

Creative Parables – “Prodigal” Session

Led by Amelia Koh Butler

This takes approx 2 hours. Do not try to condense into less than 90 mins.

Visual Imagery Give everyone a piece of A3 paper if working as individuals OR a piece of blank newsprint if working in small groups (no more than 5 per group). Distribute textas, crayons, or charcoal.

Audio Input Ask everyone to listen. Their task will be to visualise what they hear. Play BibleOz version of the Story of the Prodigal Son (Disc 2, Track 5 – NIV text). When the reading has finished, tell everyone you will play the recording twice more, giving them a chance to get some visual image on paper. This may be a poster, a scene, some reflections, etc... but should contain as few words as possible.
Play the track twice (pausing in-between while people work).
Give people a few moments after the recording.
Ask people to set aside the pictures temporarily while you all take a journey together.

Experiencing Story

Role exploration This section is about travelling the story physically. Identify the following zones (there should be reasonable distance between the various zones): the family home (possibly around the Communion Table or a BBQ); the journey of adventure; the far country; the return journey of desperation; the fields outside the family home.

Start by asking questions about what makes the family home a special place – what are the special family gatherings (Christmas, Birthdays, Wakes following funerals, etc...). Talk about what it means for someone to leave the family home and what it means to mortgage the family home in order to fund the person leaving to go on an adventure.

Ask what people have always dreamt of doing on an adventure. If they had unlimited funds, what would they choose to do? Encourage people to get excited about the possibilities as they journey on their adventure.

But the story changes. As we arrive in the Far Country, life has changed in an unexpected way. Maybe there has been an outbreak of war or a terrorist act in the vicinity. You go to the automatic money machine to find that you can't access any funds. How will you survive? How will you pay for your next meal? Ask everyone to imagine what would be the worst job they might take in order to survive? (some will start with “cleaning public toilets” – what could be worse? – prostitution, killing, ?)

As people realise how bad things might get, encourage them to think about what would be required to return home... what would they say? How will they get there? What is likely to happen when they go back?

Take the return journey quietly – give room for reflection and contemplation.

Interrupt everyone before they get home – forget the past – celebrate with a party! Most people will probably be a bit bewildered at the thought of a party.

Now focus on the family home – someone has waited all this time. What would the waiting have been like? Was there hope – strong or vague?

Now think about the fields – the one who stayed behind – earning the money that the adventurer spent. What was it like to work and not have the opportunity for adventure?

Recap the story and ask people to go physically to that part of the story that they would like to reflect on a little longer. When they get there, take the time to talk with others in the vicinity about why they find themselves in that place... (Allow 5-10 minutes).

Return to the Images Ask people to relook at the images they have drawn – do they want to modify anything? (Give them a couple of minutes)
Encourage people to wander around looking at everyone else's pictures. What do they see? What challenges them? Etc...

Introduce other Images/Input
Show 4 different pictures (one at a time) and discuss what people can see in them. (Allow plenty of time for people to see things for themselves).

IF people do not notice for themselves,
Point out the un-named women; the emphasis on different parts of the story; the male and female hand on Rembrandt's "Father".
Mention Henri Nouwen's "Return of the Prodigal"
In France, this is known as the Parable of the Waiting Father.

Context of Story Ask about the biblical background to this story. (Not just the 3 "Lost" stories, but also the question they answer.
Play the audio CD from track #4.
Show the picture of the Lost Sheep (and Shepherd) and the Woman and the Lost Coin while the story is being told.
Ask who is the God figure in each story – the Shepherd, the Housewife and the Father.
Explain about the Shepherd (being the youngest Son) and the Housewife (who wears her dowry as coins). Point out that by the time the 3rd parable is told, people have been reminded of the role and responsibility of the younger son.

Outcomes Take a few moments to reflect on what has been learnt.
What is it about this story that prompts them to share something about their faith journey? Who else could be helped by exploring this story?
How could you share in conversations about this story with others?
People may want to pray.