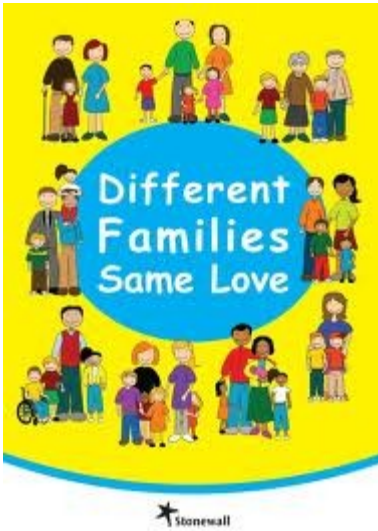


All Families are Different

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.

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

Tips for today's class:

1. Begin with your usual opening routine.
2. **Within five minutes of the first arrival, draw their attention to story time.**
3. **Next, ask them: Did you know that the Bible has a story about a man who needs help and a stranger who helps him? Let's read it and see what happens in that story!** Engage the kids in this story. 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 story, drive home themes 1 and 2 from above.** One way to do this is by saying: "Jesus told this story as a way of explaining how we should treat each other." With older kids you might ask, "Do you think God wants us to treat people the way the 1st traveler did? Or the way the 3rd traveler did? Why?" Younger ages may need it spelled out: "The 1st and 2nd traveler didn't seem to be very nice, did they? What did they do when they saw the man on the side of the road? (Answer: they passed by on the other side! They didn't help him!) "What did the 3rd traveler do that was different?" (Answer: He picked the man up and brought him somewhere he could get better. He even paid for his care with his own money!"

Now, show them the story book saying, **"Well, I happen to have here another book about strangers who realize that they are really neighbors and should help each other.** The book is called: "Four Feet, Two Sandals." ****Before you read, explain that it is a story about two girls in a refugee camp. A refugee camp is a place where sometimes people live if something scary like an earthquake or war happens. For example, many people in Haiti still live in refugee camps, big villages with just tents in them, until their country can be re-built from the earthquake last year. The girls in this story, are in camps because the country they live in has people fighting in it, so they had to move away from the fighting. The girls are hoping to live in houses again soon.****

1. As you read, pause every other page or so and ask questions or make your own comments. For example, you might read the part where people are clamoring for clothing coming off the trucks and you might ask, "Do any of you ever donate your used clothes or toys to people in need? Maybe some of them have gone to refugee camps like this!" Or, ask, "Why do you think the girl just walked away when the other girl said, "Peace be with you? The point is, involve the kids in the story. **Current Teachers: I have placed two sticky notes in the book. One asks you to replace the word 'stupid' with something more appropriate. The other asks you to skip two sentences that feel a bit too mature and aren't crucial to today's lesson.** **Future Teachers: Read the book ahead of time and gauge the appropriateness of certain sections for your age-group!**

When you finish the book, drive home themes 1 and 2 from above again. Ask the group how the girls in the story were good neighbors to each other!

Idea for Hands-On Activity (or chose your own!)

*using the prepackaged "bird house" kits available from Oriental Trading, build and decorate Inns, just like the one the Good Samaritan brought the injured man to. Decorate them with love, to be homes that welcome the stranger!

NOTE: for the youngest ages, you may need to build and glue the houses together BEFORE CLASS which will be time intensive. If you do this, note that you'll need to be creative about how they decorate since drawing on the houses will be challenging. You'll need to either a) paint, or b) use a ton of glue and string and glitter, etc...

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.

