READY TO USE CHURCH FAMILY 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 bringing your whole church family together for an afternoon or evening during the summer holidays. The parable of the lost son has lots to say to people of all ages – at different times in our lives, we might identify with younger son, the father, or the elder son. This session will help people engage with the story in a fun way, as well as provide space to spend time together in a more relaxed setting than a church service. This means that intergenerational relationships can be built and learning can happen between those of different ages.

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

As this is more informal than a church service, you’ll need to be aware of safeguarding issues. It is a very good thing for faith development for all ages to mingle and work together, but an increased awareness is required.

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## WELCOME – 10 mins

Create a welcoming environment as people 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.

Around the venue (on cards on tables, on posters on the walls), display these questions for people to talk about:

* When was the last time you were lost? What happened? How did you feel when you were found again?
* Do you have brothers and sisters? If so, what little thing do they do that gets on your nerves?
* When did you last spend money on something you didn’t need? What did you buy? Was it a waste of money, or did if bring you joy?
* What makes you really happy?

Encourage groups of all ages to sit or stand together and discuss these questions.

## 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 all ages to contribute solving them.

If this would prove too complex, then hide lots of small items (such as play people or coloured balls) around the space. Alternatively, hide people around the space!

Put everyone into smaller groups – families with extra people added in or mixed groups – 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).

**OPTION TWO: Dress up**

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

Put people 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:** RTU Parable; [this retelling](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DJgROx4wFKM) and the means to show it; roving mic (if needed)

If people have already discussed the questions in ‘Welcome’, then get some feedback from volunteers about their answers. If not, then split everyone into smaller groups (make sure anyone on their own is included in a group) and get them to chat about the questions, then give some feedback.

Read out the RTU Parable: Morgan and the missing bass riff. Ask the first set of questions at the bottom of the story. (You could print these out and give each smaller group a copy to discuss.)

Say that Jesus told three stories about being lost and then found – one about a sheep, one about a coin and one about a son. If you have lots of people who aren’t regularly part of your church community, you might want to explain that Jesus often told stories to get people thinking and to illustrate what he was teaching. They are called parables and are rich in meaning.

Show the video retelling and then ask the second set of questions from RTU Parable. (Again, you could print these out and share them around.) Ask those people who know this parable well to try to approach it with fresh ears, in order to hear from God anew; those who have never heard it before might bring a whole new perspective.

After a few minutes, get some feedback from the different groups, ensuring you hear from people of all ages.

## 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 people 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: Reflection**

**You will need:** different household objects eg keys, rope, stationery, saucepans, coins, tape measure, soap; reflective music and the means to play it; paper and pens

Lay out the household objects in your meeting space. Play the music and invite people to choose an object that they feel reflects best how they can respond to this story. For example, a rope might be that they are feeling God is hanging onto them, a tape measure might be that they feel God’s grace for them is immeasurable. A magnifying glass might signify that they need to be found. Once they have chosen an object, they can draw the item on paper or write their response to God to take home and remember.

**OPTION THREE: Drama**

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

Ask a volunteer to run a drama game. Ask people 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.

## 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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