

We Trust in God's Mercy



Background Focus

The parable commonly known by the title Prodigal Son or Lost Son is called The Forgiving Father in the Featured Story of *The Catholic Children's Bible* on page 1620. This change of emphasis from the son to the father is deliberate and reflects the main point of the story. Although it is important that the son recognized his self-destructive ways and decided to repent and return home, it is even more important that he was received with mercy and compassion by his father.

Jesus' story here is not only about our human weaknesses but about God's loving kindness, or mercy, for all of his children. This is the message of this chapter. Future chapters will explore our human tendency to take the wrong path, and our need to be honest with ourselves, to be sorry, and to ask for forgiveness. But in this chapter, the emphasis is on God's mercy. God's mercy always welcomes us home.

GO (10 minutes)

Opening Prayer

- Invite the children to turn to page 1 in their chapter 2 activity booklets and locate the prayer on the page.
- Begin prayer by leading the group in the Sign of the Cross, then saying, "Let us remember that we are in the holy presence of God." Allow about 10 seconds of silence.
- Invite four volunteers to read the prayer in the activity booklet to the group, each reading one sentence. Invite all of the children to say "Amen," and then close with another Sign of the Cross. Have the children put their activity booklets away for now.

Engage Activity

- Remind the children that running away from home is never a good idea, and could be very dangerous. Tell them that they will be hearing a story today that Jesus told about a young man who ran away from home.

Chapter 2




Featured Story

The Forgiving Father
(Luke 15:11–32)

Lesson Goals

- to recognize that God is a loving Father
- to identify that God always forgives us when we are truly sorry for our sins
- to explain that God's mercy comes to us in the Sacrament of Reconciliation

Lesson at a Glance

-  **Go** (10 minutes)
Opening Prayer
Engage Activity
-  **Seek** (30 minutes)
Featured Story
Core Learning Activity
-  **Find** (20 minutes)
God's Treasure of Forgiveness
Lesson Wrap-Up
Closing Prayer

Materials Needed

- *The Catholic Children's Bible* and chapter 2 activity booklet
- materials for any of the optional activities you choose

Music Suggestions

- "God Is Love," by The Praise Baby Collection (Flicker Records/Big House Kids)
- "Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)" (NRUMC Kids; available on YouTube, 4:34)

- Ask the children: “How would your parents feel if you ran away from home? How would they feel when you came back?” Invite the children to share their responses.
- Explain that in the story they will read today, they will find out how this young man’s father reacted when his son left, and when his son finally came back.

† Seek (30 minutes)

Featured Story

- Invite the children to find Luke 15:11–32 in *The Catholic Children’s Bible* (pages 1619, 1622).
- Direct them to turn next to the Featured Story on page 1620 and place an “I found it!” sticker on the page. Tell them that the words between the leaves are a shortened version of the Scripture story on pages 1619 and 1622.
- Ask the children to look at the artwork on pages 1620–1621. Invite them to describe what they see in the artwork.
- Invite a volunteer to read the title on page 1620, and ask volunteers to describe what *forgiving* means. (*not holding a grudge against someone; not bringing up someone’s past mistakes or hurts*)
- Read the full story to the children as noted (Luke 15:11–32), beginning on page 1619. Then ask the children several questions to check for comprehension, such as these:
 - What did the younger son ask his father for when he wanted to leave? (*his share of the property*)
 - Where did the son go? What did he do with all the money? (*The son went to a far country and spent all the money in foolish ways.*)
 - Why did the son decide to go back home? (*He was hungry.*)
 - What did the son say to his father? (*“I have sinned against God and against you.”*)
 - What was the father’s reaction when he saw his son coming? (*The father was filled with love and pity, and called for a celebration.*)
 - Did the father scold the son? Did he tell him what a bad son he had been? (*No. The father welcomed the son back and forgave him.*)

- Have the children turn to page 2 in the activity booklet and complete the activity with their Bibles open. *Answers: sinned, son, ring, shoes, dead, found*

Understand It!

- Invite three volunteers to read the paragraphs of Understand It! on page 1621, one reading the first paragraph and the remaining two dividing the second paragraph.
- Ask the children to summarize what they just heard in the reading, and review these key points with them:
 - The son asked his father for a lot of money and then left home.
 - He spent the money foolishly and had nothing to show for it.
 - When he was hungry, he decided to go home. Even before he could say he was sorry, his father hugged him and welcomed him back.
 - Our Father in Heaven is like this father. God will always love us, welcome us back, and forgive us when we are sorry.
 - Jesus told this story so that we would always trust in God’s forgiveness and **mercy**. God’s mercy is God’s loving-kindness toward all people.

Live It!

- Read the content in Live It! on page 1621 aloud to the group, or invite a volunteer to read it.
- Ask the children to share their responses to the questions.
- Ask the children to describe what the paragraph says God is like. (*a loving parent who always welcomes us back, even when we have disobeyed his commandments*)
- Pray this short prayer with the children: “Thank you, God, for loving us like the father loved his son in the story. Thank you for your mercy and forgiveness. Amen.”

Tell It!

- Ask the children to look at the images in Tell It! on page 1621.
- Invite the children to describe what is happening in each of the images.

- Encourage several volunteers to stand and summarize the Bible reading for the group, using the images in Tell It!
- Have the children use some of the smaller stickers to mark parts of the Featured Story pages that capture their interest. Remind them to save enough stickers to use on the remaining chapters.

Core Learning Activity

What Happens Next?

- Explain that when we do wrong, we hurt others. Ask the children to share how the son in the story hurt the father. (*The son not only wasted money but hurt the father's feelings by leaving home.*)
- Emphasize to the children that even though the father was hurt, he still forgave the son because he loved him. Remind them that this is what God does: he forgives us because he loves us.
- Ask the children to listen as you read the following scenarios. Discuss the "What happens next?" with the group.
 - Sylvie is mad because her family has plans to visit her grandmother on the same weekend as a friend's birthday party. Sylvie won't be able to go to the party. She goes to her room and shuts the door in anger. Later, she feels badly and tells her mother that she is sorry. What happens next?
 - Trevor sees a basketball at the curb. He knows it belongs across the street. But he has always wanted a basketball. He takes it home. Later, he feels badly. He goes across the street and knocks on his neighbor's door. What happens next?
 - Lisa and Elvira are friends. Kaylee wants to be friends with Elvira, so she tells a lie about Lisa. Later, Kaylee feels badly. She talks to both Lisa and Elvira and says she is sorry for lying. What happens next?
 - Darren waits at the bus stop with Josh, who is in kindergarten. Darren upsets Josh every morning by telling him that he dresses funny and no one likes him. Darren feels badly about it. He tells Josh he is sorry and won't tease him again. What happens next?

- Arrange the children in small groups so that each group gets a scenario to act out. Duplicates are okay. Tell the children to add words and actions to the outline of the story. Ask the children to have the actor playing the part of the mom, the neighbor, the friends, and the kindergartner to do what God would do (that is, forgive the hurt).
- Give the groups some time to plan and practice their scenes. Then invite the different groups to present their scenes to the larger group.

Teacher Note: Preparing and presenting four scenarios may not be possible due to your time frame. If that is the case, ask the group to vote on which of the above scenes they would like to see presented. Then ask volunteers to create that scene for the entire group.

Process the Activity

- Invite the children to share the character or scene they remember best from this activity. (*Responses will vary.*) Elicit reasons for their responses.
- Tell the children that God is our Father who forgives us when we are sorry. People can act like God and forgive us when we are sorry. When we forgive others, we are being like God.
- Remind the children that sometimes people will not forgive a hurt and do not always act like God. Tell them that sometimes people hold grudges and will not forgive, but God will always forgive us if we are truly sorry.

Additional Activity Options

If the core activity would not work for your group for any reason, you may choose to use any of the Additional Activities on pages 27–28 in its place.

✕ Find (20 minutes)

God's Treasure of Forgiveness

- Ask the children to recall what sacrament they are preparing for in this group. (*the Sacrament of Reconciliation*) Remind them that this is the sacrament in which we ask for forgiveness and our sins are forgiven. Tell the children that a sin is something we say, do, or think that does not follow God's Law.

- Explain to the children that at the very beginning of the sacrament, the priest will greet us and welcome us. Tell them that we then pray together the Sign of the Cross. Explain that making the Sign of the Cross reminds us that we are baptized and that we belong to God. Tell the children that the priest will usually say something like, “May God, who has enlightened every heart, help you to know your sins and to trust in his mercy” (*Rite of Penance*).
- Remind the children that they learned about God’s mercy in the Bible story about the Forgiving Father. Recall that Jesus taught us that God was like the forgiving father in the story. Explain that God is full of mercy and will always love us and forgive us.
- Ask the children to share what mercy is. (*Mercy is the loving kindness of God toward all of his children.*) Tell them that when we go to confession, we trust in God’s mercy, and we trust that if we are truly sorry for our sins, God will forgive us.
- Ask the group some questions to check for comprehension:
 - What happens at the beginning of the Sacrament of Reconciliation? (*The priest greets us; we make the Sign of the Cross.*)
 - What does the priest remind us to do? (*to trust in God’s mercy*)
 - What do we confess in the Sacrament of Reconciliation? (*our sins*)
 - What is mercy? (*the loving-kindness of God toward all his children*)
- Invite the children to turn to page 3 in the activity booklet and complete the activity.
Answers:
1. Reconciliation, 2. mercy, 3. Father, 4. forgives, 5. grace

Teacher Note: This content is presented in a child-friendly way in the *God’s Treasure of Forgiveness Student Booklet*. You may wish to have the children read all or parts of chapter 2 to supplement your presentation. Or use the concluding points under “Things to Remember” to wrap up the lesson before prayer.

Lesson Wrap-Up

- Invite the children to think back over all of the different things they did in this lesson, and invite volunteers to share some of the key things they learned.
- Take some time to get input from the group, and write their answers on the board.
- Ensure that the following points are made, write them on the board, and circle them:
 - God is a loving Father.
 - God always forgives us when we are truly sorry for our sins.
 - God’s mercy comes to us in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- Ask the children to place the chapter 2 sticker in the correct circle on their treasure maps.



Closing Prayer

- Begin the prayer by leading the group in the Sign of the Cross, then saying, “Let us remember that we are in the holy presence of God,” followed by a few seconds of silence.
- Ask the children to turn to page 1992 in *The Catholic Children’s Bible* and pray together the prayer that Jesus taught us, the Our Father. Encourage those who know it by heart to pray it without looking at the page.
- Pray aloud: “God our Father, help us to be good and loving sons and daughters. Help us to be like you in our words and actions. Amen.”
- Close with a final Sign of the Cross.



Additional Activities

Action! The Parable of the Forgiving Father (15 minutes)

- Invite the children to act out the Parable of the Forgiving Father by arranging them in groups of three. Each child in a group will be one of the following: Jesus, the father, or the son. Use the verses on page 1620 (the Featured Story in *The Catholic Children's Bible*) as the basis for the action.
- Give the groups some time to go over the verses together. Each character has a line to say, which can be memorized, read from the Bible, or paraphrased. Give each group a chance to present their mini-play.
- Conclude by asking the groups to tell the meaning of their mini-plays. Emphasize that God is our loving Father and will always forgive us and welcome us back when we are sorry.

A Forgiveness Party (15 minutes)

- Announce that the group will be having a forgiveness party today. Tell the children that they will be celebrating the forgiveness and mercy of God.
- Distribute colorful construction paper (8½-by-11-inch), and ask each child to construct a party hat. Instruct the children to lay the paper flat, horizontally, then take the top two corners and hold them together. Staple these ends together. Ask the children to write their names on the hats and to place the hats on their desks.
- Use a piece of yellow construction paper to make a ring for each child. Cut the paper in strips (about 3-by-½-inch) and tape with cellophane tape, adjusting the size for each child. Instruct the children to place the rings next to the hats.
- Ask the children to take off their shoes and leave them on the floor next to them.
- Invite the children to line up at the front of the room. For each child, go to his or her desk and pick up the hat, the ring, and the shoes. Bring these to the child and say:
 - My dear son [or daughter], I am so happy you have come home. Here is your party hat and your ring. Here are the shoes for your feet. You were lost, but now you are found, and we are going to celebrate!
- Put the hat and the ring on the child, and help the child put on his or her shoes. The child may then go back to his or her desk.
- Conclude by distributing napkins and party snacks to celebrate God's forgiveness!

Materials Needed

- none

Materials Needed

- multicolored construction paper
- yellow construction paper (cut in strips ahead of time)
- tape
- stapler
- crayons or markers
- napkins
- party snacks (preferably in individual bags)

Materials Needed

- a computer with Internet access
- a computer projector

**Toon Time: The Parable of the Prodigal Son
(15 minutes)**

- As a group, view “The Parables of Jesus 6 – The Prodigal Son,” available on YouTube (3:37).
- Invite volunteers to recall some of the ideas in the video, encouraging the children to follow the chronological order of the events.
- Remind the children that the father in the parable represents God, and we are the son who runs away. But God will always welcome us back and forgive us. You may want to link the viewing of this video with a forgiveness party (see above).