

God's kingdom belongs to people like these children. (Mark 10:14b)

The Forgiving Father – Luke 15:11-32

Prepare to Lead

Activities At-a-Glance

- My Family** (Coloring)
- Bible Story Puppets** (Craft)
- The Older Brother** (Journaling)
- Finding Love and Forgiveness** (Puzzle)
- What Happened?** (Storytelling)
- All Ages** (Art)
- Peaceful Place** (Response Activities)
- Hugs** (Activity)
- Standing in My Shoes** (Craft)
- What Would You Do?** (Activity)
- Prayers of Forgiveness** (Prayer Activity)

Supplies At-a-Glance

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|---|---|
| <i>crayons</i> | <i>drawing paper</i> |
| <i>colored pencils</i> | <i>paper hearts</i> |
| <i>markers</i> | <i>heart stickers</i> |
| <i>scissors</i> | <i>basket</i> |
| <i>glue</i> | <i>pairs of shoes that are too big for children</i> |
| <i>tape</i> | |
| <i>highlighters</i> | |
| <i>modern-day costumes and props (optional)</i> | |

Suggested Books

Sorry by Jean Van Leeuwen
Who Counts?: 100 Sheep, 10 Coins, 2 Sons by Amy-Jill Levine and Sandy Eisenberg Sasso

Tips for the Leader

- This session discusses family. Be sensitive to children in your group who come from non-traditional family backgrounds or who may have experienced family trauma. Try your best not to discuss God's family as nuclear families.
- While learning about forgiveness is important, the most important thing young children need to know is God's love and grace for them.
- If your children have participated in this month's sessions, check in with them to see if their understanding and ideas about God's kingdom have changed. Their answers may surprise you!
- If you have been using the suggested books in the Peaceful Place, consider leaving books used previously out for children to enjoy again.
- Don't forget that you can download digital copies of this curriculum either from your CD-ROM or your digital files. This is a great way to share ministry resources with families.

Prepare to Wonder

Faith Word: KINGDOM

Many teachings on this well-known parable focus on the happy return of the younger son. However, the parable of the forgiving father is really about all three of the characters in the story—the younger son, the father, and the older brother. At some point in our lives, each of us has probably felt like each one of these three family members. Most of us can relate to the father, as we have had the experience of continuing to love someone despite a mistake. And then there's the older brother. At one time or another we have each felt that life is unfair. And, of course, we must remember the younger son. We have each made poor choices and been in a situation where we needed to ask for forgiveness.

Hopefully, we have each also experienced the relief of being forgiven and loved no matter what. We can all strive to be like the forgiving father, but we can also strive to be the younger son who recognizes our wrongs and asks for forgiveness. We can even be like the older brother who might be hesitant to offer forgiveness, but continues to be in conversation with those whom we feel have done wrong.

Jesus used the parable of the forgiving father to teach people that every person is important to God. There are things to learn from each person in this story. When we can put ourselves in the shoes of others, we can be reminded that God's unfailing love and forgiveness is offered to everyone.

Spiritual Practice for Adults

Sometimes forgiveness is hard, and forgiveness is not always required. However, are there things for which you might need to give yourself forgiveness? Consider something you might be holding against yourself. Something you said, did, or didn't do. This Bible story reminds us that no one is perfect, but we can always run into God's loving arms. When we can know we are forgiven we better understand God's unconditional love. This week, rest in the knowledge that you are a beloved child of God.

Come Together

Come Together

Supplies: *Class Pack, Celebrate Wonder Bible Storybook, Wonder Box, green cloth, battery-operated candle, a picture of a house*

Prepare Ahead: *Set up a Wonder Table (see p. 3) with a green cloth, battery-operated candle, and a Wonder Box (see p. 3). Display the Unit 3 Bible Verse Poster (Class Pack—pp. 9 & 16) and Faith Word Poster (Class Pack—p. 21) Place the picture of the house inside the Wonder Box.*

- Point to the Unit 3 Faith Word Poster, and invite the children to wonder about what the word *kingdom* means.
- Invite the kids to join you in a circle.

SAY: This month we have been talking about God's kingdom.

ASK: What does it feel like to be a part of God's kingdom? What does it mean to forgive someone?

- We recommend reading stories from the *Celebrate Wonder Bible Storybook*. Allow an elementary-age child to read the story, "The Forgiving Father " (pp. 230–231) from the storybook or read Luke 15:11-32 from a CEB Bible.

PRAY: Dear God, thank you for showing us your love and forgiveness. Amen.

My Family – Preschool

Supplies: *Reproducible Kids' Book, crayons*

Prepare Ahead: *Photocopy, "My Family" (Reproducible 12A) for each preschooler.*

- Hand out a copy of "My Family" to each preschooler.

SAY: Today we heard a Bible story about a father and his two sons.

ASK: Who is in your family? Who is special to you?

- Have the children draw their family or people who are special to them on the page.

Bible Story Puppets – Younger Elementary

Supplies: Reproducible Kids' Book, crayons or markers, scissors, craft sticks (3 per child), glue or tape

Prepare Ahead: Photocopy "Bible Story Puppets" (Reproducible 12B) for each child.

- Hand out a copy of "Bible Story Puppets" and 3 craft sticks to each child.

ASK: Who were the characters we learned about in the Bible story?

- Invite the children to color and cut out the figures.
- Attach each figure to a craft stick with glue or a piece of tape.
- Encourage the children to use the puppets to retell the Bible story.

The Older Brother – Older Elementary

Supplies: Reproducible Kids' Book, pens

Prepare Ahead: Photocopy "The Older Brother" (Reproducible 12C) for each child.

- Hand out a copy of "The Older Brother" to each child.

SAY: The older brother in the Bible story was unsure about his younger brother's return.

ASK: How do you think he was feeling?

- Have the children draw the emotions of the older brother.
- Encourage the children to write down how the brothers' feelings might have changed how the Bible story ended.

Finding Love and Forgiveness – All Ages

Supplies: Reproducible Kids' Book, highlighters, crayons or markers

Prepare Ahead: Photocopy "Finding Love and Forgiveness" (Reproducible 12D) for each child.

- Hand out a copy of "Finding Love and Forgiveness" to each child.

SAY: The Bible story today teaches us that God offers love and forgiveness to everyone.

ASK: Have you ever experienced love? Have you ever experienced forgiveness?

What did it feel like?

- Invite the children to look for the words from the Bible story and to color the page.
- Encourage older children to help younger children.

SAY: In God's kingdom, people are loved and forgiven.

Wonder Time

Share a Story

Supplies: Celebrate Wonder DVD, TV, DVD player

- Invite the children to join you in a circle on the floor.
- Watch the Session 12 video (Celebrate Wonder DVD).

WONDER: Who do you identify with or feel like in the Bible story?

Interactive Bible Story

Supplies: Reproducible Kids' Book

Prepare Ahead: Photocopy today's Take-Home Pages from the Reproducible Kids' Book, 12F–12G. Display the Unit 3 Bible Verse Poster (Class Pack—pp. 9 & 16).

- Invite several readers to take turns reading and/or acting out the story, one section at a time.

WONDER: Why did the younger brother leave his family? Why did he come back?

Wonder with Me

Supplies: Class Pack, Wonder Box, scissors

Prepare Ahead: Lay out the Unit 3 Wonder Story Mat (Class Pack—pp. 7 & 18). Locate and cut out the Unit 3 story figures (Class Pack—p. 3) if you haven't already.

SAY: Today's faith word is *kingdom*.

ASK: What is God's kingdom like?

- Show the children the Unit 3 Faith Word Poster (Class Pack—p. 21).
- Read the definition of the word *kingdom* from the Faith Word Poster.

ASK: What does forgiveness have to do with God's kingdom?

- Have a child place the lost son on the Wonder Mat.

WONDER together:

- How did the younger brother, older brother, and father feel in the story?
- How does this story make you feel?
- Where is God in this story?
- Open the Wonder Box to reveal the house.

SAY: The younger son left and returned home. He was welcomed by his father and forgiven.

WONDER: Where do you feel welcomed and forgiven?

Experience Wonder

What Would Happen? – All Ages

Supplies: Reproducible Kids' Book, modern-day costumes and props (optional)

Prepare Ahead: Photocopy "What Happened?" (Reproducible 12E) for each child.

SAY: Jesus told many parables to help teach people something. Parables are special stories that we can learn from. Even though Jesus told parables long ago, we can still learn something from them today.

ASK: What would happen if Jesus told this parable today?

- Allow the children to write or draw what this story might look like today.
- After a few minutes, divide the children into small groups.
- Invite the groups to share what they wrote or drew. Then, have the groups come up with a skit to act out the story if it were to happen today. Allow children to choose costumes and props if you have them available.
- Allow time for the small groups to share their skits.

Examine the Bible Verse – Early and Older Elementary

SAY: Our Unit 3 Bible verse is Mark 10:14b. Let's find it in our Bibles.

ASK: Is Mark in the Old or New Testament? (*New*). Where is the Book of Mark located in the New Testament? (*second book*) In what chapter of Mark is our verse located? (*10*) What is the verse number? (*14*)

SAY: The Bible story is found in the Book of Mark, which is one of the Gospels.

- Gather the kids around the Unit 3 Bible Verse Poster. Read it together.

ASK: Is the younger son a part of the Kingdom of God? What about the older son?

Peaceful Place – Preschool and Early Elementary

Supplies: copies of the Unit 3 Faith Word (Reproducible Kids' Book 10F); Celebrate Wonder Bible Storybook; Sorry, by Jean Van Leeuwen; Who Counts?: 100 Sheep, 10 Coins, 2 Sons, by Amy-Jill Levine and Sandy Eisenberg Sasso; paper; crayons; paper hearts; heart stickers; basket

Prepare Ahead: Photocopy the Unit 3 Faith Word Coloring Page (Reproducible 10F) for each child.

- Assist the children, as needed, as they interact with the items provided.

- On the hearts, have the children write down a name of someone they need to forgive and place them in the basket.
- Pray over the basket as a group, without reading the hearts.
- Encourage the children to color the Unit 3 Faith Word Coloring Page.
- Invite children to draw their favorite part from the Bible story.

Tip: All of the supplies/activities suggested for the Peaceful Place are optional.

Go in Peace

Spiritual Practice – Exploring God's Kingdom Through Community

SAY: A spiritual practice is something we do to help us be present with God. This month we are going to practice ways that we can be encouraging members of God's community.

- Guide the children through a spiritual practice.

ASK: What is forgiveness? Who was forgiven in the Bible story? Who forgave? What does forgiveness look like?

SAY: Let's use the word Son and remember our Bible story when we need to ask for forgiveness.

S – Sorry: Say sorry for what you have done.

O – Open to change: Admit you want to change or do things differently.

N – Not again: Try not to make the same mistake again.

- Give time for children to say silent prayers before closing in prayer together.

PRAY: God of forgiveness, thank you for showing me your love. Amen.

Family Spiritual Practice

Supplies: Reproducible Kids' Book; Leader Guide—p. 128

Prepare Ahead: Photocopy "Family Celebration Letter" (p. 128) for each child.

SAY: Let's look at your Take-Home Pages for today (Reproducibles 12F–12G). Be sure to share the story you learned today with a friend or family member. There is a special activity for you to do at home to help you think about the people who are special and important to you.

- Send a copy of the Take-Home Pages and the Family Celebration Letter home with each child.

Supplemental Activities

Preschool – Hugs

Supplies: heart stickers (2 per child)

SAY: In the Bible story, the father welcomes home his son with hugs and kisses.

ASK: How does your family greet you when you come home? How do you show your friends love?

- Invite the children to stand up and wrap their arms around themselves like they are giving themselves a big hug.

SAY: Imagine God's arms are wrapping around you.

- Have the children stretch their arms out as wide as they can.

SAY: God loves you this much. Each time you need to remember God's love, you can stretch your arms out wide and give yourself a big hug.

SAY: We can also share God's love with others.

- Give each child a heart sticker and say, "God loves you!" Give each child a second heart sticker and encourage them to give that sticker to a friend.

Early Elementary – Someone Else's Shoes

Supplies: pairs of shoes that are too big for kids, paper, markers

SAY: Sometimes it can be hard to understand where other people are coming from.

ASK: Whose feelings in the Bible story were most difficult to understand? Why?

- Give each child a pair of shoes. Encourage the children to put on the shoes over their own shoes.
- Tell the children to walk around.
- Let each child describe what the shoes feel like.

ASK: What is it like to wear someone else's shoes? Have you ever heard of the phrase, "walk in someone else's shoes?" What does it mean?

SAY: Some of the Bible characters' actions might be hard to understand, but if we put ourselves in their shoes, it is easier to understand.

- Have the children trace the outline of their shoe on a piece of paper.
- Encourage the children to write down one new thing they learned about the Bible story inside the shoe.

PRAY: God of all, help us to try and understand one another even when it is hard. Amen.

Older Elementary – What Do You Think?

Supplies: none

- Have the children stand in the middle of the room. When you ask a question the children will move right, left, or stand still depending on their answer. Right means no, left means yes, and standing still means unsure.
- Ask questions like: Was the father forgiving? Was the older brother forgiving? Should the younger son have left his family? Should the younger son have stayed away? Should the older son have left with his brother? Should the father not have given the inheritance to the younger son?
- Encourage children to move based on their own personal answers. There are no right or wrong answers. Encourage conversation around each question.

SAY: Forgiveness can be hard to understand, but God always welcomes us home and offers us love and forgiveness.

PRAY: God of forgiveness, help me to see and accept your forgiveness. Amen.

Intergenerational Activity – Forgiveness Prayers

SAY: Sometimes we all do wrong.

ASK: What do you do when you have done something wrong? Is there someone in your life that you need to forgive?

- Divide the participants into small groups.
- Invite the groups to write a prayer of forgiveness, asking God for forgiveness, as well as a heart open to forgiving others.
- After a few minutes, gather everyone together and invite groups to share if they are willing.

PRAY: God, we ask you for forgiveness. Help us know your love and grace. Amen.