

Overwhelming love

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

Planning

LECTIONARY

Joshua 5.9-12, Psalm 32,
2 Corinthians 5.16-21, **Luke 15.1-3, 11b-32**

Context This fourth Sunday of Lent is also Mothering Sunday and we examine a well-known biblical family story – in which a mother does not feature.

Common thread – Overwhelming love (Luke 15.1-3, 11b-32) Through the familiar story of the prodigal son we discover the generosity of God's love – a love which is so abundant that it never ends, no matter what we do. We link this to the love of those who care for us, though please be aware that for some children this may not be a 'mother'.

Resources for the season See pp.6–11 for the seasonal drama, prayers, craft activities and season setting. Don't forget about the Lenten Calendar **WEB**. Also see Issue 45, pp.12–13.

ROOTS resources Look at *ROOTS Adult & All Age* magazine for further ideas.

Previous issues **WEB** These readings were covered on **21.03.04** and **18.03.07**.

Songs and music Amazing grace! How sweet the sound; Come on and celebrate; Father God, I wonder; God forgave my sin in Jesus name; God is good we sing and shout it; God's love is deeper; O Lord, all the world belongs to you; Oh, once there was a father, KS; There are hundreds of sparrows; There is a God, KS; Safe in the Father's hands, KS.

CHILDREN

Children's Sheet Downloadable activities to use during the session and at home.

Books *Guess how much I love you*, Sam McBratney; *Hug*, Jez Alborough.

Films *The Wild* ; *Finding Nemo* .

Websites For examples of *Love is ...* cartoons, go to <http://www.artfulspreycartoons.co.uk> or <http://www.loveisfan.com>.

YOUNG PEOPLE

Books *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, JK Rowling: Chapter 17: The strength of the love of Harry's mother is revealed.

i Ideas on these two pages can be used with children and young people aged about 3–16. Activities to respond to this week's Bible reading are on the next two pages.

Gather

i Ideas linked to today's theme to gather the group at the start of the session.

Prepare the space

Set out the space with cushions, tables and throws so that it looks comfortable and welcoming.

Display pictures of different generations – parents and children, grandparents and grandchildren.

Gathering activity

You will need: pack of playing cards.

- Set out packs of playing cards face down spread out on a table or floor.
- Invite the group to play 'Pairs', trying to collect as many cards as possible from the same suit (hearts, diamonds, clubs, spades). They should choose a suit to collect.
- Invite people to select two cards at a time. If they are from matching suits the player keeps hold of them; if they are from different suits they should go back down on the table.
- Make a link between the cards being different but from the same suit, the same family.

Gathering prayer

As we approach, you invite us to come closer;
as we draw near, you welcome us;
in your welcome we find peace.
Thank you, loving Father.
Amen.

Tip of the week

Depending on their family structures, some children may want to think of people other than mothers who care for and love them. Encourage them to do this in the discussions and activities throughout the session. Some of this week's activities related to families may raise difficult issues for members of the group. Be aware of sensitivities, and adapt or guide the sessions accordingly.

Open the Word

Based on **Luke 15.1-3, 11b-32**

i A way of presenting this week's Bible reading to your group.

Notes on the Bible reading

The story of the prodigal son is one of the Gospel readings that we all assume we know, yet a re-reading will give us another glimpse or phrase that has not struck us before. For Mothering Sunday it seems strange to have a reading about sons and their father yet Jesus told this parable as a demonstration of God's love – a love which is so abundant it never ends no matter what we do. Unconditional love as demonstrated in the reading is not the experience of all the children and young people you will meet and here we have an opportunity to reveal God's love: to show that core to our Christian message is the message that God loves and values everyone and he does that unconditionally.

The prodigal son

With children

A retelling of the story using a 'story bag'.

You will need: a bag to put everything in; four play figures, finger puppets or card figures **WEB** – one to represent the father and two to represent the sons, and a pig; a bag of money (real or chocolate coins).

■ Begin by explaining that Jesus often told stories about ordinary things but with a hidden meaning (parables). The powerful people of Jesus' time thought God loved them because what they did was right. Jesus didn't tell them they were wrong; instead he told this story.

Take the figures out of the bag as indicated as you talk.

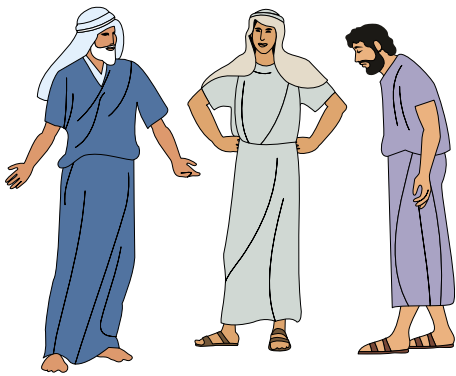
“ There was once a father > TAKE OUT THE FATHER.

who had two sons > TAKE OUT THE TWO SONS.

He loved both his sons very much. One day the younger son came to him

> PUT THE OLDER SON IN THE BAG. and said 'Give me my share of your money'.

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE



This made the father sad but because he loved his son he gave him his share of the money. > TAKE OUT THE BAG OF MONEY.

The son left home and travelled to a faraway country. > WALK THE SON AWAY.

There he spent all of the money. > GIVE COINS OUT AS YOU TALK. He spent it on new clothes, expensive food, fine wine, parties; he bought things for his friends.

Soon he had no money left. > SHAKE THE EMPTY MONEY BAG.

He couldn't afford the parties and expensive clothes any more. But more importantly, he didn't have enough money for food. He was lonely and very hungry.

He found a job working with the pigs. > TAKE OUT THE PIGS. He was so hungry he would have eaten the food the pigs ate.

One day the son said to himself, 'I'll go home and tell my father I'm sorry. I'll ask him to take me as one of his servants.'

The son set off to his father's house. > WALK THE SON TOWARDS THE FATHER. > PAUSE AND ASK THE CHILDREN HOW THEY THINK THE FATHER FELT.

The father wasn't cross or angry. He had missed his younger son. Every day he would go and stand by the road just in case his son returned home. Then one day he saw a figure in the distance. It was his son.

The father ran to meet him and hugged him. > MAKE THE FIGURES RUN TOWARDS EACH OTHER.

'Father,' the son said, 'I'm really sorry. I'm not good enough to be your son, but can I be one of your servants?'

The father hugged his son and said, 'I'm so pleased that you are home. We will have a big party to celebrate.'

The older son soon heard about the party. > BRING OUT THE OLDER SON. He was very

angry! 'It's not fair!' he said to his father, 'I have worked hard for you and you have never had a party for me. But he has wasted all the money and you have a party.'

The father said, 'I love you and I love your brother. I am celebrating because he has returned. I am celebrating because we are back together again.'

With very young children

Main idea: God loves us and will always welcome us.

End the story at 'We will have a big party to celebrate.'

Invite the children to use the puppets to tell their own story based on this parable.

With young people

A mother's story

Tell the story from the point of view of the mother. Start from the party and work back.

- Explain why your husband gave the party.
- Talk about the younger son leaving home and how you felt about that; explain how you missed him and were worried about him.
- Talk about what you think about him being given the money in the first place. Justify it as an opportunity for independence. Talk about making mistakes.
- Then talk about your elder son. Explain that he didn't come to the party. He's never given you any trouble, he's a good boy. But he should have come to the party. He should have been glad that his brother had returned and he should have known how much you and his father loved him.

An alternative dramatic presentation of the story is on the [WEB](#).

On the [WEB](#)

Short story to use with children – it may be used as a response to the Bible reading or to open the theme in an accessible way; **Drama script** for the parable; **Children's Sheet** suitable to use during or after the session or service.

Talk about

i Discussion starters to help the group explore the Bible reading.

Forgiving love

The parable shows the forgiving love of the sons' father, and the forgiving love of God.

How do you think you would feel if you were the son who had spent all the money his father had given him?

Were you surprised by anything that happened in the story?

Why do you think the father welcomed his son back?

What can we learn about God from the story?

A loving parent

Today we celebrate Mothering Sunday, a time to remember all those who care for us. In the story the father rushes to hug his runaway son.

How do you think the father felt when his son returned?

How would you feel if you were the older brother?

How does it feel to know that God's love is for everyone, even those who don't appear to deserve it?

A family's story

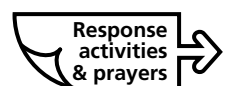
Consider the personal situations of the members of your group before starting this discussion. Some of those living in difficult family situations might welcome an opportunity to share their experiences – others may not. Be aware and listen carefully.

Are there things that you find difficult about life in your household?


Why do you think the elder brother did not come to the party?

What do you think about his behaviour? Might you react in a similar way?

How do you think the mother of this family might have felt?



Respond WITH CHILDREN

i Activities, games and prayers to respond to the Bible reading – see previous page for ways of presenting it. The  shows activities suitable for 3s–5s. Activities more suited to 11s–16s are on the next page.

Overwhelming love

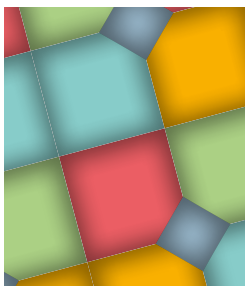
Luke 15.1-3,11b-32

A son is eager to leave the family home and set out on his own. His father gives him his inheritance, which he spends on a lavish lifestyle. When all the money has gone and he is fed up with doing menial jobs, he heads home to ask to be taken back. His father celebrates his return and forgives him.

Patchwork quilt

Continue the patchwork quilt from previous weeks of Lent.

You will need: materials to make a patchwork for the quilt (page 9 in issue 45); felt tip pens or fabric pens; circles (6 cm diameter) of crepe paper or thin material in different colours with a small hole punched in the middle; wool; glue or fabric glue.



- Tell the children that today's patchwork piece is a celebration of the love people show to us. Remind them that flowers are often used as a gift to show our love, to celebrate or to say sorry.
- Ask the children to draw stalks and leaves onto the patchwork piece using felt tip pens or fabric pens.
- Help them to make flowers by taking a selection of the coloured circles and threading a piece of wool through the middle. Tie a knot at either side to secure in place, and scrunch up the circles to make petals.
- Fix the flowers onto the stalks using glue or fabric glue.

Balloon prayers

Balloons to remember God's love for us.

You will need: balloons (at least one for each child, plus spares in case of popping, and some blown up in advance for the younger children); stickers or address labels; a pen; string or wool.

- Remind the children of the party the father had to celebrate his son's return. All the best celebrations have balloons!
- Give everyone a balloon and help to blow them up and tie them.
- Encourage the children to pat the balloons in the air as you say 'Thank you, God, that just as the father loved his son so you love each of us.'
- Write the words 'God Loves ME' on each sticker and help the children to fix one onto their balloon. Give everyone a piece of string to tie onto their balloon to take home.

Giant board game

Play a game to follow the story of the prodigal son.

You will need: pens; dice; A4-size paper.

- Beforehand write these instructions on A4 sheets:
Son asks for money, Dad gives money, Son leaves home, Son spends money, Son has no money!, Son works feeding pigs, Son decides to go home, Son is sorry, Dad forgives, Dad loves.
- Prepare another 10 sheets with 'Go back 1' or 'Go forward 1' written on them.
- Explain to the children that they are going to remember the Bible story by making a 'human board game'.
- Help them to spread the pieces of paper out in a loop to make the game board, making sure the events are in the right order. Place the 'Go back' and 'Go forward' squares at intervals.
- Encourage the children to play the game using themselves as counters. The winner is the first one to reach 'Dad loves'.

Abundant cups

Make a gift for someone who cares for you.

You will need: paper cups (enough for one per child); tissue paper in different colours; heart-shaped sweets and chocolates; strips of paper cut to the same width as the height of the cups; glue and tape.

- Explain to the children that Mothering Sunday is a time when we can show our mums and carers how much we love them.
- Give each of the children a strip of paper.
- Invite them to make a thank you gift for their mum or someone else who cares for and loves them. Chat about who this could be. Do they think the younger son thanked his father for still loving him?

With younger children

- Ask them to decorate the paper strip and help them to fix it around the cup. You could also help them to write a message on the paper.
- Help them to fill the cup with tissue paper.

- They can then put a few heart-shaped sweets or chocolates in the cup.

With older children

- Ask them to write onto the paper things they would like to say to the person who cares for them and loves them.
- They can fix the paper around the cup, and fill the cup as above.

Send out

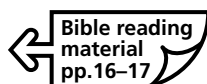
i Gather the children together, give them a copy of the *Children's Sheet* and pray.

Dear God

We know we do lots of things wrong, yet you still want us as your children and you love each of us more than we could ever know.

Thank you. Amen.

(based on Luke 15.21)



Respond WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

i Activities, games and prayers to respond to the Bible reading – see page 17 for ways of presenting it. Activities more suited to 3s–10s are on page 18.

Overwhelming love

Luke 15.1-3,11b-32

A son is eager to leave the family home and set out on his own. His father gives him his inheritance, which he spends on a lavish lifestyle. When all the money has gone and he is fed up with doing menial jobs, he heads home to ask to be taken back. His father celebrates his return and forgives him.

Love is ...

Make a framed picture to show what you think love is.

Friendshin is



You will need: examples of *Love is ...* cartoons (see *Planning* or **WEB**); two pieces of card per person; felt pens or coloured pencils or paints; scissors; glue; glitter; shiny paper.

- Remind the young people that the parable of the prodigal son is about love.
- Ask who shows love to whom in the parable.
- Show your examples of the *Love is ...*

cartoons (by Kim).

- Give everyone their cards. Cut out the centre of one of the cards, leaving a frame about 2 cm wide. Glue the frame to the other card.
- Invite them to make a *Love is ...* picture. It does not have to have a representational drawing. It can simply be a decorated card.
- It should contain the words *Love is* and the sentence completed by the young person.
- They can decorate the frame with the glitter and shiny paper or by drawing or painting.
- It can be a gift for someone (remind them that it is Mothering Sunday) or it can simply be for themselves.

Good news, bad news

Play a game to reflect on family life.

It is better if this game is played by an odd number of people. This may determine whether or not leaders take part. You may need to clarify what you mean by 'family'.

- The first person says *The good news about families is ...* and then makes something up.
- The next person says *The bad news about families is ...* and then adds something, and so it goes around the group.
- You should go around the group at least twice to enable people to say both an item of good news and an item of bad news.

Mother's love

A discussion and film.

You will need: *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* DVD and the means to play it.

- Play the final scenes of the film as Harry recovers in his hospital bed.
- Ask the group why it was that Harry was safe.
- Dumbledore explains that when Harry's mother saved him she left a mark of love on him so strong that it was too much for evil to defeat. Ask:

How would Harry feel to know he was loved so much?

Are there people you love in this way or who love you in this way?

Pig prayers

A creative prayer.

You will need: egg boxes cut into single egg segments; pink paper or paint; black pens; pink pipe-cleaners or chenille sticks; old newspapers; aprons.

- Young people may enjoy a messy prayer!
- Invite each person to make a pig. Give everyone a segment of egg box and ask them to cover it in pink paper or paint. Use a black pen to add eyes and a snout. Cut ears from pink paper and stick onto the pig. Curl the pink pipe cleaner and stick onto the back to form a pig's tail.
- Ask everyone to think of a difficult time in their lives when they have felt lost, like the son feeding the pigs. How did they move on from there? Who could they turn to for help? Invite them to write this person's name or initials inside the egg box segment.

Prayer

A prayer of thanks.

God, our loving parent, you want us to be with you;
you welcome us when we return to you;
you always love us.
Help us to recognise your love and to share it with others.
In Jesus' name,
Amen.

Send out

i Gather the group and close your time together by sending them out to live the message of the session. End with a prayer.

God, our loving parent,
help us to accept the love that is offered to us and to show it to others.
May we never be jealous, always grateful and ever-willing to share.
Amen.

