 coins per child (you'll get them back), 1 wastebasket, 1 towel, Bible, 1 oven mitt, 1 newspaper page per child

The Basics for Leaders

This story is one of a series Jesus told to help people know God and to help them realize how eager God is to welcome them into the kingdom. How eager? Well, eager enough to forgive people who speak poorly of God and take advantage of his kindness. If they repent and if they turn away from the bad things they've done and ask for forgiveness, then he's willing to forgive them. God is forgiving. That's the meaning of this well-known story, and it's the truth you'll help your children discover!

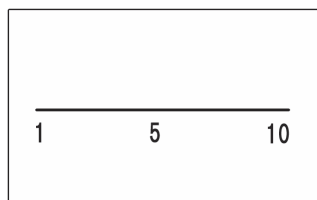
OPENING ACTIVITY—OPTION 1

HOWZITGOIN'

Time: about 5 minutes, depending on attendance

Supplies: pencils, prepared poster

Before kids arrive, draw a line on a poster. Write a 1 on the left end of the line, a 10 on the right, and a 5 in the middle. As kids arrive, ask them to pencil in their initials on the line.



Say: **If this past week was so awful you wish you'd slept through it, place your initials by the 1. If it was a great week you wish you could repeat, put your initials by the 10. Place your initials anywhere on the line that shows how you feel about this past week—except exactly on the 5. Because there's no such thing as a week that's exactly half good and half bad!**

After kids have signed in, give them 30 seconds each to explain why they placed their initials where they did. Be sure to include your own initials and explain your placement on the line. Kids will begin to express themselves more over time, and hearing their stories will help you adapt this lesson to make it relevant to your kids' lives.

OPENING ACTIVITY—OPTION 2

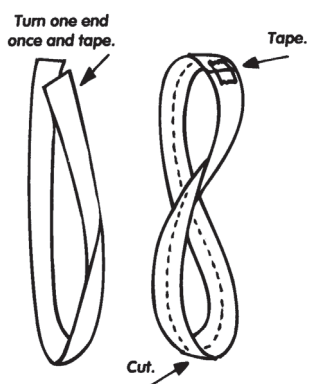
GOD'S FORGIVENESS STRIP

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: paper, 1 pencil per child, tape, safety scissors (several pairs)

Note: You'll use these strips for the Closing Prayer activity, so be sure each child makes one. Before children arrive, cut 2" x 11" strips of paper. Cut one or two strips per child. Practice the steps outlined below so you're able to give kids clear directions in completing the project. (*Technically, this is called a Mobius strip, but we're going to call it God's Forgiveness Strip.*)

Give each child a strip of paper and a pencil. (Younger children will need extra help with this activity. Consider pairing them with older kids.) Use pencils to write "God's Forgiveness Strip" on the strips of paper. Bring the ends of each



strip together as if creating a paper circle, but give one end a half twist. Tape the ends of the circle. Use tape on both sides where the paper ends join.

Show children how to poke their scissors carefully through the centers of the strips and cut down the centers, continuing all the way around the circles. As you help the children, ask them what they think will happen as they complete the cut.

Surprise! Kids won't have two circles. Instead, they'll have a longer loop.

Collect the strips and set them aside as you have children sit in a circle on the floor. Discuss:

- How do you know God forgives you?
- If you walked away from God, would he welcome you back? Why?

Say: The loop you made is like God's forgiveness—it never ends. In a story Jesus told, a young man learned that his father's love didn't end either, even though he walked away from his father. Let's see what happened when the young man turned around and went home again.

Cool Stories Game

WASTING MONEY

Time: 10 minutes or more, as desired

Supplies: 5 coins per child (you'll get them back), 1 wastebasket, 1 towel

Say: In our story today we'll learn how a young man wasted a lot of money in what the Bible calls "wild living." What might a person do today that we would call wild living? Answers might include spending money on foolish things, driving too fast, drinking too much, buying and using drugs, and getting arrested.

Say: **We don't know exactly what he did with his father's money, but he managed to lose it all. Not that I want you to get good at doing the same thing, but let's practice throwing away a bit of money now.**

AGE-ALERT TIPS

Alert #1: If you have lots of younger kids, simply place the wastebasket closer.

Alert #2: Invite older children to toss their coins from a greater distance.

Place a wastebasket 10 feet from the children. Place a towel inside the basket to dull the sound of coins landing. Toss coins, one at a time, toward the basket. Older children can flip their coins—it adds even more challenge.

As they toss the coins, tell them to call out what they'd buy with each coin if it was worth 100 dollars. Because children don't know what most things cost, be prepared for interesting answers!

When children have finished, have them help you collect stray coins and drop them in the wastebasket. Then ask children to stand in a circle around the basket. Say: **Suppose this wasn't your money to waste but belonged to your parents. How happy do you think they'd be to see you when you came home and announced you'd thrown away 500 dollars?**

Allow children to respond. Then say: **In a story Jesus told, a young man took his father's money and threw it away by making really bad choices. Then he wanted to come home again. Let's find out what happened to him!**

Cool Bible Story

MOVE THE MITT!

Time: about 20 minutes

Supplies: Bible, 1 oven mitt

Gather children in a circle and place the oven mitt in the middle of the circle. Explain that oven mitts are used to handle very hot things, and today that hot thing is anger.

Say: **As we read a story that Jesus told, we'll decide as a group who has the right to be angry. That person will wear this oven mitt.**

Assign three roles: father, younger son, and older son. Everyone else will play the part of the pigs. Have just a few children? No problem! Take on the role of older son yourself and assign just the father and younger son roles.

Invite the kids playing the role of the pigs to practice their sound effects a few times. Then ask for silence and begin reading. Read aloud Luke 15:11–12. Say: **Money wasn't handed out to sons until fathers died. The younger son is saying, "I wish you were dead so I could get my money." Who has a right to be angry here?** (Father—let the father put on the mitt.)

Read verses 13–15. Ask:

- **Does the younger son have a right to be angry about running out of money?** (No, so keep the mitt on the father.)

Read verse 16 aloud. Ask:

- **Do the pigs have the right to be angry about having only crummy food to eat?** (No, but don't put it to a vote!)

Read verses 17–24 aloud. Ask:

- **What did the father do with his right to be angry?** (He gave it up, so have the father take off the mitt and place it on the floor.)

Read verses 25–32 aloud. Ask:

- **Does the older son have the right to be angry?** (No. He'll receive what's due him, as promised. He doesn't get to wear the mitt!)

Say: **In this story there were plenty of mistakes made. And yet the only one who had a right to be angry was the father, and he chose to forgive his younger son.** As a large group discuss:

- **In what ways are we like the younger son?**
- **In what ways are we like the older son?**
- **In what ways, if any, are we like the father?**

Say: **When we forgive, we give up the right to be angry. We choose to be happy even when life isn't fair. We let go of our hurt feelings. It's easier when people like the younger son ask for forgiveness, but it's our choice. We can forgive others even when they don't deserve it. That's what God has done with us. We don't deserve it, but God is forgiving!**

CLOSING PRAYER

GOD-IS-FORGIVING PRAYER

Time: about 5 minutes

Supplies: God's Forgiveness Strips from Opening Activity—Option 2

Hand each child the God's Forgiveness Strip that he or she made earlier. Ask children to place both hands through their strips and clasp their hands together.

Say: When the father in Jesus's story had the chance to have his son come back—even after the son had done things that the older son thought were unforgivable—the father jumped at the chance. His son was more important than the lost money, his pride, or others' anger at him for being so forgiving. The father just wanted his son back. That's what mattered.

God's forgiveness is like that. It surrounds us. Like the paper circle, it's eternal—it goes and goes without any end. Let's thank God for his forgiveness and love.

Ask children to offer prayers aloud, thanking God for his love and forgiveness. After letting kids pray silently, close the prayer for your group. Collect the God's Forgiveness Strips to hand out when kids leave.

EXTRA-TIME ACTIVITY—OPTION 1

NEWSPAPER PAINS

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: 1 newspaper page per child

Have children fold their newspaper pages in half. Ask them to hold the papers at arm's length, using both hands and keeping the papers straight in front of them.

Say: **How heavy or light would you say your newspaper page is? Pretty light, right? It's not hard at all to hold it out in front of you ... elbows locked ... straight ahead. But keep holding it.**

Ask children to keep the papers in the same position for 90 seconds without talking. It will seem like an eternity to them.

After 90 seconds, say: **How heavy does the paper feel now? Heavier, huh?** Ask children to drop their arms and shake out the cramps. Collect the newspaper pages. Then say: **When we've done something wrong, it's like carrying a weight. Even a little weight gets heavy if we hold it a long time. But when we ask God for forgiveness, he takes the weight from us. We don't have to carry it anymore! That's not just good news ... it's great news. God is forgiving!**

EXTRA-TIME ACTIVITY—OPTION 2

FEAST!

Time: about 5 minutes

Supplies: 1 sheet of paper and 1 pencil per child

Give each child one sheet of paper and a pencil. Ask children to draw a dinner plate on their papers and then, on the plate, the food they'd most want to see at a feast in their honor. After children explain what they have on their plates, discuss:

- **Why do you think the father in Jesus's story served such expensive food?**
- **Who was happy when you decided to be in a friendship with God? Or have you not made that decision yet?**

Say: **All of us come to God in the same way: by feeling his love and asking for his forgiveness. And God's answer is always the same: he forgives us!**

EXTRA-TIME ACTIVITY—OPTION 3

INQUIRING MINDS WANT TO KNOW

Time: 5 minutes

Supplies: none

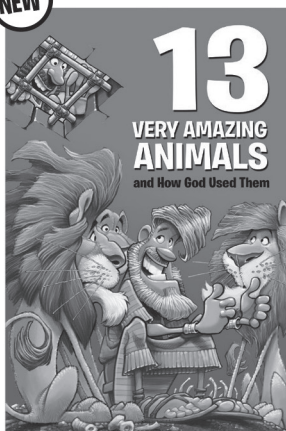
Gather kids in a circle. Ask: **Who have you forgiven? How did it feel to forgive someone else? How does it feel to know you've been forgiven by God?**

WE SERVE A BIG GOD. Show kids how big!

Kids will discover, think about, talk about, pray about, and apply what they learn.

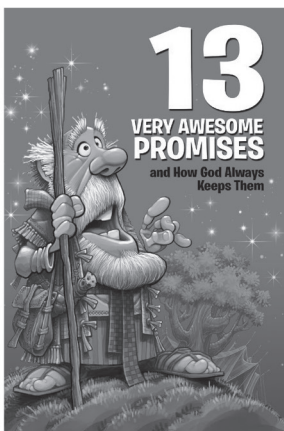
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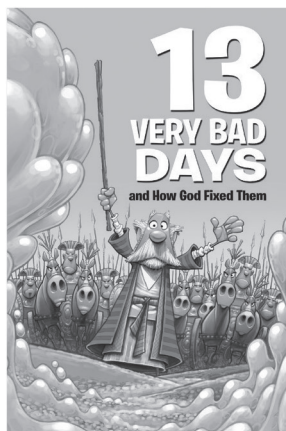
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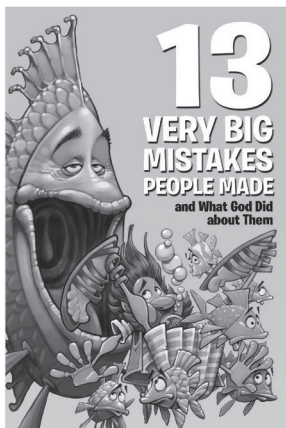
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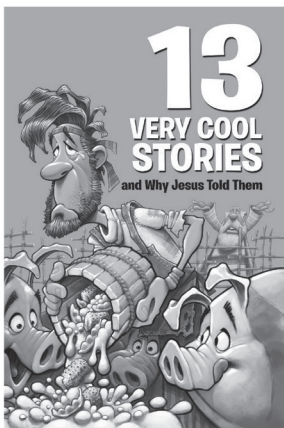
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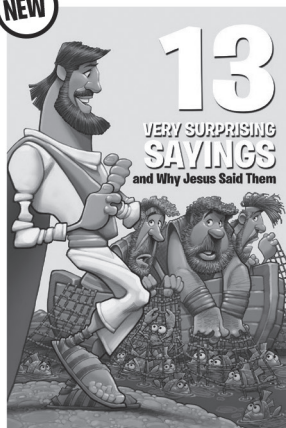
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