

Middle School

October 27-28, 2012



Title: A Journey Home: Week 4 (Return Home)

Series: A Journey Home

Series Description: Something incredible happens when we feel at home. We know we belong. We let our guard down and put up our feet. We know we're loved and we are brave—terrifically brave. But home doesn't come from a street address, kind group of friends or even a good family. The direct source of home is God—the perfect dad who treasures his children. Because no matter our history or family of origin, we can all feel abandoned and alone. So we can either default to living as emotional and spiritual orphans or live in our true identity as sons and daughters.

Objectives:

Know: God is looking for us to come home—to receive our place in his family. Through the story of the Prodigal Son, we're going to be identifying something God is asking us to let go of.

Do: Repent and turn to God

Where to find it: Luke 15 (Pg. 1031), Romans 8:15-17 (Pg. 1116)

Schedule for all Sites:

Hang time	(10 minutes before service begins)
Worship and Teaching	(at the start of the service hour, 25-30 minutes)
Small Groups	(last 35 minutes of the service)

Leader Notes: Today is a turning point. We're going to be actively repenting and turning to God. Be prepared for the Holy Spirit to do some major work in the life of your students. **Large Group is probably going to be a little longer than usual today—that's ok.**

Large Group Teaching Script

Presenter Notes: For the Dirty Little Secret portion, please create a card like ones you see in The All-American Rejects video. Think about the journey you've been on the past few weeks. What is keeping you from experiencing life as God's treasured child? What orphan tendency keeps popping up? Be honest and share this with your students. The more honest you are, the more opportunity the Spirit has to move in your life and in the large group setting. **And large group is probably going to be a little longer than usual today—that's ok. We want to leave at least 15 minutes for groups to meet at the end though, so watch the clock.**

Kids enter large group with "Home" playing in the background. (It's in the Keynote)

Video: Phillip Phillips' "Home" [youtube.com/watch?v=HoRkntoHkIE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HoRkntoHkIE)

Songs: band plays

NOTE: If you don't have a band this weekend, use this INTRO: Hi, Welcome to Middle School. To get started, we're airing our dirty little secrets...(and immediately begin the video).

Video: Dirty Little Secret by The All-American Rejects

To see the video, follow this link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gPDCwjJ8pLg>

(Holding up your "dirty little secret" card for the group to see.)

Hi. I'm _____ and this is my dirty little secret. I _____.
(Insert text of your secret). We all have secrets, every one of us. We think things or do things that most people will never know. We've been on a journey together to find our place in God's family—the place of a treasured child—but we have dirty little secrets that stand in the way from us fully receiving the love God has for us. Today is the day we turn from those secrets. Today is the day we begin walking back home to our father. Today is the day he wants us to know that we're truly loved and received—that we have a place in his family, regardless of what anyone else might say about us. Today is that day.

We've Believed Lies

Dirty Little Secrets came into our world at the beginning, when we rebelled. Shame, Isolation, and Fear entered when we ate the fruit. And from that day to this one, we've been running from our Father and believing lies. We've bought into the lie that God can't be trusted. We've believed the lie that God could never *really* love us. We've decided we just don't belong in God's family—we're the outsider and God doesn't want us to be his treasured child. We've received these lies, but we can turn from those lies beginning today.

Jesus the King

That's the reason Jesus came—to shatter those lies and to set things right. As the Creator—and therefore the true Authority and Owner—Jesus was coming to show us what God is like. Jesus the King was coming to announce that a new way was here—the Kingdom of God. And God's Kingdom is radically different from any kingdom in this world. In God's Kingdom, you can't earn or buy your way in. Jesus leveled the playing field for rich and poor, outsiders and insiders, haves and have-nots. It's his family that he invites us to be part of—we just have to

receive our place at the table. We also can't do something so horrible that we exclude ourselves from that invitation or from being a part of his family. We all come into the family in the same way—on Jesus' terms.

Jesus Told Stories

To help us understand this, Jesus told stories to illustrate how his Kingdom Family works. One particular story is called the Lost Son or the Prodigal Son. It's a famous story even outside the Christian faith, but it's often misunderstood or applied in wrong ways. We're going to dive deep in that story for a few minutes because, in it, we find God's heart toward us.

The Audience

Here's how the story begins:

(Continued)

Tax collectors and other notorious sinners often came to listen to Jesus teach. ² This made the Pharisees and teachers of religious law complain that he was associating with such sinful people—even eating with them! So Jesus told them this story: Luke 15:1-3

The Religious people of the day didn't get it. Why is Jesus hanging out with the worst people in society—drunks, prostitutes, cheats, the sexually promiscuous, rebellious, far-from-God people—instead of hanging out with people who keep all the religious rules? Jesus was hanging out with the so-called Orphans, not the people perceived as the Treasured Children. So Jesus told the Religious Leaders this story. We're actually going to read it together—I'll read out loud and stop to point a few things out along the way. You can follow along with your eyes on the screen if you want: **Provide Commentary in bold Italics as you read the story:**

“A man had two sons. ***Notice this story is really about two sons—not just the Prodigal son.*** ¹² The younger son told his father, ‘I want my share of your estate now before you die.’ So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons. ***This would have been incredibly shocking to Jesus' audience. This son basically told his father that he wished the father was dead—then at least he could get some money out of the deal. The son would rather have the father's money than a relationship with the father. And the father shockingly gives the money to his son.***

¹³ “A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and moved to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money in wild living. ¹⁴ About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve. ¹⁵ He persuaded a local farmer to hire him, and the man sent him into his fields to feed the pigs.

We don't know how long it took him to blow through his money pile, but the money's now gone. His inheritance has been squandered. His only option is to work on a pig farm. To Jesus' audience, this would have been the worst possible job. Pigs were considered to be unclean to even touch, let alone work with them. This would have been the worst Dirty Jobs episode for Jesus' audience.

¹⁶ The young man became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him. But no one gave him anything. ¹⁷ “When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, ‘At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸ I will go home to my father and say, “Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, ¹⁹ and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant.””

Here’s the turning point in the story. “He finally came to his senses.” He actually decides to return home to the father—the very same father he wished was dead and whose money he had wasted frivolously. This was beyond a bold move—this was scandalous in every way possible.

²⁰ “So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him.

Is this how you would have reacted if you were this Father? If it were me, I would _____ (insert your own answer). Since the Father ran to the son—which, by the way, Jewish men like the Father would never be caught dead in public running—since he ran to the son he must have been looking for him to come home. He was waiting and hoping and deeply longing for his son to return home. He didn’t even wait for his son to get all the way home—he ran to meet the son where he was. ...And to kiss him and give him a giant bear-hug?!? There’s no way the son expected this. He was hoping to be hired back as a family house servant—not to be welcomed as a son.

²¹ His son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.’^[b] ²² “But his father said to the servants, ‘Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. ²³ And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast,²⁴ for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.’ So the party began.

You’ve got to be kidding me! ...A party? Why? All this son did was insult his father in the worst way possible and then spent all the money. Then he has the nerve to come back and the father throws him a party!?! Jesus was making an unbelievable point about the way God the Father receives us when we “come to our senses”. When we turn and come back to our Father, no matter how offensive we’ve been, he is ready to receive us. And not just receive us as a household servant—but receive us as a member of the family—an honored son, complete with all of the privileges of being in the family.

Let’s stop and ask an important question here: Who paid the cost for the Father to receive the wayward son in this way? Did it cost the Father or the son? In other words, did the Father pay the price or did the son pay the price? (Pause for responses) In this story, the Father pays the price. It costs him actual money. It costs him his reputation in the community. It’s an incredible cost to pay since

every other Jewish father would have considered their son dead to them if they pulled a stunt like this. Let's be honest, if it were my son, I would not have responded like this.

Let's ask one more question. If you were this son and the Father responded to your rebellion like this, would you ever doubt his love again? Would you wonder if the Father really loved you? (Pause for responses) Nope—this son never forgot this. It had to be the driving force in his life from that day forward. Let's finish the story:

²⁵ “Meanwhile, the older son was in the fields working. When he returned home, he heard music and dancing in the house, ²⁶ and he asked one of the servants what was going on. ²⁷ ‘Your brother is back,’ he was told, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf. We are celebrating because of his safe return.’ ²⁸ “The older brother was angry and wouldn’t go in. His father came out and begged him, ²⁹ but he replied, ‘All these years I’ve slaved for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends. ³⁰ Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the fattened calf!’

Waa Waa—somebody call the WAAAAMBULANCE. The older son is ticked. He played by the rules. He did all of the right things, yet he never got a party. He can't believe the father would act so irresponsibly. And besides, the money the father had left was actually going to be the older brother's some day. The younger brother was having a party on the older bro's dime. He couldn't believe that this "sinner" was being welcomed back into the family. Look at what the Father says:

³¹ “His father said to him, ‘Look, dear son, you have always stayed by me, and everything I have is yours.’ ³² We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!”

The Father had to celebrate—the brother was dead and has come back to life. He was lost, but now he is found.

Is This Story About You?

Do you believe this story is about you? (Pause for a second) Jesus told this story so we would understand how the Father is ready to receive us when we come to our senses. The Father receives us with arms open, a giant bear hug and a huge kiss. He gives us a place in his family—makes us sons and daughters. He puts the family ring on our fingers, takes off our ratty, dirty, pig-stained clothes and puts fresh, new clothes on us. Then he throws a party. His lost son or daughter has come back!

Repent

When the younger brother came to his senses, he had a moment of repentance. The word “Repent” has all kinds of religious baggage. You might think of a dude carrying a sign on a street corner or you might think it means getting all emotional and crying a lot because you're really sorry. What it really means in the bible is to change your mind. To turn from going one

direction—thinking one thing—to going a different direction—thinking what God thinks. It's about aligning our thinking to God's thinking. It's when we realize our thinking is not the same as God's thinking but then we agree with God and change the way we think.

It works like this:

- I think God couldn't love me because I've done _____ BUT the Bible says that nothing can separate us from God's love. So if we refuse to believe God could love us, we're not thinking like God thinks and we need to Repent—begin thinking like God does. In this situation, it would mean believing and acting as if God really does love me.
- OR I have to act the right way—clean up my behavior—before God will receive me in his family. But the Bible says that Jesus has come to call those who are spiritually sick, not those who think they have it all together. Jesus says to come as we are. So I need to repent and move toward Jesus before I try to clean myself up.

What's Your Secret?

We're going to do a repentance exercise today. I told you earlier that my Dirty Little Secret is _____. What is your secret? What's the thing that's keeping you from receiving your place in God's family as a treasured child? How are you acting like an orphan?

What's something in your life that you're ready to let go of? What is it that you want from God instead? Maybe it's one of these: (Show the list on screen and pick 3-4 to highlight)

- *I don't think my parents love me*
- *I feel like a mistake*
- *Some days I wonder if anyone would notice if I was gone*
- *I was abused so God can't possibly love me*
- *I do _____ only because I want people to like me*
- *I'm friends with _____ because of what it gets me*
- *Because I did _____, God can't possibly love me*
- *I'm not really sure I believe in this whole Jesus thing, though everyone else thinks I do*
- *I think I'm better than _____*
- *I don't really like sports, but I can't stop because _____*
- *Sometimes I get high just so I don't have to think about _____*
- *I only get good grades because I cheat*
- *If I get lower than an "A" I've failed*
- *I don't think my parents will love me if they find out _____*

Whatever it is, I want to invite you to let go if it today. We're going to Repent together. Around the room there are stations where you can pick up a **note card**. I want you to write down the thing in your life that you're ready to let go of and what it is you want from God. And when you've had time to write it down and talk to God about it, I want you to bring your card to one of these **buckets of water** and toss your card in. Water is a significant picture of repentance in the Bible and this is an act of repentance—turning away from that thing and turning towards God. As you do that, keep this in mind—The Bible says that it's God's Kindness that leads us to repent. He is a loving father to us and in his kindness...he is inviting us to himself. Let's repent and meet our Father right now:

NOTE: We're not going for some emotional high today—we're looking to create an opportunity for genuine repentance. You might want to play some music in the background as students are responding. Give students time to complete this exercise and when they are finished, pray the following blessing over them and then dismiss them to small groups.

Prayer of Blessing/Dismissal to Small Groups

Whatever you put on that paper, God does not see you as that and God does not hold that against you. God says because you're his treasured child, you're the opposite of that. And you can receive a new identity in him. I bless you with that and pray that this is a point where you begin to turn and experience the love of the father. "May Jesus make his 'home in your hearts' as you trust in him, may your roots grow down into God's love and keep you strong, and may you have the power to understand...how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Jesus, though it is too great to fully understand." Amen.

Small Group:

Instructions:

Small group will likely be shorter than usual this week.

Part 1: Discussion Questions—Large Group Recap

- What was your reaction to the story of the Lost Son?
- Who did you identify with? The Father, The Younger Brother? The Older Brother? A Bystander? Why?
- Would anyone like to share:
 - How you viewed the story
 - What that view might reveal about how you see God

Part 2: Sharing and Prayer

SAY/READ: Running toward God and receiving him as a father is actually a daily choice. It's tempting to think it's a one-time thing, but it's not. Every day, we either choose to be independent—or we choose to live like a child who depends on his dad for everything...especially his grace and approval. Even pastors and Bible scholars have to make this choice. We are all broken. We all have things, every single day that will try to pull us away from our dad. AND we all have a dad who welcomes us home, every day.

ASK: Would anyone like to share what you let go of today—what you turned away from and what you turned to? We can talk about what we did or didn't do. This is a safe place and you don't have to share.

If anyone wasn't able to let go of something earlier, but you would like to now, you can just say what it is you're letting go of and what you want from God. And we, this group, will remind you of how you're forgiven.

Prayer: let's pray together that God will keep showing us ways that we can get closer to him and get home. Anyone who would like to can pray right now.

PRAYER EXPERIENCE REMINDER:

*Encourage students to attend (maybe even attend the same time as a small group activity) and give them a **reminder card** with this info:*

This week, your challenge is to go to the Journey Home Prayer Experience. It's an immersive way for you to try experiencing time with God. And it's designed to be done individually—no awkward hand-holding circles, we promise.

Prep Needs

Small Group

- Prayer Experience Info Card (1 per kid).

Large Group

- LIVE Bible
- Pens
- 4x6 Note cards (at least 2 per student so there are extras)
- A place (or places for bigger sites) for students to retrieve note cards and pens. A small table or stools should do the trick
- Large buckets filled half-full with water. Something similar to this: Buckets should be placed around the teaching area (should have 1 bucket per 30-40 kids?)
http://www.backyardherds.com/forum/uploads/1751_large_bucket.jpg

AV/Tech

1. Phillip Phillips' "Home" video (In KC Tech Multimedia Folder already)
2. A Journey Home Series Slide
3. Video: Dirty Little Secret by The All-American Rejects (Download on iTunes) (In KC Tech Multimedia Folder)
4. Verse: Tax collectors and other notorious sinners often came to listen to Jesus teach. ²This made the Pharisees and teachers of religious law complain that he was associating with such sinful people—even eating with them! So Jesus told them this story: Luke 15:1-3
5. Verses: Luke 15:11-32 NLT:
*"A man had two sons. ¹²The younger son told his father, 'I want my share of your estate now before you die.' So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons.
¹³"A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and moved to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money in wild living. ¹⁴About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve. ¹⁵He persuaded a local farmer to hire him, and the man sent him into his fields to feed the pigs.
¹⁶The young man became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him. But no one gave him anything. ¹⁷"When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, 'At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸I will go home to my father and say, "Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, ¹⁹and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant."
²⁰"So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him.
²¹His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.'^b ²²"But his father said to the servants, 'Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. ²³And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast,²⁴ for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.' So the party began.
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6. The following list on one slide (all text should appear at the same time, not one bullet at a time)

- I don't think my parents love me
- I feel like a mistake
- Some days I wonder if anyone would notice if I was gone
- I was abused so God can't possibly love me
- I do _____ only because I want people to like me
- I'm friends with _____ because of what it gets me
- Because I did _____, God can't possibly love me
- I'm not really sure I believe in this whole Jesus thing, though everyone else thinks I do
- I think I'm better than _____
- I don't really like sports, but I can't stop because _____
- Sometimes I get high just so I don't have to think about _____
- I only get good grades because I cheat
- If I get lower than an "A" I've failed
- I don't think my parents will love me if they find out _____