

Open Bible Stories — The Story of the Compassionate Father

Introduction

Key Idea

The story of the compassionate father teaches us about God's readiness to forgive us of our sin and cautions us about being confident in our own righteousness.

Core Belief Verse

"As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him." Psalm 130:13

God's Big Story

The eternal God created all things in six days.

He made a good and perfect world.

He made humans in his image to fill the earth and rule over creation.

But humans rebelled against God and ruined God's creation.

God set to restore his world through his promise.

God made a covenant with Abraham. He promised to bless all nations through Abraham.

God kept his promises across the generations.

God provided Abraham with a promised child, Isaac.

God gave Isaac a wife, and she bore twins, Jacob and Esau.

God blessed Jacob and his sons, and the blessing continued to the next generation.

God rescued Joseph, one of Jacob's sons, and used him to rescue his family.

God caused his people, the Israelites, to multiply in the land of Egypt; eventually, they became slaves.

But God raised up a deliverer, Moses, to deliver his people from slavery.

God judged the Egyptians with harsh plagues; in the final judgment, he passed over his people, who covered their doorposts with the blood of a sacrificed lamb.

Then, God delivered the Israelites by bringing them out of Egypt and crossing the Red Sea on dry land.

God made a covenant with the Israelites and made them his people.

God tested Israel in a series of wilderness wanderings and eventually brought his people into the promised land of Canaan.

God raised up deliverers to lead Israel and rescue them from their enemies.

God formed Israel into a kingdom. He made a covenant with King David and promised to send a king that would rule his people forever.

Many of Israel's kings were evil, and the kingdom of Israel was divided into two kingdoms.

God sent prophets to warn his people of God's judgment and call them to repent.

When Israel did not repent, God sent his people into exile. After many years, he brought them back to the land.

Throughout the Old Testament, God promised to send his Messiah to deliver his people from their sin.

After many years, the prophet John was born. He would prepare people for the coming Messiah.

At the perfect time, God sent his Son, Jesus, to be born of a virgin Mary.

When John and Jesus grew up, John baptized Jesus as a sign that Jesus was God's beloved Son.

Jesus endured all manner of temptation without ever sinning.

When he was thirty years old, he launched a public ministry of preaching, teaching, and healing.

He taught his disciples about the life of compassion, sacrifice, and forgiveness.

Jesus performed many miracles: he fed a crowd of five thousand, he walked on water, he healed the sick, and he cast out demons.

He proclaimed to people the nature of real faith, God's kingdom, and how fallen humans can be restored in relationship with God.

The Story: The Story of the Compassionate Father

35-01



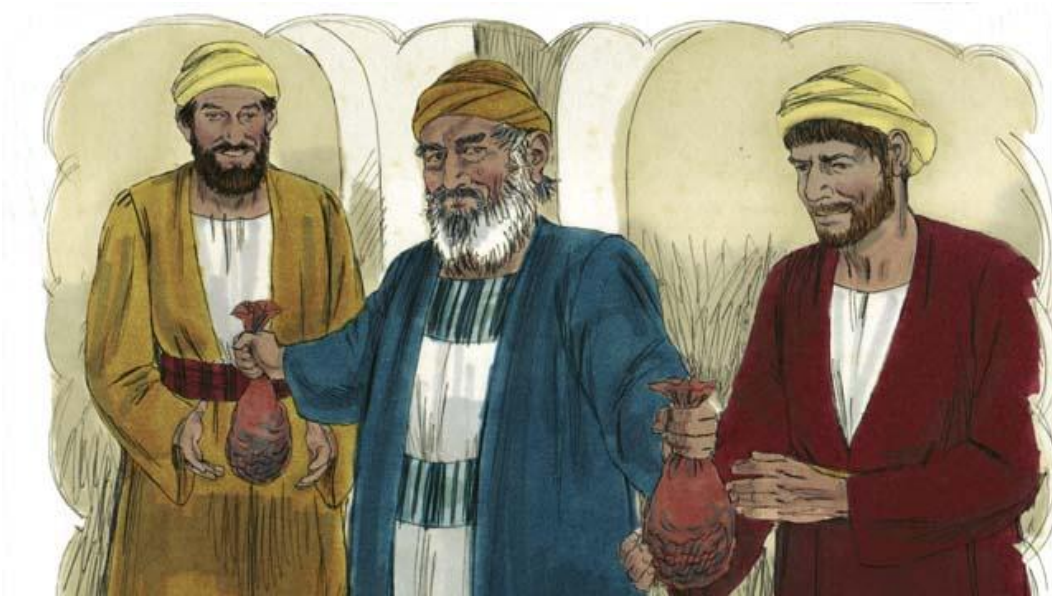
One day, Jesus was teaching many people who had gathered to hear him. These people were tax collectors and also other people who did not try to obey the Law of Moses.

35-02



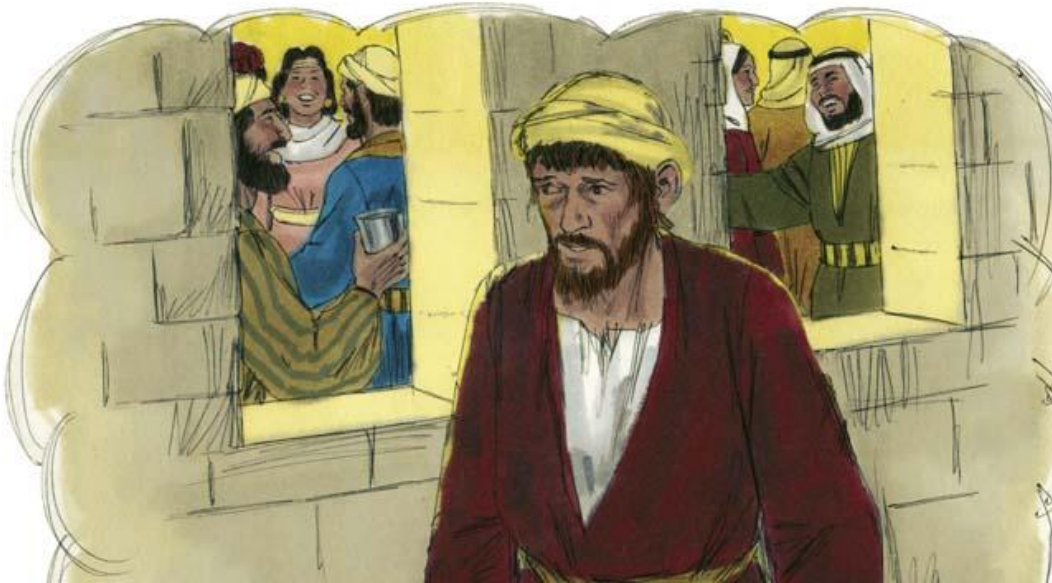
Some religious leaders saw Jesus talking to these people as friends. So they began to tell each other that he was doing wrong. Jesus heard them talk, so he told them this story.

35-03



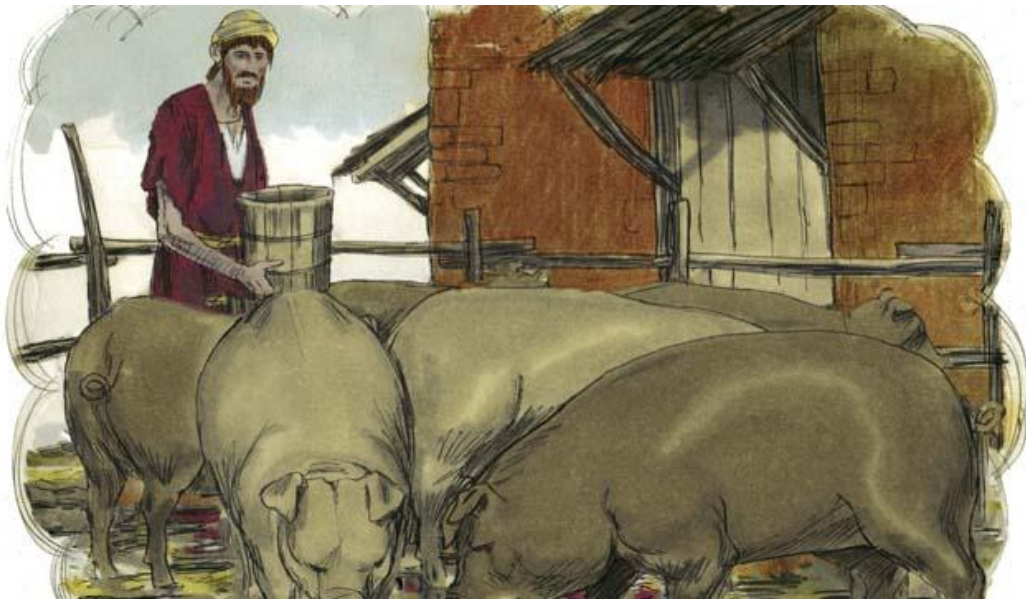
"There was a man who had two sons. The younger son told his father, 'Father, I want my inheritance now!' So the father divided his property between his two sons."

35-04



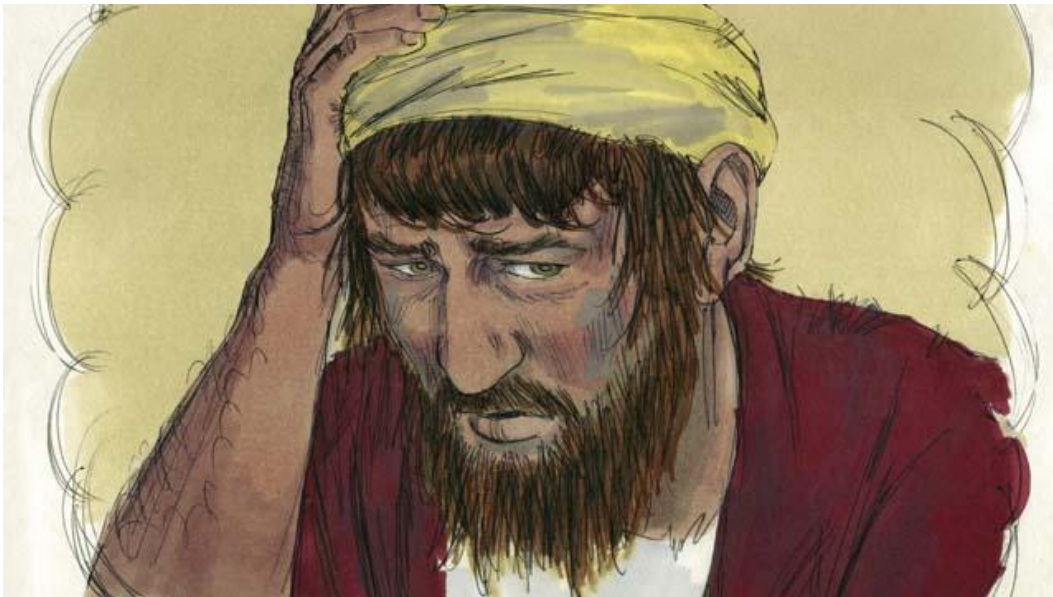
"Soon the younger son gathered all that he had and went far away and wasted his money in sinful living."

35-05



"After that, a severe famine occurred in the land where the younger son was, and he had no money to buy food. So he took the only job he could find, feeding pigs. He was so miserable and hungry that he wanted to eat the pigs' food."

35-06



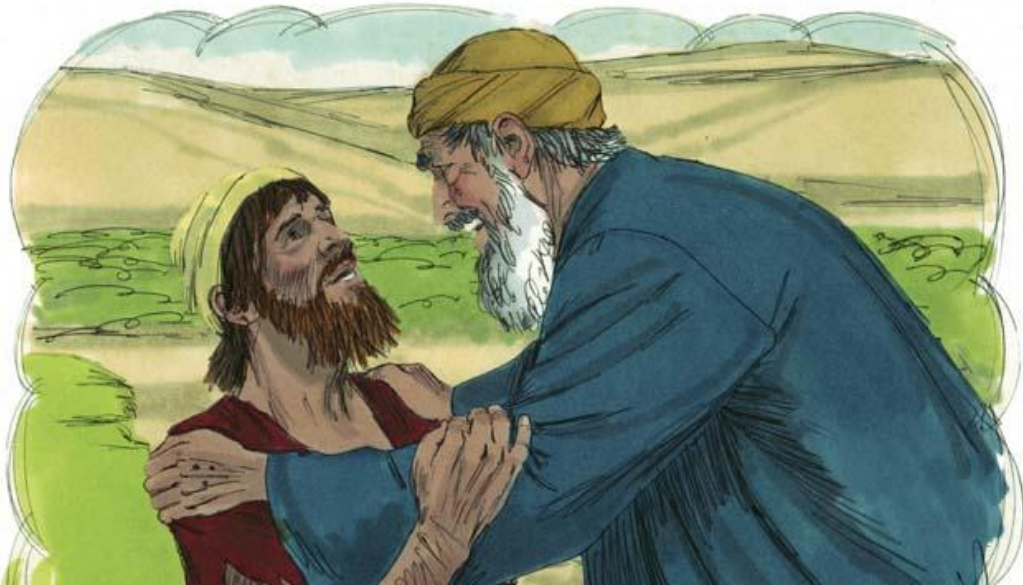
"Finally, the younger son said to himself, 'What am I doing? All my father's servants have plenty to eat, and yet here I am starving. I will go back to my father and ask to be one of his servants.'"

35-07



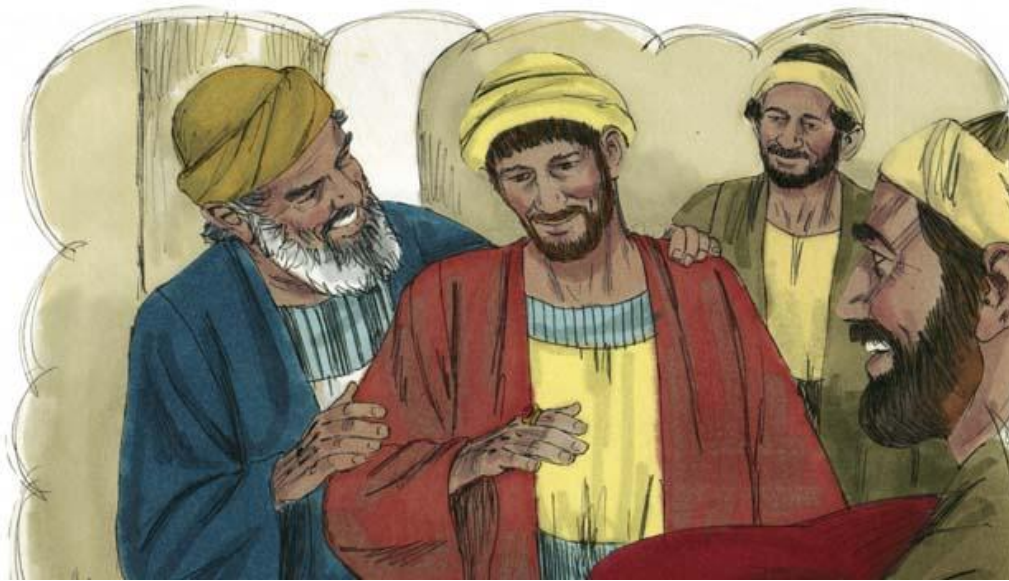
"So the younger son started back towards his father's home. When he was still far away, his father saw him and felt compassion for him. He ran to his son and hugged him and kissed him."

35-08



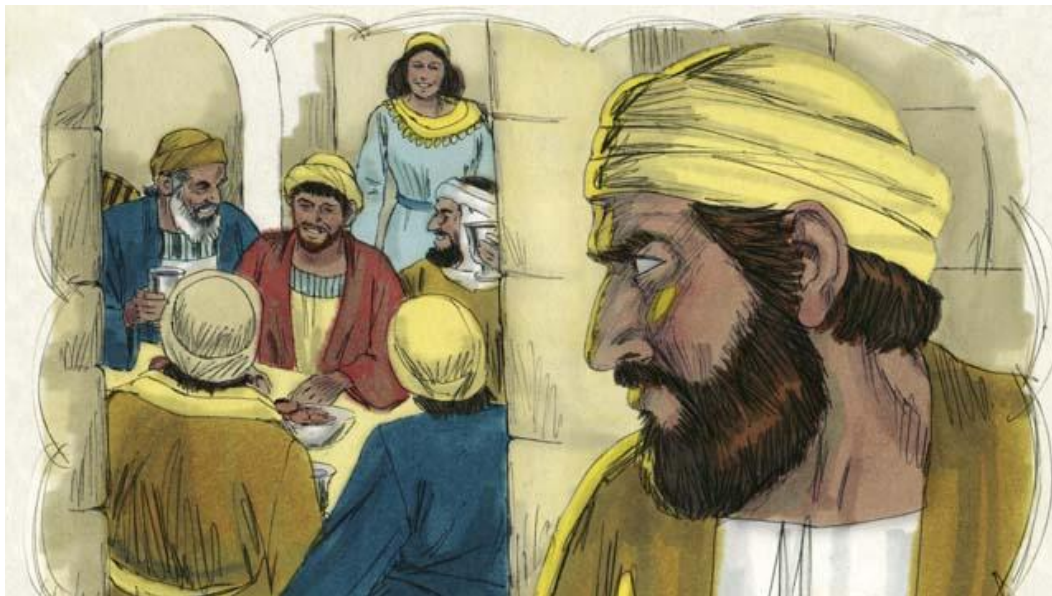
"The son said, 'Father, I have sinned against God and against you. I am not worthy to be your son.'"

35-09



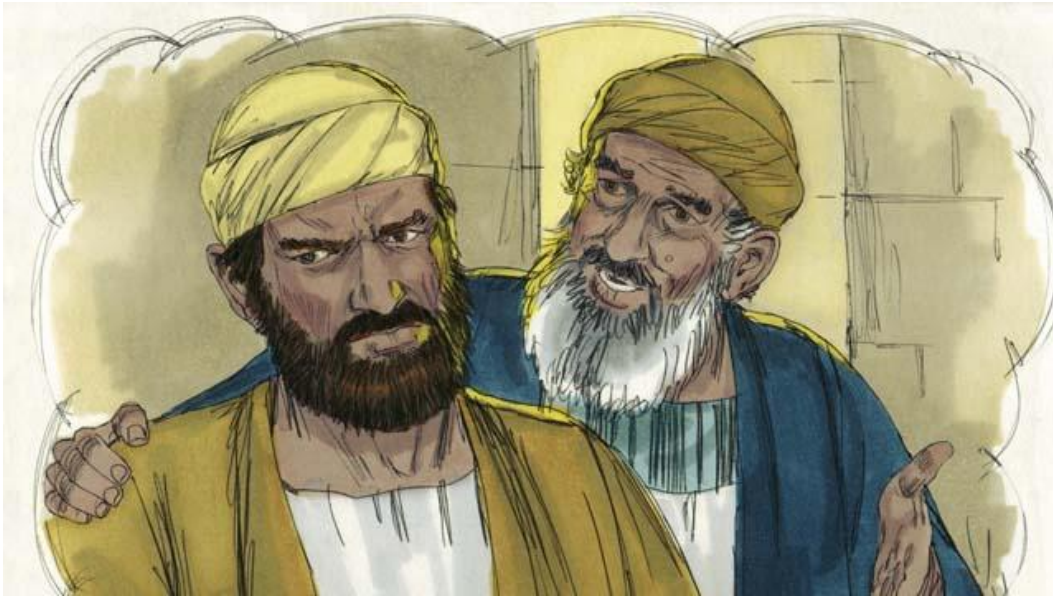
"But his father told one of his servants, 'Go quickly and bring the best clothes and put them on my son! Put a ring on his finger and put sandals on his feet. Then kill the best calf so we can have a feast and celebrate, because my son was dead, but now he is alive! He was lost, but now we have found him!'"

35-10



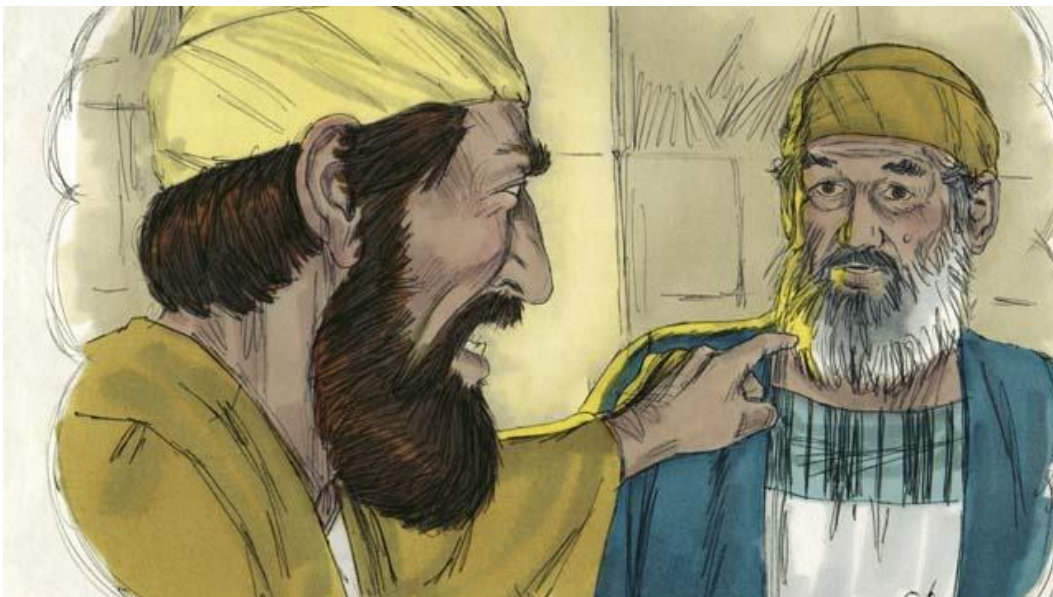
"So the people began to celebrate. Before long, the older son came home from working in the field. He heard the music and dancing and wondered what was happening."

35-11

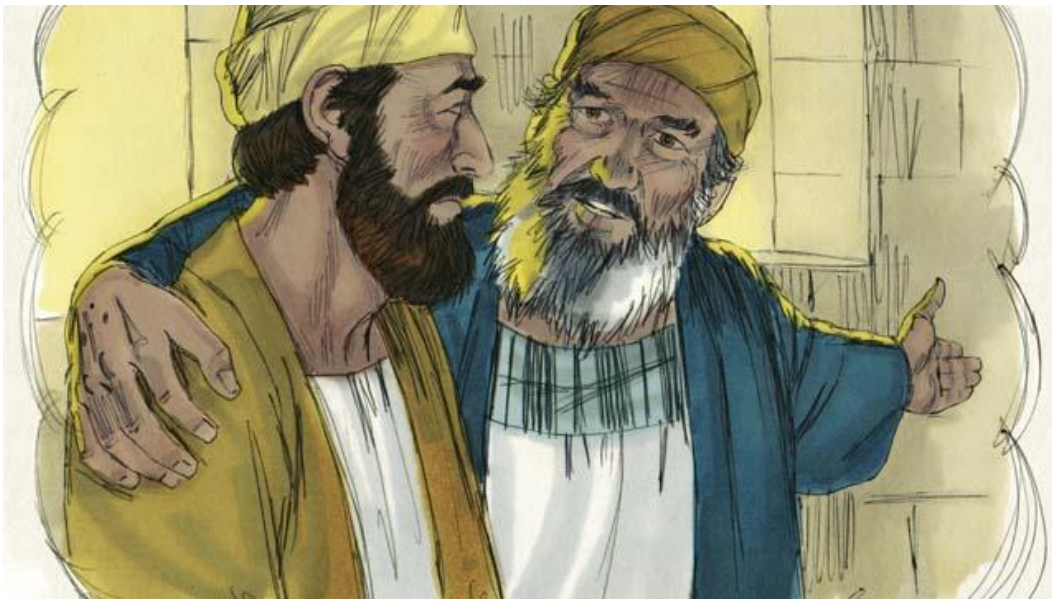


"When the older son found out that they were celebrating because his brother had come home, he was very angry and would not go into the house. His father came out and begged him to come and celebrate with them, but he refused."

35-12



"The older son said to his father, 'All these years I have worked faithfully for you! I never disobeyed you, and still you did not give me even one small goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But this son of yours has wasted your money doing sinful things. When he came home, you killed the best calf to celebrate!'"



"The father answered, 'My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But it is right for us to celebrate because your brother was dead, but now is alive. He was lost, but now we have found him!'"

A Bible story from: Luke 15

Community Study: Choosing the Best—Enjoying Jesus as We Serve

- **Key Idea:** maintaining a vibrant relationship with God
- **Key Passage:** Luke 10:38-42
- **Main Session:** OBS 35 The Story of the Compassionate Father

Recite the Core Belief Verse (3–5 minutes)

The verse below summarizes the teaching of the current passage. Read the verse out loud as a community. Read it again several times as a group until the whole community can recite it from memory.

As a father has compassion on his children, so Yahweh has compassion on those who honor him. Psalm 103:13

OR

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God, and this is what we are. 1
John 3:1

Reflect On God's Love (5-10 minutes)

Think about God's love for you. Consider how God is like a loving Father. As a community, discuss how God's love is a motivation for ministry.

I have experienced God's fatherly love in these ways ...

God's love motivates us for ministry in these ways ...

Read the Passage (3-5 minutes)

God wants you to serve him out of love and rest. God's compassion toward us energizes us to serve him in freedom. As a community, read the following Bible passage together to understand the important truth that of keeping a focus on Jesus during our work.

38 Now as they were traveling along, he entered into a certain village, and a certain woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. 39 She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and heard his word. 40 But Martha was overly busy with preparing to serve a meal. She came up to Jesus, and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me." 41 But the Lord answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious about many things, 42 but only one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen what is best, which will not be taken away from her." Luke 10:38-42

Discuss the Passage (10-15 minutes)

God calls us to serve him with devotion and commitment. Nevertheless, God is the only source of strength and success in our lives. As a community, use the following questions to discuss the teaching of the biblical passage.

1. How does this passage describe the different ways Mary and Martha related to Jesus?

2. What is this passage teaching about the importance of enjoying Jesus' presence?
3. How can our work for Jesus distract us from enjoying a relationship with Jesus? How is a relationship with Jesus important for our faithful work for Jesus?
4. How is this narrative a warning for us? How can we choose what is best as we go about God's work?
5. How can your community embrace godly rhythms of work and rest?

Naming Challenges to Godly Work (5 minutes)

Reflect on the above discussion. Consider things that threaten the work of ministry in a godly way.

If we are not careful to work in a godly way, these dangers can threaten our community and ministry...

Pray to God (5 minutes)

Pray that God will help your community to work in a godly way. Identify some of the principles in the passage above and pray these over members of your community. Ask God for healthy rhythms of work and rest.

Sing a Song (3-5 minutes)

Sing a song as a community that celebrates God's love and God's rest as motivations for ministry work.

Movement 1: Understand the Story

Read each question aloud. Give the group time to answer before sharing the answer.

Observation Questions

35-01

What kind of people gathered to hear Jesus teach in this story?

Many people who were tax collectors and people who did not obey the Law of Moses gathered to hear Jesus teach.

35-02

How did Jesus treat these people?

Jesus was talking to these people as friends.

How did the religious leaders respond to Jesus talking to the tax collectors and sinners as friends?

The religious leaders told others that Jesus was doing something wrong.

What did Jesus do when he heard the religious leaders criticize him?

Jesus heard them talking and told them a story.

35-03

Who were the characters in Jesus' story?

The story was about a man who had two sons.

What did the younger son demand from his father?

He wanted his inheritance right away.

How did the father respond to the request of the younger son?

The father divided up his property between his sons.

35-04

What did the younger son do with his inheritance?

The younger son gathered up all his possessions, went far away, and wasted it on sinful living.

35-05

What happened in the land where the younger son went to live?

There was a severe famine.

How did the famine affect the younger son?

Eventually, the younger son had no money to buy food.

What did the younger son do to survive during the famine?

He took a job feeding pigs.

What did the younger son feel like at this time?

The younger son was so miserable and hungry that he wanted to eat the pigs' food.

35-06

Why did the younger son decide to return home?

He realized his father's servants had plenty to eat, yet he was starving.

What was the younger son planning to ask his father?

He was going to ask his father to let him be one of his servants.

35-07

When did the father see his son returning home?

The younger son started back towards his father's home, and the father saw him when he was still far away.

What did the father do when he saw the younger son approaching?

He felt compassion for him, ran to him, hugged him, and kissed him.

35-08

What did the younger son say to his father when they met?

He said, "Father, I have sinned against God and against you. I am not worthy to be your son."

35-09

How did the father respond to the younger son's confession?

He put clothes, a ring, and sandals on the younger son and had a feast to celebrate his return.

What did the father say about his son returning home?

The father said that his son was dead but was now alive; he was lost but was now found.

35-10

How did people act when the son returned home?

The people began to celebrate.

Where was the older son at this time?

The older son was working in the field, heard the music and dancing, and wondered what was happening.

35-11

How did the older son react when he learned that his brother had come home?

He was very angry and refused to go into the house.

What did the father say to the older son?

The father begged the older son to come and celebrate.

How did the older son respond to his father's plea?

The older son refused to join the celebration.

35-12

What was the older son's complaint to his father?

The older son said he had worked faithfully for his father and obeyed him, and his father did not give him even a small goat to celebrate.

What did the older son say about the celebration of the younger son?

The older son said that the younger son wasted money doing sinful things, but when he came home, he was given the best calf to celebrate his return.

35-13

How much of the father's possessions now belonged to the older son?

Everything the father had now belonged to the older son.

What reason did the father give for celebrating the return of his younger son?

His son had been dead but now was alive. He had been lost, but now was found.

Movement 2: Theological Questions

What Does This Story Teach Us?

1. How is sin a rebellion against/rejection of God? How does the rebellion of the younger brother teach us about the nature of sin?
2. How can sinners be restored to a relationship with God? What does the younger brother's return teach us about what it means to be restored in our relationship with God?
3. What keeps people from returning to God? How do the younger brother's rebellion and the older brother's angry response help us understand what can keep people from returning to God?

Movement 3: Live It Out

Personal Implications & Applications From The Story

Guide the group to discuss practical obedience from this story and name concrete next steps.

1. How did your life before you became a Christian look like the rebellion of the younger son?
2. How has God restored you and received you into his family like the father received the wayward son back into his family?
3. In what ways are you in danger of a proud and self-righteous spirit in which you think you are better than others?
4. Think about this week. Where does "The Story of the Compassionate Father" challenge you to obey God in a practical way?
5. How does this key idea shape one decision you need to make right now: The story of the compassionate father teaches us about God's readiness to forgive us of our sin and cautions us about being confident in our own righteousness.

Movement 4: Retell the Story

Invite the group to retell the story several times until they can tell it clearly and faithfully.

1. Can someone retell "The Story of the Compassionate Father" from beginning to end in their own words?
2. Retell this story again, but focus on what God did at each key moment.
3. Retell the story in three parts: beginning, middle, and ending. What changed in each part?
4. If you were teaching this story to your family tonight, how would you tell it simply and clearly?

Church Ministry

Ministry Preparation: Take time to consider how you could minister this story to others. Record some ministry ideas below.

Ministry Implementation: Minister this story to a group of believers as you had planned. Use the information in this study to help develop

a teaching/lesson or lead a discussion of this story with other believers. Record your ministry plan below.

Ministry Reflection: Think about what you learned from ministering this story to other believers. Reflect on your experience below.

Movement 5: Share It

Help each person plan how they will share this story with others before the next gathering.

1. Who is one specific person you will share "The Story of the Compassionate Father" with this week?
2. When and where will you share this story with them?
3. What is the one main truth from this story you want them to remember?

Report-back next meeting: Who did you share with, and what happened?

Mission Engagement

Witness Preparation: Take time to consider how you will witness this narrative to unbelievers. Record some ideas below.

Witness Implementation: Share this story with an unbeliever. Use the information in this study to help develop a teaching/lesson or lead a discussion of this story with unbelievers. Record your witness plan below.

Witness Reflection: Think about what you learned from ministering this story to unbelievers. Reflect on your experience below.