

God, Families and Forgiveness

by *The Rev. Kerith Harding, Christ and Holy Trinity Church School, Westport, CT*



Storybook: *The Family Book*, by Todd Parr

Theme: All families are different, but they all have the most important thing in common— all families have love.

Story from Scripture: *The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32)*

Bible needed: *The Young Reader's Bible*, page 328-332 "Lost and Found"
(Important note: not all stories are in all children's bibles!!!!)

Lesson: Just like the father in the Bible story, God accepts us with loving arms wide open and forgives us when we apologize for making mistakes that hurt others or ourselves. *Illustration by Brian W. Chalmers*

Condensed Class Outline:

The Family Book

The Prodigal Son Story

Activity

Major themes and Teaching points:

(Teachers, although these aren't ALL the themes in today's stories, these are four to be sure to drive home with the kids.)

Family: There are lots of different ways to be a family. No matter how many or how few people we have in our families, and no matter how different we may look or seem from each other, all of our families have the most important thing in common—we all love each other.

Celebrating and accepting diversity: When people have families that look different from ours, that's ok. It's nice to have so many different kinds of families. We should be happy to have so many different kinds of friends.

What is God like?: God is a member of our family. In fact, God is like a parent to all people, children and adults alike! God created all of us and loves us equally ("the same") and unconditionally ("no matter what").

Mistakes/Sins and Forgiveness: When we make mistakes that hurt other people or hurt ourselves, God isn't happy. But when we say our mistakes out-loud to God and apologize for them ("say we are sorry"), God is thankful and forgives us. God's love for us never goes away, even when God is disappointed with our behavior.

Tips for today's class:

1. As kids trickle in from church, have crayons and coloring pages or pieces of paper available for them to doodle on before you start. If you have another opening routine you prefer, go for it.

2. **Within five minutes of the first arrival, draw their attention to story time.** "Today we are going to read a story about families." Show them the book. Some of them may have read it. Affirm their comments as appropriate and then ask them to put their eyes on you so that everyone can hear you read: Todd Parr's "The Family Book". As you read, pause every other page or so and ask questions or make your own comments. For example, you might read, "Some families are big. Some families are small." And then, depending on the age group, you could ask either ("How many family members does this bunny have?" and then start counting them, and "How many people are in this family?" Two! So, a large family and a small family. Do both families look happy?) or perhaps ("What do these two families have in common?" -- both smiling, some are different colors, etc). The point is, involve the kids in the story. **Important: Try and avoid words that might subconsciously diminish one of the pictured families.** For example, don't say, "Look, this family *only* has one parent or this family *just* has a dad." Rather, say, "This family has one parent and two children, and the members of this family all look different from each other... Can you tell from the picture that they love each other? How can you tell? Oh, because they are having a party and smiling?" **When you finish the book, drive home themes 1 and 2 from above.**

Next, ask them: Did you know that the Bible has a story about a man with two sons? Let's read it and see what happens in that story! Engage the kids in this story as you did in the last one. As you glance at each sentence in advance, feel free to change the wording if you think it will help the kids understand the story better. **When you finish the book, drive home themes 3 and 4 from above.** One way to do this is by saying: "Jesus told this story as a way of explaining what God is like. God is like the father in this story who opens his arms and gives us a BIG hug when he hasn't seen us in a long time. And, when we mess up and make mistakes that hurt ourselves or hurt other people, and when we say we are sorry and we ask for forgiveness, God wants us to know that we are forgiven and that God always continues to love us, no matter what!!" With advanced

ages, you can even ask questions like, "So, how do we ask God for forgiveness?" and see if you can get them into a little discussion about prayer before you move into your hands-on activity.

Options for Hands-On Activities (choose one appropriate for your age group or create your own!). You can have kids:

- *draw their families (markers, crayons) or use water colors. Create a wall collage.
- * use "magic paper" to create a stained glass window that represents their family.
- *create "God is Love" Cross Magnets (check it out at Oriental Trading)
- *Pre-cut white card stock paper into the shape of shields and have them create a "family crest" that has a symbol on it that represents each family member.