READY TO USE 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

Although a fictitious story told by Jesus, this is just as relevant today as it was 2,000 years ago. The temptations for ‘wild living’ are stronger than ever and knowing the forgiveness, acceptance and welcome of God our Father is foundational to all our lives.

Be aware that each family will bring their own backgrounds and stories to this event. Some may have their own ‘lost children’ and some may have been that son themselves. As leaders, we need to ensure we are as accepting and welcoming as the father in the story in order to demonstrate the love of our Father God to the families. This story may trigger some emotional reactions or memories for some families, so ensure there is a quiet place prepared if they need a few moments to themselves.

These activities can be used inside or outdoors and are designed to be used as a carousel. Each family will have 15 minutes to do an activity before moving on to the next one. They are a fun way for families to engage with the story and understand afresh the welcome of Father God. Set up each activity in a different part of your meeting space. You may have to run the activities with two or more families at each station, so make sure you have enough resources to do that.

After the carousel activities there is time to reflect together on the story and eat together.

Choose three volunteers to be ‘living actors’, the father and the two sons, to roam around during the event chatting to families as they go.

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 families 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.

The ‘father’ actor should welcome each family to his ‘home’. He should then explain the carousel system to the families so that they know what’s happening. After everyone has arrived and they know where everything is (toilets, fire exits etc), set them off on the carousel of activities, giving each family a set of activity instructions.

## Carousel activities – 15 mins each

**ONE: Grab it**

**You will need:** water pistols; chairs; bags of coins; blindfold

The family should choose one person to be blindfolded and sit on a chair in the middle, holding the full water pistol. The bag of coins is placed behind the chair.

One person is chosen to creep to the chair and try to grab the coins. The person on the chair listens out and sprays the water pistol in the creeper’s direction! Everyone takes turns. You could keep score if you like, either by counting how many times the blindfolded player manages to catch the creeper, or how many times the creeper evades being sprayed!

**TWO: Photo booth story**

**You will need:** items for photo booth pictures including fake beards, old sheets (to make robes), gardening equipment, bags of coins or Monopoly money, empty wine bottle or beer glasses, sunglasses, pig snout, toy binoculars (or homemade), smart robe or coat, a ring, smart sandals or trainers, plates, knives and forks; card and pens to write captions; camera or smartphone; printer; folders (one per family); printouts of Luke 15:11-32

Give the family a copy of the Bible passage. They should take freeze-frame photos of each section of the story, then print them out and keep them in their folder. The story sections are:

**One:** The father and two sons working together in a field.

**Two:** The youngest son asks the father for his share of his money. The father gives it to him.

**Three:** The youngest son parties and spends lots of money.

**Four:** Meanwhile, the oldest son carries on working in the fields.

**Five:** The youngest son has no money left.

**Six:** The youngest son has to work with pigs – he is sad and hungry. He tries to eat the pig food, but then decides to go home and be a servant for his father.

**Seven:** The father sees his youngest son, runs to him and hugs him.

**Eight:** The youngest son says sorry to his father.

**Nine:** The father puts the best clothes and a precious ring on his son.

**Ten:** The father holds a welcome home party.

**Eleven:** The oldest brother is angry and jealous. He has been working all this time and has never been given a party! He argues with his father.

**Twelve:** The father says: “My son, 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.”

**THREE:** Pig food pick ’n’ mix

**You will need:** a bowl and spoon for each family; large containers filled with one each of the following ingredients – carrot peel, oats, sweetcorn or unflavoured popcorn, apple peel, stale bread crusts, limp lettuce leaves

Families should create their own pig food by mixing the ingredients together. Who is brave enough to taste it? Provide some water ready to wash it down with!

**FOUR:** The best robe

**You will need:** an old sheet for each family; fabric pens or paint; sequins; glitter; fabric glue; buttons and other adornments

The family should work together to create their own ‘best robe’. They should use whatever resources you have provided (make sure each family has access to the same range of materials). They should choose one of their family to model the robe.

**FIVE:** Welcome-home party planners

**You will need:** lining paper; pens; balloons; masking tape or Blu Tack

The family should work together to create banners and blow up balloons in order to decorate the meeting space. They should think about what they might write on a welcome home banner, particularly one for someone who has done lots of things wrong!

## CHATTING TOGETHER – 5 mins

**You will need:** a large sheet of paper for each family; pencils and felt-tip pens; *Where’s Wally?* books for ideas

Gather everyone back from their carousel activities. Give each family some paper and art materials. Each family should create their own ‘Where’s the son?’ picture akin to the *Where’s Wally?* books.

While they are drawing, they can chat through some of these questions:

* Why did the son choose to take his inheritance early?
* I wonder how the father felt all the time the son was away.
* What do you think the pig food tasted like?
* Why did the son offer to be a servant when he returned?
* Why did the father hold a party?
* How did the older son feel?
* Which character are you most like?
* What does this story tell us about God?

When completed, the families can swap their pictures with other families and try to find the son.

## 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.

## Welcome Home Party – up to 30 mins

End the time by eating together. Depending on your budget, you can either provide food or ask families to bring picnic food to share. Allow this time to be informal with a celebratory atmosphere.

When everyone has finished eating, families can parade their ‘best robes’ if they would like to!

## 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.

**HELEN HODGSON**

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