

2

Finding Our Way Back

LUKE 15:11-32



GOAL

By engaging stories of repentance and apology, children explore the “turning around” nature of repentance.

- A** Art
- AM** Active/Movement
- C** Conversation
- D** Drama
- F** Food
- G** Game
- M** Music
- NS** Nature/Science
- QC** Quiet/Contemplative
- S** Service
- T** Technology
- X** Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

Loving God, whose grace knows no bounds, help me create space for children to be honest about their mistakes and secure in your love for them. Amen.

THIS SESSION

The Greek word for *repentance* (*metanoia*) literally means “to turn around.” In this session, we consider how to return to God’s path when we have gone astray. In order to do so, we must repent; that is, we must “turn around” and return to the path. But how do we do so? What does individual repentance look like?

THE BIBLE STORY

The parable in Luke 15:11-32 is increasingly known as the parable of the father and two sons, emphasizing the father’s love for both sons (and thus, God’s love for all of us). In this session, though, we focus on the return of the prodigal son, the one who left home and strayed from God’s path. In realizing his mistake, returning home, and apologizing, this wayward son finds his way back to God’s path and serves as a model of repentance for children and adults alike.

CONNECTIONS WITH CHILDREN

Rather than directly practicing repentance, which can’t be forced or staged, children engage in practices of self-reflection that make repentance possible. They consider how their behaviors might be changed to follow God more closely.

SESSION PREPARATION

Consider a time you made a significant apology. Would you say you were repentant? How did you come to know you were wrong? How did you turn around and right any wrong you caused? What was the end result? Rest in the knowledge that God’s grace is sufficient for our foibles, however looming they seem to be to us.

- “Walking God’s Path” (p. 22): Obtain Resource Page 3 from session 1 (p. 17).
- “Observing the Path” (p. 22): Display the *Confess* infographic poster from session 1.



GETTING STARTED



Adjust the game to the size and age of your group; the game may move more swiftly with older groups. Smaller or younger groups may need a lower goal number.

☐ Resource Page 3, session 1 (p. 17)

FALSE STARTS

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Invite the children to sit in a circle. Going around the circle, have the children take turns counting to 100 with each child saying one or two numbers at a time, their choice. If they say one number, the count continues in the direction it is going. If they say two numbers, the count changes directions. If a number or a reversal is missed, play begins again at one. Be sure to include several reversals as you participate.

WALKING GOD’S PATH

Invite the children to repeat after you and follow your motions as you lead them from Resource Page 3 from session 1.



Keep Resource Page 3 from session 1 for sessions 3 and 4.



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

☐ Newspaper, markers

SORRY REQUIRES CHANGE

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Wonder with the children about how we feel when we have recognized, or had it pointed out to us, that we have done something wrong. Invite the children to share stories about times they were sorry. Ask the following questions:

- ✦ What are examples of choices we made that hurt someone else?
- ✦ Have you given someone an apology lately? Who?
- ✦ How did it feel to say *sorry*?
- ✦ What did you do differently after you apologized?
- ✦ Did the other person accept your apology?

Explain that being sorry PLUS changing your ways, wanting to do better, is called *repentance*. God always accepts our apologies (God *forgives* us) and helps us “turn around” and do something different. Write this as a math equation:

$$\text{sorry} + \text{change} = \text{repentance}$$

Tell the children that repentance is a feeling *and* an act, meaning that once we’ve realized that we’ve gone off God’s path, we turn around and get back on it and try to stay on it. Acknowledge that we stumble and stray all of our lives; we do wrong things and make mistakes, but God always welcomes us back to the path of loving God and loving others.

☐ *Confess* infographic poster from session 1

OBSERVING THE PATH

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Display the *Confess* infographic poster and invite the children to look at the overall poster. Review what they see as a main image. Remind them that, in each session of this unit about the practice of confessing, they will look at the path and signposts that make up confession. Today, start at the

Confess sign and go to the *Atone* sign. Note that the “golden thread” that runs through the entire poster, from sin to reconciliation, is God’s presence with us through it all. Spend some time talking together about the two paths that separate. Focus on the personal path and wonder what personal, or individual, sins might be. Note what the pictures represent around the *Repent* sign and how they might help individual repentance. Look at the questions posed along the path for this section.



Keep the *Confess* infographic poster for session 3 and 4.



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL SON



Hand out Bibles and invite volunteers to take turns reading Luke 15:11–32 to the group. Show the YouTube video “God’s Story: Two Sons and a Father” (bit.ly/FMProdigal, 4:06) to hear the story told again, or invite the children to act out the story in their own words. Wonder together:

- How did the dad feel when his son left? How did the son feel?
- When did the son feel sorry? Why?
- What did the son do when he felt sorry?
- Which son stayed on God’s path? Which son(s) ended up on God’s path?

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- Bibles
 - Internet-connected device (optional)



FINDING THE PRACTICE ALL AROUND US

Choose one or both options.

AMAZING GRACE



Tell the children that the author of the beloved hymn “Amazing Grace,” John Newton, wasn’t always the deeply faithful man one might assume. Share a bit of Newton’s story:

- In Newton’s early years in the 1700s, he was involved in the slave trade as the captain of a slave ship. His work hurt many, many people.
- Eventually, he found faith and repented.
- He became a priest in the Church of England and worked hard to end slavery.

Read the words to the first verse of the hymn from a hymnal (*Glory to God*, #649) or show the YouTube video “Amazing Grace with lyrics” (bit.ly/FMGraceLyrics, 4:18), stopping at 2:18. Have a conversation with the children using the following questions:

- What do you think John Newton means when he writes “amazing grace”? (If *grace* is a difficult concept, explain that grace is a gift from God and try substituting “God’s love” when reading “grace.”)
- Why did John Newton think he was a “wretch,” or a bad person?
- How do being lost and being found feel different?
- Who does the author think found him?

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- Internet-connected device or hymnals with the song “Amazing Grace”

- ✦ What do you think the older John Newton, who wrote these words, would want to say to the younger version of himself?
- ✦ How did John Newton repent? From what and to what?
- ✦ When in his life do you think John Newton was on God’s path? When was he off of it?

Internet-connected device

SAYING SORRY

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Tell the children that “Amazing Grace” is a traditional, historical song of confession, acknowledging one’s lost way and overwhelmed by God’s grace to find the path again. Andrew Peterson is an American Christian folk rock musician. “I Want to Say I’m Sorry” is his contemporary song about feeling sorry for a wrong. Show the YouTube video “Andrew Peterson—I Want to Say I’m Sorry (Official Lyric Video)” (bit.ly/FMSorry, 3:02). Wonder with the children:

- ✦ What do you think the singer is sorry about?
- ✦ Do you believe that he’s really sorry? How can you tell?
- ✦ Do you think he’ll do the same thing again?
- ✦ If you were writing a letter like this to someone, what would you want to do better?



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

- Copies of Resource Page 1
- Crayons, markers, or colored pencils

GETTING BACK ON THE PATH

A D

Distribute copies of Resource Page 1. Ask the children what they see in this picture. Point out the main path and the many paths where one has veered off the path and made poor choices. Talk together about the choices that are shown. Encourage the children to draw a picture in the boxes showing how the children in the illustrations could make a better choice and return to the path. Suggest that it may be helpful to draw stick figures.

Encourage the children to consider the choices they make and whether they are staying on God’s path of loving God and loving others or have veered from it. Remind them to pay attention to how they feel when they stray from the path and what they can do to change direction and get back on the path.

If you have time, form small groups and have each group act out a scenario of their own choosing about a wrong choice and what actions can be taken to do better.



This activity attempts to take an abstract concept and make it concrete, which is difficult for many children. Younger children may need to complete this activity as a group instead of individually.

DAILY EXAMEN



☐ Internet-connected device (optional)

The examen is a form of prayer based on the spirituality of St. Ignatius of Loyola and commonly used in the Jesuit community. Asking simple questions and allowing time to consider the answers, it can help us take stock of our day and God's presence throughout it. The examen is traditionally prayed at the end of the day but can be used whenever a time of self-reflection is needed. It can be a useful tool for considering ways we might need to repent, or turn around and change our actions, to find our way back to God's path.

Lead the children in the examen by encouraging them to get into a comfortable position and close their eyes, as they feel comfortable. Encourage the children to consider the questions as you ask them. Allow time for quiet reflection between each question. When the prayer time has ended, invite the children to share their responses if they would like to.

- Where have you been and what have you done today? Who have you seen?
- When were you the happiest today? The saddest?
- Where did you see God's love today?
- Where did you show God's love today?
- Was there a time you feel like you turned off God's path? If so, what do you need to do to turn back onto the path?
- What are you thankful for today?

Encourage the children to try this type of reflection at the end of each day.



A recorded version of the examen, adapted for children, is available at bit.ly/FMChildrenExamen and in the Pray As You Go app for smartphones.



FOLLOWING JESUS

Lead the children in the following back-and-forth litany. If your context allows, don't be afraid to celebrate God's love loudly!

Leader: Is there anything you can do to make God love you any more?

Children: No!

Leader: Is there anything you can do to make God love you any less?

Children: No!

Leader: God's love never quits.

Children: God loves us all-the-way and always!

Getting Back on the Path

