



'Light for the Path' a Resource for Families in the Year of Mercy

Session Three for Children: The Lost Son, the Loving Father – a parable of Mercy

We look

Sometimes we hurt each other in the family when we think only about ourselves and what we want, and not about other people and what they need. We can be greedy and want something 'now', rather than waiting for it. We can get cross and run away somewhere to do what we want to do, even if the rest of the family are not happy about it. What does it feel like when things have gone wrong like this? Have you ever had to let someone you love go away? What's it like when they have gone? And when they return?

We listen

Gospel of Luke, Chapter 15 (verses 11-31) *The loving father, the lost son and the dutiful son.*

Then Jesus said, 'There was a man who had two sons. One day they would inherit everything the father had, and share it between them. But the younger son could not wait that long. He wanted to see the world and the bright lights of the city! So he said to his father, 'Give me my share of the money now. Because he loved his son, that is what the father did. Soon after, the younger son packed his bags and went travelling. His money ran out pretty soon – parties, shopping, fun. His new friends left him. He had no money. He was alone and had nowhere to go. He tried to find work – and all he could find was a job on a farm outside the city, feeding the pigs. He was so hungry he would gladly have eaten the pigs' food, but no-one gave him a thing. He was very miserable. He began to think about home. 'My father's workers have plenty to eat, and here I am starving!' He thought about how he had wasted his father's money he felt ashamed. How could he ever be forgiven? Perhaps his father would take him on as a worker. At least he would have food and a roof over his head. Full of sorrow about what he had done, he headed for home. On the way he practiced what he was going to say. While he was a long way off, his father saw him all bedraggled, and his heart went out to him. He ran to the boy and enfolded him in his arms and kissed him. Then his son began to apologise for the way he had behaved. But the father would not hear a word of it – he had been so sure his son was dead, and here he was alive and home at last! He was full of joy, and said it was time to celebrate. He said to his servants, "Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the calf we have been fattening, and kill it; we will celebrate by having a feast, because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found. The elder brother didn't see it like that. He was out in the fields, and on his way back to the house, he could hear music and dancing. Calling one of the servants he asked what it was all about. The servant told him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the calf we had been fattening because he has got him back safe and sound.' He was angry: Celebrate? He should be taught a lesson. His father, noticing his elder son wasn't there, went out to find him. He told him how much he loved him, and always had. Everything he had was his. It didn't matter what his younger brother had done. The important thing was he was home at last. He had been lost and now was found.



https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Return_of_the_Prodigal_Son_1667-1670_Murillo

In this story Jesus shows us what God is like

We wonder.....

Which bit of the story you like best? What do you see in the picture?

What would it be like to be in this story – as the father? Or the lost son?

I wonder, have you ever felt like the elder brother?

I wonder where the pigsty is? Have you been to a place like this?

I wonder where the home is? I wonder why the father was still waiting?

I wonder what the elder brother did next?

At Home

You might like to talk about the times when we are unkind, or greedy and selfish at home, and who gets hurt. When do we say 'It's not fair'? What makes it better?

Perhaps have some fun choosing parts and acting out or telling the story again together. And you could finish with a lovely meal!



Remember, **Pope Francis** says that the mercy of God is God's loving concern for each of us. God wants to see us happy, full of joy and peaceful. And as God loves, so do his children. We must be 'merciful' to each other! (MV9)



You may like to draw your favourite part of the story, or your favourite character in it.

Tips for using this 'Year of Mercy' resource with children at home

1. **We gather:** Decide on the best time – before or after school, evening or weekend – for a quiet 10-30 minutes together.
2. **Background:** What does the word 'mercy' mean? You will find some notes below.
3. **We look at our experience and our Catholic Tradition:** In the parables God is always presented as full of joy, especially when he forgives. What does everyone think?
4. **We listen to God's Word.** Read the story. For the very young, the pictures might help to talk about the story and where we find ourselves in it!
5. **We wonder:** Ask the 'wondering' questions. Have a conversation about these.
6. **Pope Francis says:** Look at the 'Pope Francis' box, and his teaching about mercy. What catches your attention? What is 'love' between us in a family like? When are we most happy and peaceful?
7. **We respond:** Look at the 'At Home' box – and talk about this.
8. **What difference does this make?** Finally, draw the part of the story or character you like best, to remind you of the importance of being 'merciful'.
9. **We pray:** Finish with a simple prayer (see an example below)

Prayer moment

Let's sit quietly for a moment, and remember the story and all we have shared together. As we think about these things, we pray:

Thank you for being with us as we gather here in your name Lord Jesus. You have shown us what God the Father is like. Help us not to judge one another, and to be more kind, loving and forgiving when we make mistakes and hurt each other. May our families and homes be places where anyone can come and experience through us the Father's love and mercy for them. We make this prayer, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Helpful Background

The word mercy is 'hesed' in Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament or first part of our bible. It is 'eleos' in Greek – the languages of the New Testament, or second part of our Christian bible. Both these words have many different meanings in English, for example, 'mercy' means loving someone so much that you want to make everything better for them. It means being full of love and kindness, and being forgiving. It means wanting to take away someone's hurt or pain when they are feeling sad or lonely or unloved, or have done something wrong and don't know how to or can't put it right.

'Mercy' is a word that tells us something very important about God, and about ourselves. As followers of Jesus, we want to think about other people before we think about ourselves. That's the 'merciful' way Jesus shows us. The story shows how our loving Father, God, is always ready to welcome us back when we see that we have made mistakes and been selfish. God lets us choose to follow his ways or not, and he waits patiently for us when we get it wrong and are selfish. When we 'come to our senses' and realise we cannot be truly happy when we are being selfish, God is always ready to run and welcome, hug and forgive. 'Mercy' is the way God comes to meet us! Being full of loving kindness is the way God made us to be, with each other as parents, brothers and sisters, and with everyone we meet.