

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

Music Suggestions

- "God Is Love," by The Praise Baby Collection (Flicker Records/Big House Kids)
- "Amazing Grace—My Chains Are Gone," by St. John UMC Children (VBS Babylon; available on YouTube, 3:27)

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 your child to turn to page 1 in the chapter 2 activity booklet and locate the prayer on the page.
- Begin prayer by making 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.
- Read the prayer in the activity booklet with your child, taking turns reading the sentences. Say "Amen" together, and then close with another Sign of the Cross. Have your child put the activity booklet away for now.

Engage Activity

- Remind your child 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.

- Ask your child: "How do you think I would feel if you ran away from home? How would I feel when you came back?" Invite your child to respond.
- Explain that in today's story, we 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 your child to find Luke 15:11–32 in *The Catholic Children's Bible* (pages 1619, 1622).
- Direct your child 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 your child to look at the artwork on pages 1620–1621. Invite them to describe what they see in the artwork.
- Invite your child to read the title on page 1620, and ask what *forgiving* means. (*not holding a grudge against someone; not bringing up someone's past mistakes or hurts*)
- Read aloud the full story as noted (Luke 15:11–32), beginning on page 1619. Then ask 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 your child turn to page 2 in the activity booklet and complete the activity with their Bible open. *Answers: sinned, son, ring, shoes, dead, found*

Understand It!

- Take turns reading the paragraphs of Understand It! on page 1621, beginning with the first paragraph and dividing the second paragraph into two or three parts.
- Ask your child to summarize what they just heard in the reading, and review these key points:
 - 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.
- Ask your child to respond to the questions.
- Ask your child 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 together: "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 your child to look at the images in Tell It! on page 1621.
- Invite your child to describe what is happening in each of the images.
- Encourage your child to summarize the Bible reading, using the images in Tell It!
- Have your child 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 your child 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 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 your child to listen as you read the following scenarios. Discuss the "What happens next?" after each scenario.
 - 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?
- Ask your child to choose a scenario to act out with you. Together, plan to add words and actions to the outline of the story. Have the actor playing the part of the mom, the neighbor, the friend, and the kindergartner do what God would do (that is, forgive the hurt). As time permits, choose more than one scenario to act out. If possible, present the scenario to other family members.
- Invite your child to share the character or scene they remember best from this activity. Elicit reasons for their responses.

- Tell your child 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 your child 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.

✕ Find (20 minutes)

God's Treasure of Forgiveness

- Ask your child to recall what sacrament they are preparing for. (*the Sacrament of Reconciliation*) Remind them that this is the sacrament in which we ask for forgiveness and our sins are forgiven. Tell your child that a sin is something we say, do, or think that does not follow God's Law.
- Explain that at the very beginning of the sacrament, the priest will greet us and welcome us. Tell your child 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 your child 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 your child 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 your child 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 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 your child to turn to page 3 in the activity booklet and complete the activity.
Answers: 1. Reconciliation, 2. mercy, 3. Father, 4. forgives, 5. grace

Lesson Wrap-Up

- Invite your child to think back over all of the different things they did in this lesson, and invite them to share some of the key things they learned.
- Take some time to get input, and write their answers on a piece of paper.
- Ensure that the following points are made, write them on the paper, 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 your child to place the chapter 2 sticker in the correct circle on the treasure map.



Closing Prayer

- Begin the prayer by making 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 your child to turn to page 1992 in *The Catholic Children's Bible* and pray together the prayer that Jesus taught us, the Our Father. If your child knows it by heart, encourage praying 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 Family Suggestions

For additional ideas, activities, and prayers that can be used by your family for this chapter, please refer to the Family Page on page 4 of this chapter's activity booklet.