

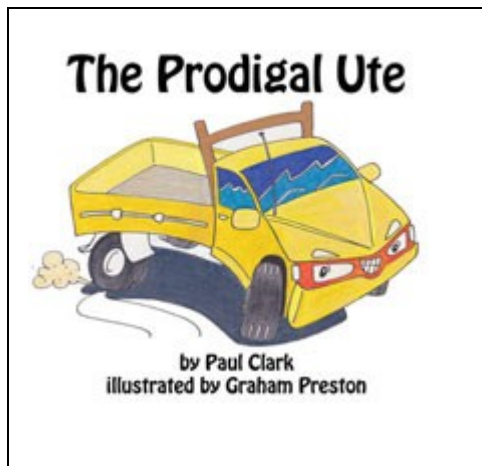


Even Before Publishing

Writing for the Word



Teacher's Notes and Ideas



TITLE – The Prodigal Ute

AUTHOR – Paul Clark

ILLUSTRATOR – Graham Preston

ISBN: 9781921633102

Recommended Retail: \$5.95

Recommended Age: Between 3 and 9

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CAR PARK PARABLES

While the people hear Jesus' story of the prodigal son, the cars in the car park have a different story. When the prodigal ute ends up in the city broken and in the rain after driving too fast, he dreams of forgiveness and his home.

Share the stories of the bible in a language that kids understand - with cars!

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Introduction

The Prodigal Ute is a retelling of the classic story from the bible of the prodigal son. The word *prodigal* means reckless or wasteful, but has perhaps proverbially, due to this parable, come to mean wayward or rebellious with a real hope for redemption and return.

Story Summary

The story of the Prodigal Ute is told within a particular community – a community of cars who frequent a local church car park. Each car has their own personality and problems. The stories are told by the old and wise Model T Ford [Old Mr T] who is a grandfather type figure. The stories are told within specific situations that arise in the cars' lives.

In this instance, Trevor Truck, the hardworking blue-collar persona, arrives at church smelling to high heaven from his working class existence. Luxurious Lucy, a high class car who is ever concerned with the prim and proper, finds Trevor's presence disconcerting – and lets him know. The end result of their argument is that Trevor is uncertain if God could like a dirty truck like him.

This situation is supposed to parallel that described in Luke 15:1-2 where Jesus accepts the presence of 'sinners' who come to him, much to the chagrin of the 'righteous'. Their words imply a Holy God [and Holy people] do not accept the 'unclean.'

Just as Jesus told the parable of the prodigal [actually 3 parables in total], Old Mr T tells his cars gathered the story of the Prodigal Ute.

In the story there are two cars; a home and work vehicle. The work vehicle becomes dissatisfied with his more mundane tasks and escapes to the city to live the wild life. This soon comes to an end when his tyres go bald. Being towed to the wrecking yard, the Ute unexpectedly finds acceptance from the owner he spurned, indeed, more than he could have dreamt of. The owner [God] is shown to be a gracious and accepting master.

The home vehicle reacts with perhaps the more expected emotions – expecting justice for the rebellious car and vindication for themselves. Instead the owner invites that car to also show grace and acceptance as a better way.

The impact on Lucy and Trevor is immediate. They understand their place in the story. Trevor understood that although he is dirty, he is accepted by God. Lucy apologises as does Trevor and by chance, the whole community go off to enter into the celebration!

Key Learning Areas / Values addressed/ethics explored

Depending on the age of the children this story has a wealth of depth. Sometimes it's better just to let the story flow and wash over the children. It might be very difficult for them to articulate the themes of the story using the right words – but they can feel it and experience it and let it soak into their souls – creating a culture for them. This is perhaps more how Jesus taught the crowd.

The first learning area is the grace and mercy [acceptance] of God. While God is a Holy God [this is no condoning of the Ute's reckless life] the message of Jesus is that grace and mercy are his tools of redemption, not judgment and punishment. God's arms are open wide to accept those that return to him, no matter what their past.

The second is a call for his followers to show the same grace and mercy [without condoning sin]. Our 'goodness' does not make us better than others in God's eyes. We aren't to stand off and judge others. Indeed it is God's acceptance, not our goodness, that saves. Even the 'older brother/car' would not come into the celebration [a very common metaphor for heaven] except through the acceptance of the Father, rather than his own righteousness.

Practically speaking the cars themselves demonstrate the lesson – to accept others, to not look down on others.

Themes

Themes in this story are;

- Love; The amazing love of the owner that accepted a rebellious car home. Also, how patient that love is.
- Acceptance; acceptance of people who may not be the same as you, or who have lived an unholy life. This does not mean you must condone their life.
- Forgiveness; How forgiveness let's go – doesn't demand recompense, doesn't hold a grudge.
- Repentance; There are times when we must make turning points to swallow our pride and return to what others taught us was right. Repentance is hard, but is restorative.
- Righteousness; while righteousness may be our call [doing the right thing], self-righteousness is as damaging as rebellion and also cuts us off from a good relationship with our Owner.
- Mercy; needs to be shown if we are to receive mercy, or have received mercy. Mercy is restorative to the repentant.
- Grace; takes guts and courage and pain. A Father willing to let their sons rebel. Heart-brakingly allowing them the freedom to self-destruct, but always there to welcome them home.
- Rebellion; The initial excitement and titillation of rebellion – its short term pleasure, but long term pain and destruction. The ute experiences these.
- Judgement; Right Judgement can only come from perfection. Since we are not perfect, we judge at our own peril, at our own risk.

Style

This is a simple children's picture book. The style is to paint a situation, then let the story within the story, change the participants of the original situation. The application then becomes more apparent to those listening to the story.

About the author

Paul Clark, born in Melbourne, now a Minister in Qld, has lived and ministered across four states as both a Youth Worker and Minister. He is married to Becky and they have two wonderful children, Jenny & Simon.

Paul trained and worked as a high school computer teacher in NSW before jumping into the deep end of full-time ministry. Nicknamed 'The Puppet Minister' because of his love of puppets, he is in reality passionate about the gospel and finding 'new ways to tell the old story.' He's very passionate about making the Gospel 'good news' - not boring news, and helping the church be more like Jesus.

He has been awarded the 'Outstanding achievement' award in the Community Services Section of the Young Australian of the Year awards, and has published a collection of 5 drama and puppet books to date, as well as the Car Park parables DVD and book series. He has taken his puppets to remote areas with the Mt Isa school of the Air, and done school tours to over 7000 children. He runs a 'Creative Ministry Group' as part of his church, seeing children and youth performing and using technology to show and tell the good news.



About the illustrator

Graham Preston is a Brisbane based illustrator, father of 7 and spends much of time serving and working for Right to Life Australia. He has illustrated a number of kids books and his comics have appeared in a range of adult and children's newspapers and books.

Related text/resources

Luke 15:1-32.

The Prodigal God by Timothy Keller. A short but in depth look at this parable. [Adult level].

Other Car Park Parables Books and DVD's.

Other possible topics

Cars! Storytelling.

Other books in the series coming soon

Visit www.carparkparables.com for a full list.

The Strange Car [Book], The Missing Motorcycle [Book], Old Mr T and Friends [DVD – includes this story].

Blackline masters/colouring pages other photocopy-able resources

'Trevor Truck's Activity Book' contains colour-in, find-a-word, mazes, and other resources that can be used in a classroom context. Please contact the publisher to obtain copy approval.

www.carparkparables.com has downloadable activities that are being added too regularly