

STORY 1: ACCEPTANCE

During Jesus' ministry, people who had bad reputations often came to listen to him teach. This made the teachers of religious law complain that he was associating with such bad people—even eating with them! So one day Jesus told them this story:

"There once was a man who had two sons. The younger son said to his Father, 'Father, I want what's coming to me now.' So the Father divided his property between the two sons.

"Well, it wasn't long before the younger son packed up everything he owned and left for a distant country, where he wasted his money living a wild lifestyle. After he spent every penny he had, there was a bad famine in the whole country and soon he had nothing to eat.

"So he went to work for a man in that country, and the man sent him out to take care of the pigs. He was so hungry he would have eaten what the pigs were eating, but no one would give him any.

"Finally, he came to his senses, and said, 'My father's workers have plenty to eat, and here I am starving to death! I'll go back and tell him, 'Father, I have disobeyed God and I have disobeyed you; I don't deserve to be called your son. Treat me like one of your workers.' So he got right up and starting making his way home.

"When he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for his rebellious son. He ran to his son, and hugged him and kissed him.

"The son started his speech, 'Father, I have disobeyed God and I have disobeyed you; I don't deserve to be called your son.'

"But the Father wasn't listening. He called to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best set of clothes and put them on him. Put the family ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Go get the best calf and roast it- We're going to have a feast! This son of mine was dead, but now he's come back to life! He was lost but has now he's been found!'

"And they all began to celebrate the homecoming of the rebellious son."

{optional addition for further study: verses 25-32- The Elder Son}

STORY 1: ACCEPTANCE

- **review:** re-tell the story
- **dialogue:** discuss the story
 - What do you like or not like about this story?
 - What are some evidences of the father's love and acceptance of the "lost" son?
 - Why do you think Jesus told this story?
 - What can we learn about God from this story?
- **application:** live the story
 - Why don't we always experience assurance and acceptance in our relationship with God?
 - If we were completely assured of God's love for us, how would we live? What would our lives look like?
 - What is one action you can take to apply this story to your life?
- **notes:**