READY TO USE CHILDREN’s EVENT

# The lost son

EVENT AIM

To discover that we can come back to God, whatever we have done.

BIBLE PASSAGE

Luke 15:11-32

BACKGROUND

This event plan is aimed at helping you create an event during the summer holidays which all children, both churched and not, can have fun and discover more about Jesus.

The parable of the lost son has lots to say to children. They will be familiar with going their own way and, if they get things wrong, having to face the consequences. They might also identify with the elder son, having watched a sibling do something wrong and then be forgiven. Helping them engage with the story and ideas behind it will enable us to show them the love of Jesus regardless of where they are in their journey with him.

Piece together activities into a programme, making sure you include some kind of Bible experience as part of your event. Allow time for children to move between items on the programme – they never go directly from one thing to another so don’t pack your programme too tightly!

Make sure you follow your church’s safeguarding policies as you plan this event, particularly if you’re drawing in adult volunteers who aren’t usually part of your team.

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## WELCOME – 10 mins

Create a welcoming environment as children arrive. Play some upbeat music and serve refreshments. You could theme your food: have pea or lentil crisps, pork sausages on sticks and sugar snap peas and hummus in one place; serve mini beefburgers, chips and carrot sticks in another.

Have some simple craft activities around the room that children can join in with as they arrive. Try creating pictures of sheep (out of tissue paper or cotton wool) or making brass rubbings of different coins.

Alternatively, have a disco going as the children arrive, inviting everyone to show off their best dance moves (if they are happy to). Make sure a few volunteers are primed and ready to show off their own moves to get the ball rolling.

## GAMES – 10 mins each

**OPTION ONE: Treasure hunt**

**You will need:** a large space; clues; prizes (such as sharing bags of sweets or a healthier option)

Before the session, create a treasure hunt around the space you are using. It would be ideal if you could use the whole building and surrounding gardens (if there are any), but don’t go off the premises. These could be simple rhymes or more complicated puzzles to solve, but make sure there will be opportunities for everyone to contribute solving them.

If this would prove too complex, then hide lots of small items (such as toy sheep, chocolate coins or play people) around the space. Alternatively, hide actual people around the space!

Put the children into smaller groups, each one with a volunteer, and set them off on the hunt. Give them the first clue, if you’re using clues. Give them a bucket, bowl or bag if they’re collecting hidden objects. Give them a piece of paper and a pen, if they are searching for people (each person they find should sign the piece of paper).

Another option of a game hunting for lost things would be a scavenger hunt. Put the children into groups (with a volunteer in each one) and give them a list of things that they might find in your ‘hunting’ space. Include some simple things on the list (a leaf, an interestingly shaped stone) and some more abstract things (a shadow, a footprint, evidence of an animal).

**OPTION TWO: Dress up**

**You will need:** lots of ‘junk’ (such as eggboxes, pieces of fabric, kitchen foil); dressing-up clothes; costume jewellery

Put the children in groups and give each group the same amount of resources (or as near as you make it). Challenge the group to dress one of their members up, so that they look like they’re wearing fine clothes and are an honoured guest at a party.

Give them a time limit (such as five minutes) and then have a fashion show, with each group modelling their creation. If you like, you could ask someone to be a judge and choose the best outfit.

## BIBLE STORY – 15 mins

**You will need:** dice (one per team); sections of story as below (adapted from International Children’s Bible), printed and numbered (one set per team); [this retelling](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DJgROx4wFKM) and the means to show it

Divide the children into smaller groups. Each team rolls the dice and collects one item from the ingredients and the correlating numbered section of the story. Once they have all the sections, the groups should race to put them in the right order!

When they have collated the story, watch the retelling to check that they got it right. (The correct order is four, one, six, five, two, three.) Finally, read the story from Luke 15:11-32.

**Section one:** After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a farmer, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the food that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

**Section two:** Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. “Your brother has come,” he replied, “and your father has put on a party because he has him back safe and sound.”

**Section three:** The older brother was angry and refused to go in. His father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father: “Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has lost all your money comes home, you have the best party for him!” “My son,” the father said, “you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.”

**Section four:** Jesus told this story: There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of your money.’ So he divided his money between them. Not long after that, the younger son packed up all he had, set off for a distant country and there lost all his money in wild living.

**Section five:** The son said to him: “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” But the father said to his servants: “Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the best food. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.” So they began to celebrate.

**Section six:** When he came to his senses, he said: “How many of my father’s servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your servants.” So he left the farm and headed to his father’s house. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

## CHATTING TOGETHER – 5 mins

Discuss the story further using these questions:

• Why did Jesus tell this story?

• Which character do you relate to most and why?

• What would it feel like for the father?

• What would it feel like for the older brother?

• What would it feel like for the younger brother?

• What does this story tell us about God?

## CRAFT ACTIVITIES – 10 mins each

Choose one or more craft ideas from RTU Craft. You could set up a craft area with two or more craft activities for people to try. It might be helpful to have a volunteer at each activity to explain what needs to be done and to help guide the conversation in the way suggested, so that everyone can continue to process their response to the story and think about what Jesus might be saying to them.

## RESPONSE ACTIVITIES – 10 mins each

**OPTION ONE: General creativity**

**You will need:** anything to help people be creative, such as art materials, collage materials, building blocks, Bibles and Bible storybooks, pictures of Jesus, play sand

Set out all your resources and ask people to choose some things to use to help them respond to the story. They could paint a picture, create a sculpture, build something with blocks, read the story again from a Bible – whatever they want to do.

It doesn’t matter what they do, the key to this activity is to provide space for children to think about what they have discovered through the story and the discussions. Those who know Jesus might think about what impact this story has had on their relationship with him, or Jesus might be saying something specific to them. Those who have yet to catch sight of Jesus might be hearing from him for the first time and need some space to process that.

**OPTION TWO: Ring bracelets**

**You will need:** rings of card wide enough to go around a child’s wrist; wool, ribbon or tinsel; felt-tip pens

The dad gave his son a ring to put on his finger, as a sign he was treating him like a son, not a servant. Give each child a ring of card and ask them to decorate it with the pens and wool, ribbon and tinsel. The purpose is to make it as beautiful as possible. Talk about how happy the dad was to welcome his son and how happy God is to welcome us. Ask the children what it might mean to them that God treats them like his child. As you put on your finished bracelets, share with the group what this means to you.

**OPTION THREE: Drama**

**You will need:** volunteers to facilitate the activity

Ask a volunteer to run a drama game. Ask the children to think of a situation – either from the Bible story or a similar situation from their own lives. Invite two or three people to start role-playing the situation. Then either stop the role play at a certain point and invite someone else to take over one of the roles, or say that, if anyone has any ideas about where they might take the situation, they can shout “Stop” and take over one of the roles.

When the situation has run its course, get some feedback about how that went. If you have time and the group is keen, then set up another situation and do the activity again.

**OPTION FOUR: The Lord’s Prayer**

**You will need:** copies of the Lord’s Prayer; felt-tip pens

Give out the copies of the Lord’s Prayer and explain that this is the prayer that Jesus taught his friends to say. Say it together, then comment that we can call God our Father, who is in heaven and here with us as well. Also, in this prayer we ask God to forgive us for anything wrong we’ve done...and he will forgive us, just as the father in the story forgave his son.

Give out felt-tip pens and encourage the children to decorate the prayer. They could highlight sections they like, draw ideas that the different lines make them think or, or simply draw patterns and pictures around the whole prayer.

## CLOSING – 5 mins

At the end of your time together, ask if anyone would like to say what they have learned at the event, or what they enjoyed most about your time together. Thank everyone for coming and tell people about the next thing that they may want to attend – this could be your next church service or another summer event.

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