

Teaching resources for understanding **identity**



The Bible's answers to our big questions





Lesson 5

I AM LOVED & FORGIVEN

Luke 15:11-32

faith**in****kids**

CONTENTS

LEADER'S NOTES	3
ALL TOGETHER TIME	5
 Under 7's Lesson Plan	8
 Over 8's Lesson Plan	11
APPENDIX	
Case Study Pictures	15
Craft Sheet	16
Chat Time Sheet	17
Visual Summary	19

Who Am I?

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We recommend the International Children's Bible for use with children during the lesson. Our leader's notes and Take Home Sheets use the New International Version.

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Living Out (www.livingout.org) commissioned Faith in Kids (www.faithinkids.org) to produce these resources to help children build a permanent identity based on God's word. Visit www.faithinkids.org to download these resources and look out for accompanying podcasts for both children and parents.

'All for the glory of God alone' (1 Corinthians 10:31)

I AM LOVED AND FORGIVEN

LUKE 15:11-32



Thank you for using a Faith in Kids resource. We want to hear your feedback so we can keep improving our resources. Please [click the link](#) to fill out a short form or email us at info@faithinkids.org



Truth that changes me:

Our relationships with God and others are broken because of sin. Jesus can mend my friendship with God.



Faith in Kids looks like:

Children who both see their role in the world's brokenness and know they are totally forgiven.



WHERE ARE WE GOING?

In this series on identity, we want our children to understand who they are - loved children of a heavenly father. Rejecting that identity is the heart of sin. Some openly reject the father to chase after other things. Others think they have to earn their place as his child, rejecting his free gift. The father loves, forgives and welcomes both. Knowing this makes it safe to admit our sin and come home to him.



THE WORLD OUR CHILDREN LIVE IN

The world tells our children, 'Be true to yourself, follow your heart, be who you want to be'. But what if their hearts are the problem? Hearts that are always chasing after the next big thing (stuff, experiences, friends, success...) will lead them away from who they were made to be, instead of towards it. What if being true to themselves ends up hurting those who get in their way?

In a 'you do you' world, it's hard to talk about sin. Our culture has no good answers when we don't live up to the person we want to be. Children who identify themselves as 'good' become too afraid to admit the real state of their hearts. Children whose sins are publicly visible can be crushed by guilt. Every child needs to find forgiveness, acceptance and rest in the place where they are truly loved.



LOOK AT THE PASSAGE

Two Different Sons

- **Younger brother, v12-20** - He believed he was missing out by being home where he belonged. He wanted the good things his father offered, without his father. He left to try everything, to be the person he wanted to be, but ended up empty and lonely. Realising that what he really needed was the father, he headed home saying, 'I have sinned against heaven and against you.' Sin, above all else, is not living with God as our father. His head bowed, he didn't feel worthy to be called a son. He had forgotten who he was.



NOTES

Pray and read the Bible passage. Read *Where are we going, The world our children live in* and *Look at the passage* to give you a better understanding of how to apply the truth.



- **Older brother, v25-32** - He believed he'd earned his position, deserving the good things his father offered. He thought he'd missed out by staying home with him. He'd obeyed like a servant and expected celebration for his efforts. In the place of extreme frustration, he believed it was all about him. He had forgotten who he was.

One Forgiving Father

The father is the constant in the story. While the sons forgot who they were and where they belonged, the father consistently loved, waiting with open arms to forgive and welcome them. He waited for the younger brother to discover that being with him is better than all pleasures. He stood beside the older brother, waiting for him to discover that sonship is given, not earned.

The Saviour's Story

Jesus fully understands the hearts of both sons, and he shares his father's heart. Whether we rebel and run away or stay and try to earn love, Jesus told this story to bring us to our senses. He lived, died and rose again to take our sin, both our rebellion and our self-righteous ingratitude. Whichever brother we are, we can come home to the father's embrace and know eternal love and forgiveness.



WIN MY HEART

How do you tell your own forgiveness story? Is it a tale of overcoming the odds where, despite the obstacles, you've made it to a place of security? Or maybe it's less dramatic, as you predictably arrived where you were meant to be. Imagine seeing your story through your heavenly father's eyes. He is the one who has patiently waited for you to discover that the place you fit best is in his arms. He is the one who offers love as a gracious gift to enjoy not a reward to earn. Imagine how the story of your life might change if you fully embraced a secure identity of being totally loved and completely forgiven.

- Which son's story resonates more with you?
- If you were more secure in your identity as a loved and forgiven child, what difference would it make?



5 MINUTES TO FOCUS ON YOUR GROUP

We usually think of sin being about particular wrong things we do, but sin is fundamentally about going away from the father. How can you help your children feel the sense of belonging to God, and the sadness of being away from his love? Do you know enough about their families to use them as an illustration to help them understand God's love?



This truth is for your heart too.

What do the children in your group need?

Pray for them:

- *to grasp the truth*
- *to live it out*
- *to rely on the Spirit*





ALL TOGETHER TIME



Flexible resource: This has been written as an all-age slot to introduce the whole church family to what the children are learning today, but it could be adapted for the children's classes.



PROPS

3 hats/labels to identify the characters, binoculars, calculator and a camera/phone.



HELPERS NEEDED

3 volunteers to act as the father and the 2 sons.



What to Say



What to Do

Jesus told a story to a big crowd. At the front were sinners who knew they needed Jesus. They couldn't get enough of him.

Point to people on the front row. Get them to cheer.

At the back of the crowd were the eye rollers, the tutters. They were the do-gooders who thought they didn't need Jesus.

Point to people at the back. Get them to tut/eye roll.

Let's meet the 3 characters in Jesus' story...

- The father was always looking out for his sons because he loved them.
- The big bro was always working hard and keeping track of what he'd earned.
- The little bro was always looking around him, distracted, wanting the next big thing.

Give the 3 volunteers a hat/label and their prop:

- Father - binoculars. Holds them up and looks around the room.
- Big bro - calculator. Presses calculator buttons.
- Little bro - camera/phone. Pretends to take photos.

The father - always watching.

Big bro - always working.

Little bro - always wanting.

Make binoculars with your hands.
Mime pressing calculator buttons.
Mime taking a photo.

One day, little bro got itchy feet. He wanted to be out there! He demanded his dad's money, left his home where he belonged, and went far away.

Younger brother walks to the back of the room - mimes taking photos.

Big bro saw what his brother did, rolled his eyes, tutted and went back to work.

He reckoned his dad owed him a fortune!

He'd never behave like that.

Older brother mimes adding up on the calculator, rolls eyes, tuts and heads to the side of the room.

continued →



What to Say

What to Do

So, he's over there partying and posting the pictures of his amazing life.
And he's over there, working and keeping count.
And their father's here... always loving, always watching.
However *they* behave, he stays the same.

Mime taking a photo.
Mime pressing calculator buttons.
Make binoculars with your hands.
Father looks through binoculars at sons.

A day came when the little brother had nothing. His money and friends were gone.
He was living in a pigsty, when he realised it wasn't *something* he was missing - it was *someone*... his dad!

Moves halfway towards the father (who is still looking through his binoculars).

He should go home and say 'sorry'! Let's tell him together...

Encourage everyone to shout out, 'Go home, say sorry!'

He planned his 'sorry' speech...
Younger brother: 'Dad, I have sinned against you. I am sorry. I don't deserve to be your son. Let me work for you instead.'

Younger brother speaks.

He started for home,
But the father was still loving and still watching.
He raced towards him.
There were apologies, tears and forgiveness.

It's party time! His son was home, where he belonged!

Younger brother walks slowly towards father practising his speech.
Father and younger brother act out the scene as you speak.

Father has one arm around the younger brother's shoulder and the other ready to welcome the older brother.

Older brother: 'What about me? I've worked hard. I deserve the party. I've earned it.'

Older brother speaks.

He hadn't left home, but his heart was far from his father, too. He was behaving like a worker, calculating what he deserved, instead of enjoying being a son.

Father moves towards older brother and holds out his arms.

Father: 'Everything I have is already yours. Come and celebrate. Join the party!'

Father speaks.

continued →



What to Say

What to Do

He had a choice...walk away and keep trying to earn his father's love or walk into the party knowing he's already loved.

Older brother stands still, considering his options.

Jesus tells this story because he knows we've *all* walked away from God's love. Either by living without him or by thinking it's what we *do* that matters.

That's what sin is - thinking we'd be better off doing our own thing, instead of living like the loved child of God that we are.

Let's remember who was listening to the story...

The sinners at the front were cheering.

They loved that the little brother could go home. They knew they were just like him, far from God. They needed to go home, by saying sorry and living as God's child.

The do-gooders at the back would have been eye rolling and tutting.

But they were sinners too. Like the older brother, they were busy trying to earn God's love. They needed to do the same thing: say sorry and *live* as God's loved child.

Get the people in the front row to cheer.

Get the people in the back row to eye roll and tut.

Which brother are you more like?

We're made to be children in God's family. We belong with him, loved and forgiven forever.

Our children are in week 5 of a series called, 'Who am I?'

Today we are learning that being a loved and forgiven child of God is our identity. It is more about who we are than what we do.

The Take Home Sheet will help you see what's been taught and help you to talk about it at home.

Pray/sing/celebrate in your usual way to close.





UNDER 7's LESSON PLAN




GET GOING

Belonging Together

Before the session, hide one of each pair somewhere in the room. Explain to the children that you have two items that belong together but have been separated. Can they find them and put them together? When a pair is found, talk about how the two objects belong together.

For a sitting down version of this game, have the objects in 2 bags/boxes. Get the children to pick an object from one bag/box and then find the item it belongs with from the other.

 **Link:** You had to find things that belong together. We belong with God. The best place for us to be is close to him. Today we're going to think about how good it is to come back to God when we have been far away from him.



TEACHING TIME

Go through the story by looking at the 3 different characters. Get the children to act out the scenes with the play figures and toys (or let the children be the different characters).

The son who left home

Read Luke 15:11-13, explaining the hard parts as you go.

Then Jesus said, 'A man had two sons. The younger son said to his father, "Give me my share of the property." So the father divided the property between his two sons. Then the younger son gathered up all that was his and left.'

What did the younger son want from his dad?

In talking pairs: If you were given thousands and thousands of pounds what would you spend it on?

The younger son wanted to spend all of his dad's money, but he didn't want to enjoy it with his dad.

Have fun with the pig scene! Act out the moment the son wishes he was back home, remembering the love of his father.

continued →



NOTES

Flexible resource: look at both lesson plans, pick what works for your group.

Use this activity to introduce today's theme.

You will need: Pairs of objects that belong together e.g. a knife and fork, a pillow and pillow case, a cup and saucer, a saucepan and lid, a lock and a key, left shoe and right shoe, bat and ball.

Use a suitable Bible translation - we use the International Children's Bible (found online at www.biblegateway.com).

You will need: A doll's house, toy farm, 3 play figures and pig figures/toys.

Search YouTube for 'Saddleback Prodigal Son' for a video of this story.



The father who welcomes



Read Luke 15:20:

'While the son was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. He felt sorry for his son. So the father ran to him, and hugged and kissed him.'

Focus on the father's love for his son.

In talking pairs: When you have been away (at school or on holiday) what is the first thing you do when you get home? What do you love to do at home that you can't do anywhere else?

The son came home, where he belonged! Being with your family, who love you, is the best thing about being home.

Get the children to do a frozen statue of the moment the son gets home, with the dad's hug and a big party.

The grumpy brother

Read Luke 15:28-29:

'The older son was angry and would not go into the feast. So his father went out and begged him to come in. The son said to his father, "I have served you like a slave for many years!"'

The older brother's sin is hard for under 7's to understand, but God can still use this story in their lives. Perhaps just explain that the older brother decided to stay out of the party because he was so angry.

Optional: here are some ideas if you want to go further.

Why did the Dad have to come out and talk to the grumpy brother?

In talking pairs: Why do you think this brother was so grumpy?

He thought he needed to work hard for his dad to love him. He hadn't understood that his dad just loved him anyway. The story ends with only one brother at home enjoying the party.

- One brother knew he'd messed up and wanted to say sorry.
- The other brother was angry with his father for being so loving and forgiving.

God is like the father in the story. He loves us and wants to forgive us when we go away from him. When we understand that we'll want to be with him and enjoy the party. God really loves us, just like the father in the story, and is always ready to forgive us. It's totally safe to say sorry to him.

continued →






BRAIN BREAK

Party Time!

Play some balloon games. Have a balloon for each child if you have a small group, or divide the children into teams. Game suggestions:

- Up in the air: bat the balloon with hands to keep it in the air for as long as possible. The child/team is out when the balloon touches the floor.
- Over and under: children stand in 2 lines. The child at the front passes the balloon over their head to the child behind them. That child passes the balloon through their legs to the child behind them. Keep alternating these actions until the balloon gets to the end of the line - the first team to do this wins.
- Foot pass: children sit in 2 lines on the floor. The child at the front holds the balloon with their feet and passes it over their head to the child behind them who must receive the balloon with their feet. No hands to touch the balloons. If the balloon is dropped then it must be picked up with their feet. First team to get the balloon to the end of the line wins.

 **Link:** No matter what we've done, we can always come back to God our father who loves us and is ready to forgive us. Come and join in the party!



A chance to rest the children's minds before Heart and Hands. Get moving and have fun with this game.

You will need: balloons.



HEART & HANDS

Craft time - Make a 'loved and forgiven' party hat

Prepare in advance: cut out the hats for younger children.

Have a celebration while the children colour in and decorate their party hats - play party music and eat party ring biscuits. Help the children to glue/tape the back of the hat together. Punch holes on the sides for the elastic to be tied to so the hat can be worn.

Make the **Truth that changes me** personal to each child as they put on their hat. Say, 'God really loves you. It's always safe to say sorry to him.'

Think time

Big Question: Who loves you just like the father in the story? God!

A follow up question: Who will forgive you just like the father in the story? God!

Prayer

Say together: Dear God, thank you for loving me and forgiving me even though I mess up. Amen.

Make a craft and have a chat. Give the children time to reflect on today's big truth, so it can impact their hearts.

You will need: the craft sheet printed onto card (1 per child), scissors, glue/tape, hole punch, elastic, crayons/coloured pens and stickers.






OVER 8's LESSON PLAN



GET GOING

How Low Can You Go?

Have helpers hold a length of string/garden cane at a set height. Children try to limbo or duck under it without putting their hands on the floor. Gradually lower the marker - see how low they can go before they have to give up.

 **Link:** In today's Bible story the younger brother went as low as living with pigs and sharing their food before he came to his senses and went home. His dad welcomed him with love and forgiveness, like God welcomes us.



TEACHING TIME

On the paper, write the word 'Sorry' and the four question headings in bold. As you go through the questions, children write their answers on the sheet:

- **What for?** What kind of things do we say sorry for?
- **Who to?** Who do we say sorry to?
- **How hard?** Who do you find it hard to say sorry to?
- **Forgiven?** When we say sorry, are we always forgiven?

Then look at today's Bible passage and see if it changes our thinking about saying sorry. You could act it out or get different children to read different parts.

Two different sons

Read v12-20. Ask the questions about the younger brother:

- **What for?** What does he have to say sorry for?
- **Who to?** Who does he have to say sorry to?
- **How hard?** How hard is it for him to say sorry?
- **Forgiven?** Can you tell if he is forgiven?

Read v25-32. Look at what the older brother is angry about. How might *he* answer these questions:

- **What for?** Who does the older brother think needs to say sorry? What for?
- **Who to?** Who does he think they need to say sorry to?

The older brother has put himself in the centre of the story and made it all about him.

How has this spoiled his relationship with his dad? (v28)

continued →



NOTES

Flexible resource: look at both lesson plans, pick what works for your group.

Use this activity to introduce today's theme.

You will need: A length of string or garden cane as a limbo marker.

Use a suitable Bible translation - we use the International Children's Bible (found online at www.biblegateway.com).

You will need: Bibles, pens and a large sheet of paper.



Let's look again and see if we can spot what the older brother has missed.

- **What for?** What does the older brother have to say sorry for?
- **Who to?** Who does he have to say sorry to?
- **How hard?** How hard would it be for him to say sorry? Does he say it?
- **Forgiven?** Do you think the father will forgive him?

One forgiving father

- Does the father love both his sons?
- Who ends the story enjoying the father's love?

Some of us are like younger brothers; we walk away from God thinking we'll have more fun without him. We need to come back, say sorry and enjoy his love and forgiveness. It's totally safe to be honest with God about our mess.

Some of us are like older brothers. We don't think we need to say sorry because we haven't done big, messy things wrong. But trying to earn God's love is another way of being far from him, and we need forgiveness, too. God's love is much too big to earn, so don't try; just enjoy it!

Reflect on your original 'Sorry' answers. What does God want most for us?




BRAIN BREAK

Who belongs together?

Choose a child to wait outside the room. The rest of the children get into pairs or groups of 3 or 4 (depending on how many are in your group). Each pair/group chooses a leader who they will watch and copy. The children sit in a circle, making sure they don't sit next to their partner/group members. Invite the child back into the room and get them to stand in the middle of the circle. Each leader starts doing actions that their partner/group must copy e.g. tap their knees, clap their hands, pat their head. The leaders keep doing new actions for their partner/group to copy. The child in the middle must identify which children belong together in a pair/group based on which ones are doing the same actions - encourage them to do this quickly so you can play a few rounds. With each round, send a different child outside and mix up the pairs/groups.

A chance to rest the children's minds before Heart and Hands. Get moving and have fun with this game.

 **Link:** In that game, the child had to find the pairs/groups who belonged together. We belong with God. He loves us. The best place for us to be is at home with him.

continued →





Did you spot it?

- How did the younger brother mess up?
- How did the older brother mess up?
- What did the father want most for his sons?

Work it out

- How does the father respond to his sons' mistakes? How would you describe the father?
- Jesus told this parable to a group of tax collectors, sinners, Pharisees and teachers of the law (Luke 15:1). What did Jesus want the tax collectors and sinners to understand about God and themselves?
- What did Jesus want the Pharisees to understand about God and themselves?

Live it out

Look at case study picture A:

Imagine this was your class at school, or our group on a Sunday. You're around the table, but there's a child who has lost it, messed up and is outside the room.

- How do you think he is feeling?
- Do you think he feels like he's loved by God at this moment?
- Would you feel like you were loved by God if it was you? Why or why not?
- What could you tell him from this Bible story that is good news for people who know they have messed up?

Or look at case study picture B:

Look at the Sunday School class. It's like ours: different children, different dreams, different struggles.

- These children look well behaved, they're in church, do they need to be forgiven by God? Why?
- Imagine this girl thinks she has to try really hard all the time. How would knowing she was loved and forgiven change that?
- Do you need God's love and forgiveness, or are you alright without it? Why or why not?

Extra Stretch

- How does this story encourage the person who feels guilty, lost or ashamed? What questions could you ask them to help to think about these issues?
- How does this story help someone who thinks they have it all together, without needing God?
- How would someone answer the question, 'Are you a Christian?' if they thought they deserved God's love? How would they answer if they knew they didn't?
- When people are asked if they are Christians, some reply, 'I'm trying.' How does this story help them to think again about their answer?
- What could 'leaving home' and 'only wanting the father's good things, not the father' look like in your life?



A chance to reflect and chat about how the truth, through the Spirit's work, changes our thoughts (head), feelings (heart) and actions (hands).

Use the **Chat Time** sheet – you could enlarge it and work on it together. Hand out sticky notes so children can still respond personally.

These questions are designed to stretch the resource up to teenage years. Depending on the level of discussion in your group, you may want to consider using them.



Prayer

Encourage your group to respond honestly to God, perhaps with a time to respond privately.

Dear Father, we confess the times we have walked away from you, ignored you and only wanted your stuff and not you. We reflect on that in our hearts now...

Father, we are sorry, please forgive us.

Father, we confess the times when we think we don't need you and are good enough on our own. We reflect on that in our hearts now...

Father, we are sorry, please forgive us.

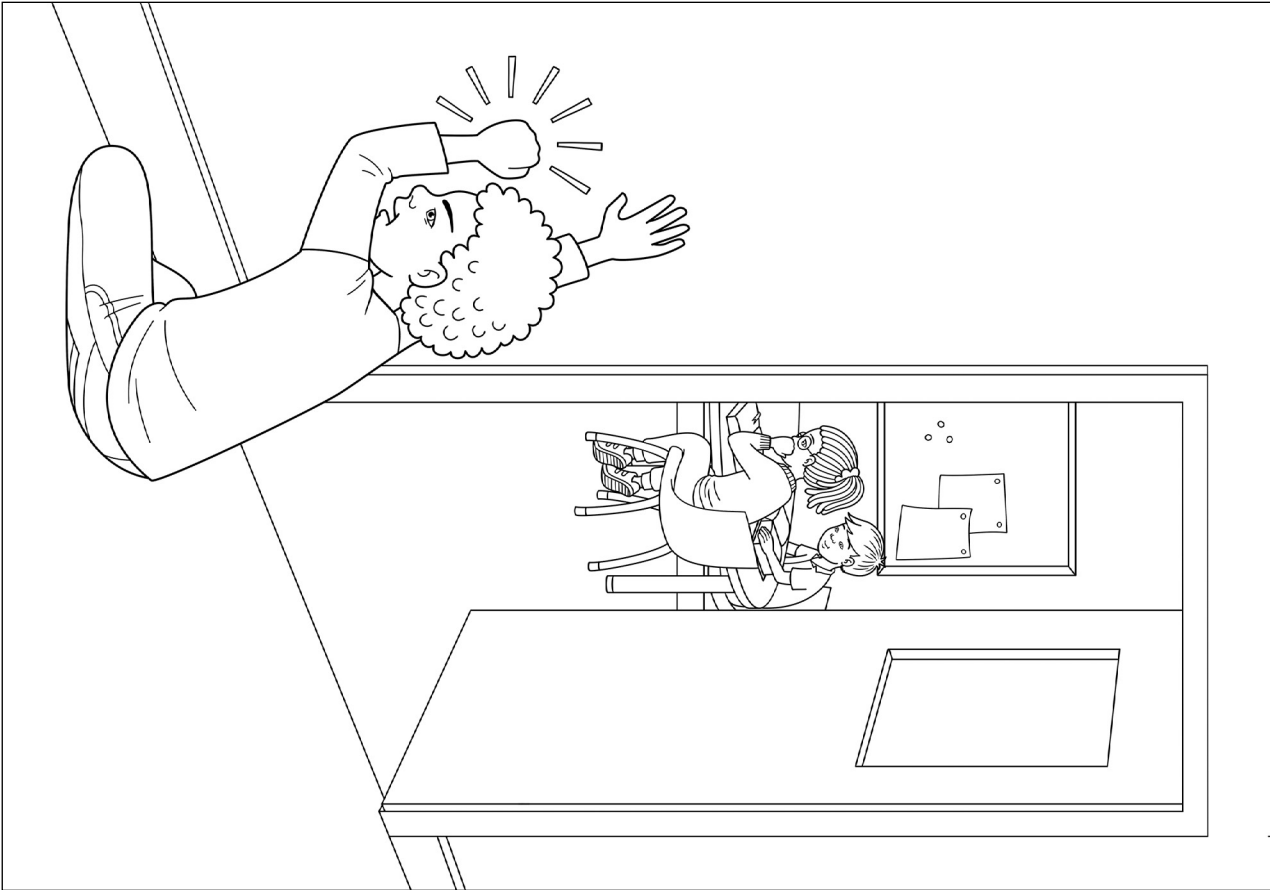
Thank you for your love, patience and forgiveness. Please help us to enjoy being your children. Amen.



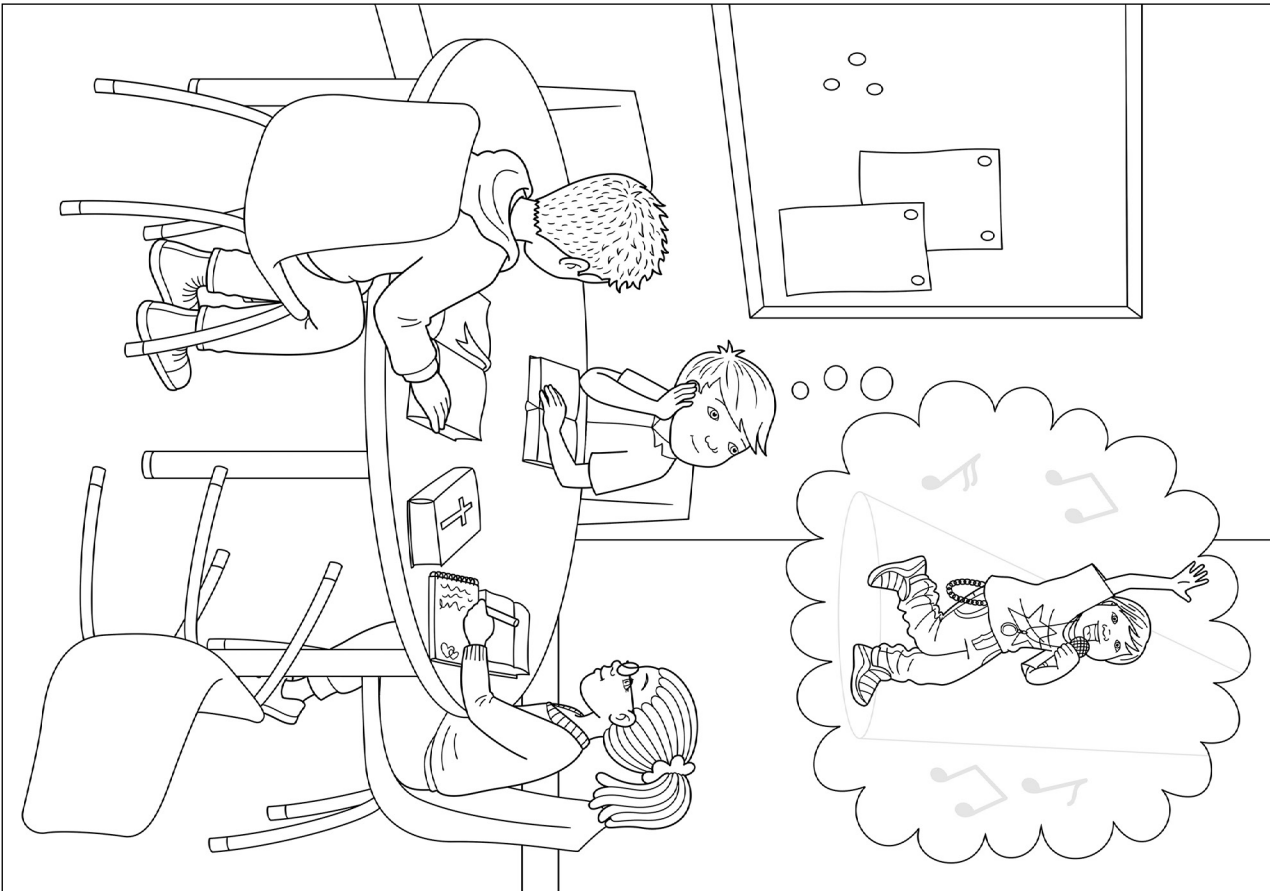
Whenever we explain what it means to come home to God, we should expect the Spirit to move in some hearts in big ways. Be prepared for some children to take significant steps of faith. Talk to their parents as appropriate.

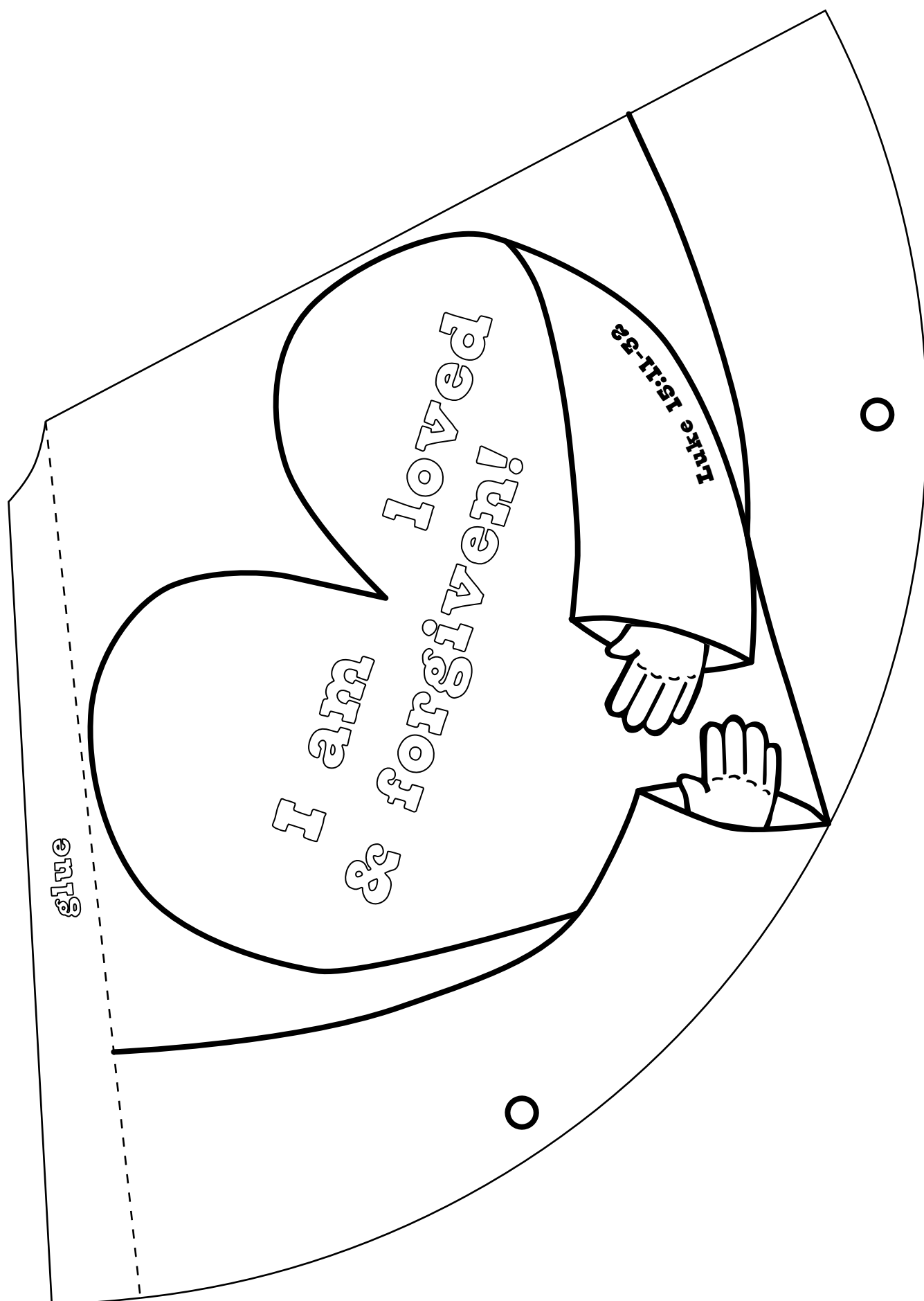


A



B







WHO AM I?

I am loved and forgiven

LUKE 15:11-32

Look at these verses together
and find the answers



DID YOU SPOT IT?



How did the
younger brother
mess up?



How did the
older brother
mess up?



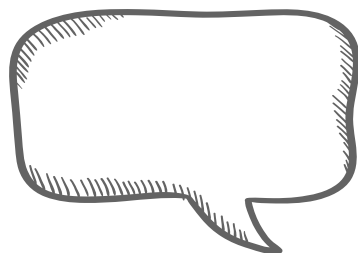
What did the
father want most
for his sons?



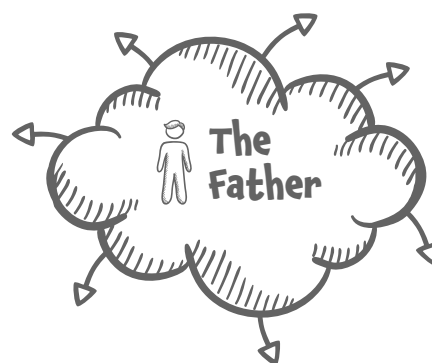
WORK IT OUT

Give everyone a chance to answer...

How does the father respond to his sons' mistakes?



How would you describe the father?



What did Jesus want these different groups of
people to understand about God and themselves?

Tax Collectors & Sinners



God

Pharisees





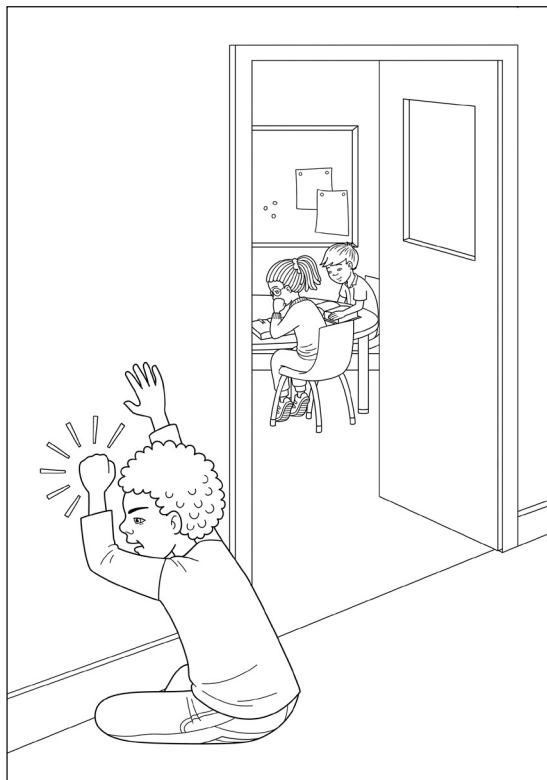
HEART & HANDS CHAT TIME

faith4kids



LIVE IT OUT

Give everyone a chance to speak...



How do you think this boy is feeling?



Do you think he feels like he's loved by God at this moment?

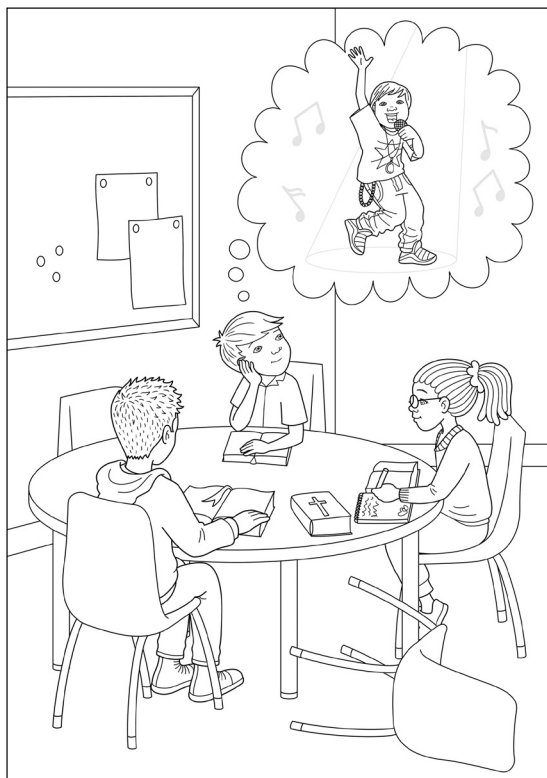
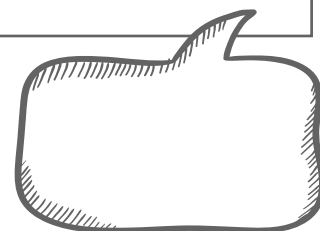


Would you feel like you were loved by God if it was you?



Why or why not?

What could you tell him from this Bible story that is good news for people who know they have messed up?



These children look well behaved, they're in church, do they need to be forgiven by God?



Why or why not?

Imagine this girl thinks she has to try really hard all the time.

How would knowing she was loved and forgiven change that?



Do you need God's love and forgiveness, or are you alright without it?



Why or why not?





**I am made
by God**



**I am made to
love others**



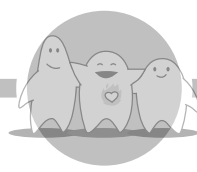
**I am
hurting**



**I am given
a body**



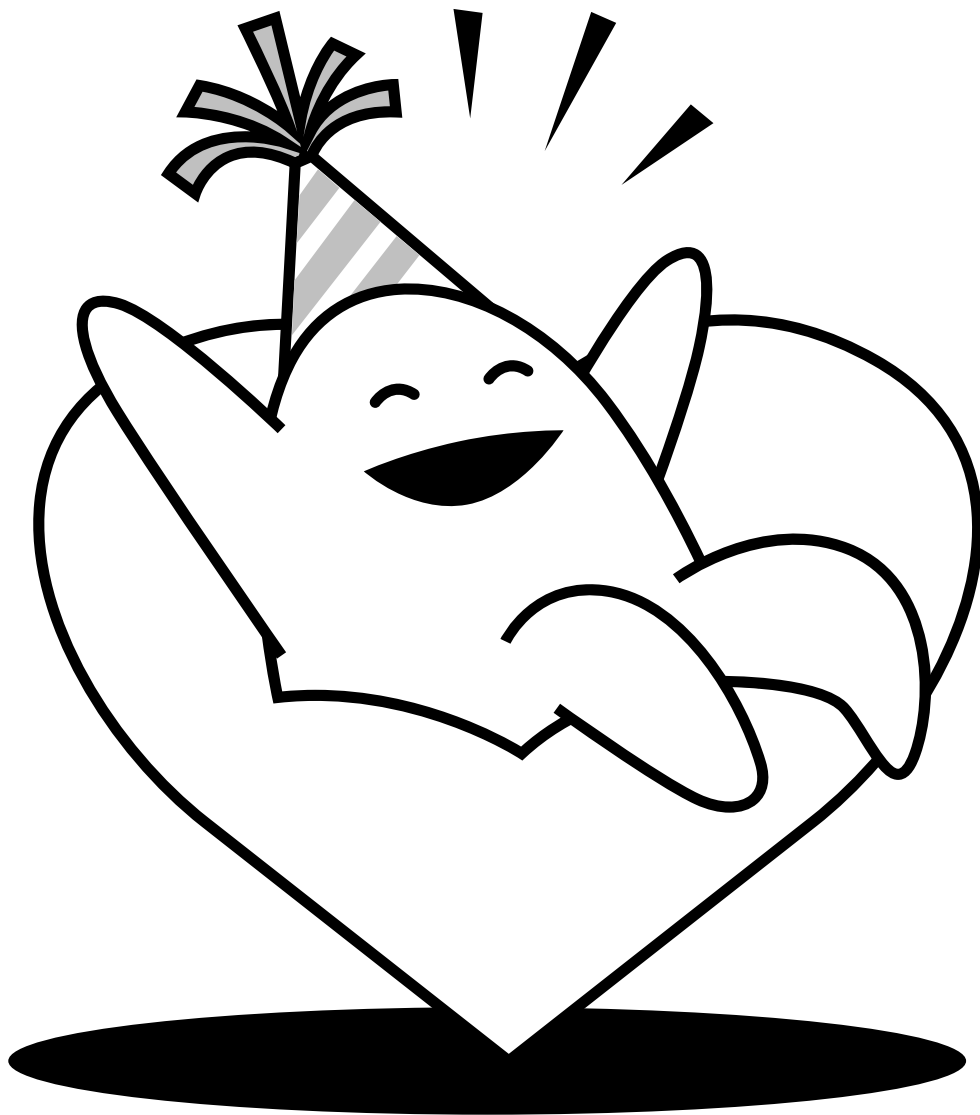
**I am loved
and forgiven**



**We are
not alone**



**We will be
like Jesus**





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Partner with us

We can offer this resource free of charge to churches everywhere because of the generosity of our supporters - people like you!

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