

## God Loves Us, No Matter What!

In this unit students learn about forgiveness and reconciliation. In Part 1 they explore the parable of The Prodigal Son/The Forgiving Father with a focus on the actions and responses of each character, and relate the teachings of this parable to their own experiences. In Part 2 students learn about how the Catholic community celebrates God's forgiveness and the reconciliation between people in the sacrament of Penance.

### DOCTRINAL FOCUS

In planning to teach this unit the following references from the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church are recommended:

**#211** The divine name 'I Am' or 'He Is' expresses God's faithfulness: despite the faithlessness of men's sin and the punishment it deserves, he keeps 'steadfast love for thousands'. By going so far as to give up his own Son for us, God reveals that he is 'rich in mercy'. By giving his life to free us from sin, Jesus reveals that he himself bears the divine name: 'When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will realise that "I AM" '.

(See *Compendium #40 Why is the revelation of God's name important?*)

**#1846** The gospel is the revelation in Jesus Christ of God's mercy to sinners. The angel announced to Joseph: 'You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins'. The same is true of the Eucharist, the sacrament of Redemption: 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins'.

(See *Compendium #391 What does the acceptance of God's mercy require from us?*)

**#1439** *The process of conversion and repentance* was described by Jesus in the parable of the Prodigal Son, at the centre of which is the merciful father. The fascination of illusory freedom, the abandonment of the father's house; the extreme misery in which the son finds himself after squandering his fortune; his deep humiliation at finding himself obliged to feed swine, and still worse, at wanting to feed on the husks the pigs ate; his reflection on all he has lost; his repentance and decision to declare himself guilty before his father; the journey back; the father's generous welcome; the father's joy – all these are characteristic of the process of conversion. The beautiful robe, the ring, and the festive banquet are symbols of that new life – pure, worthy, and joyful – of anyone who returns to God and to the bosom of his family, which is the Church. Only the heart of Christ, who knows the depths of his Father's love, could reveal to us the abyss of his mercy in so simple and beautiful a way.

### SPIRITUAL REFLECTION FOR TEACHERS

Living in relationships requires of us that we are able both to give and to receive forgiveness. It is not always easy to forgive, but holding on to the hurt causes rifts that just get more and more difficult to mend. Do you have someone in your life who needs your forgiveness? Are you able to forgive and move forward in your relationships?

When Peter asked Jesus how many times we must forgive, Peter himself offered the number seven, suggesting perfect forgiveness, but Jesus said, 'seventy times seven' (Mt 18: 22); there is just no limit to the amount of forgiveness we must offer each other. How are you challenged by Jesus Christ's command to forgive 'seventy times seven'?

We are invited to receive God's unconditional healing and forgiveness through the sacrament of Penance. In this sacrament we celebrate our reconciliation with God, with ourselves and with each other. Take time to reflect on your experiences of the sacrament of Reconciliation.

## LINKS WITH STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES

Students first experience forgiveness in family life. They see it take place among adults and among parents with siblings. They also know and feel it first-hand in these relationships. Classroom life is the other place they experience forgiveness. *How have you developed a value for forgiveness in the classroom? How do students know when they have or haven't been forgiven? What actions, words and feelings do they associate with forgiveness?*

Our ability to deal with hurt, anger, conflict and forgiveness can sometimes be influenced by our image of God. *How do the students imagine God? Is their image one of a loving and forgiving God who gives people a second chance?*

## EXPLANATION OF SCRIPTURE

### Lk 15: 11–24                      **The Prodigal Son/The Forgiving Father**

The story of The Forgiving Father (also known as The Prodigal Son) is the third in a series of parables, given by Jesus, of God's mercy and forgiveness. It is sometimes known as the gospel within the gospel. The image of God that Jesus puts before us in this parable is that of an affectionate father who forgets that he has more than just cause for anger with his selfish, spendthrift son. Instead of remonstrations the disgraced boy is welcomed with an embrace that covers his carefully rehearsed confession, and which forgives and reinstates him. Anger is swallowed up by the father's depth of understanding of the misery of both his erring sons, for the older son is also trapped in lovelessness and jealousy. The father waits, ready to accept instantly the first sign that his sons will return to him, but the story is left open-ended. Will the young spendthrift stay with his father after his hunger abates and he has recovered his dignity?; and will the older boy overcome his jealous rage and secret resentment of his father and enter the feast? This multi-levelled story is one of the greatest of the parables in Luke's Gospel. See Henri Nouwen's *The Return of The Prodigal Son* for an in-depth but accessible examination of this parable.

## POSSIBILITIES FOR PRAYER AND WORSHIP

### Prayer Celebration 1:

- Decorate the prayer space using coloured cloth, candle, Bible.
- Sit in a circle around the prayer space with each student holding a cut-out heart with the words 'Welcome Home' written across it.

- Light the candle and make the Sign of the Cross.
- Proclaim the word (Lk 15: 11–24).
- Sing a suitable song, e.g. 'I'm Sorry' (Christopher Walker, *Stories and Songs of Jesus*, OCP Publications).
- Invite each student to place their heart on the prayer cloth saying 'God welcomes me' as they do so.
- Pray the prayer from *KWL*, 2nd edn, Book 2, Chapter 10, p. 113.
- Introduce students to the short Act of Contrition in *KWL*, 2nd edn, Book 2, Chapter 10, p. 203.
- Students are asked to think about ideas to be included in a short class prayer asking for God's forgiveness. Pray this class prayer throughout the unit. Students could also journal a prayer, understanding that it will not be shared with anyone.
- Learn some 'forgiveness' songs or songs about making peace. Learn a song like the 'Prodigal Round', with actions, by Jack Miffleton, *Wake Up the Earth*.

### **Prayer Celebration 2:**

- Create a prayer space using coloured cloth, candle, Bible.
- Sing a suitable song about peace or forgiveness.
- Welcome the students and make the Sign of the Cross.
- Use the story of the Prodigal Son as the scripture reading. This may be read in parts. It may be done in 'frozen pictures' with a narrator or broken into sections with a sung antiphon.
- Play some quiet music and invite students to:
  1. close their eyes and still their bodies, hands resting on their laps (10 seconds)
  2. become aware of their breathing (30 seconds)
  3. imagine, as they breathe in, they are breathing in the light of God's love and forgiveness (1 minute)
  4. imagine, as they breathe out, they are breathing out all the darkness of things for which they need to say sorry (1 minute)
  5. breathe in the light, breathe out the darkness (15 seconds)
  6. open their eyes when they are ready.
- Say the Act of Contrition together.
- Sing a suitable song about peace or reconciliation or God's love.
- Celebrate a penitential service.

**Related Chapters** – *KWL*, 2nd edn, Book 2: Chapter 10, Welcome Home.

**Faith concepts:** reconciliation, love, relationships, forgiveness, sacrament.

**Understandings:**

Reconciliation helps us to rebuild friendships with others and with God.

Jesus Christ is the model for loving and forgiving.

God invites people to love, care for and forgive others.

God loves and forgives people.

The sacrament of Penance has prayers, words and actions that celebrate God’s love and forgiveness.

**Unit specific learning:**

<b>Students will learn about</b>	<b>Students will learn to</b>	<b>Students will undertake to</b>
<i>Knowledge and Understanding</i>	<i>Reasoning &amp; Responding</i>	<i>Personal &amp; Communal Engagement</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ways in which they experience forgiveness and reconciliation in their lives.</li> <li>• Ways in which Jesus Christ forgives in the gospels.</li> <li>• The actions and reactions of the characters in the Prodigal Son.</li> <li>• The actions and words used to express forgiveness and healing.</li> <li>• The actions and symbols of the sacrament of Penance.</li> <li>• The sacrament of Penance as a time when we celebrate God’s forgiveness.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Express their feelings and ideas about forgiveness and healing.</li> <li>• Relate the themes of the parable of the Prodigal Son to their own lives.</li> <li>• Reflect on their experiences of forgiving and being forgiven in light of new learning.</li> <li>• Compose a prayer of sorrow.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participate in a penitential celebration.</li> </ul>

## Part 1: Forgiveness

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
<p>The parable of <b><i>The Prodigal Son</i></b> is found in Lk 15: 11–32, where it is the third and final member of a trilogy, being immediately preceded by <i>The Lost Sheep</i> and <i>The Lost Coin</i>. The Prodigal Son refers to a son who returned home after squandering his family's assets. The parable of <b><i>The Prodigal Son</i></b>, also called the parable of <i>The Forgiving Father</i>, is often used in association with reconciliation and forgiveness. The father in this story is an image of God.</p>	<p><b>Telling the Story</b>            Play a game of silent ball. When a ball is rolled to a student they state a feeling they have felt when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– they have been hurt (e.g. rejected)</li> <li>– they have been forgiven (e.g. loved)</li> <li>– they have hurt someone (e.g. guilty)</li> <li>– they have forgiven another (e.g. good)</li> </ul> <p>Create a word bank based on student responses. Students sort words into categories: 'hurt' words and 'forgiving' words.</p>	<p><b>Assessment for Learning</b>            This activity will indicate students' understanding, perceptions and experiences of hurt and forgiveness.</p>
<p>In this parable we encounter something very unexpected. The return of the undeserving son was <b>celebrated</b>, when we might have expected him to be severely punished. Why? Engaging with your students in wondering what this parable is about will help each student to discover something about the boundlessly lavish nature of God's love.</p>	<p><b>Responding</b>            Students select one word from each category and illustrate a time in their lives when they have experienced that feeling, or find images from newspapers and magazines which match the feeling.</p>	

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<p>In this presentation of the parable the focus is on the first section, the story of the younger son. The verses dealing with the older brother are not told. The story ends as the father began the celebration of his son's return home. The father in this story loved his son so much that he gave him the freedom to make his own choices. The father waited with open arms and ready forgiveness to welcome his son back, regardless of what he had done. The story reveals to us the lavish love and forgiveness of God. God's love is beyond the limitations of our understanding.</p> <p>Through the power of the parable story foundations can be laid for the students to develop an understanding of people loving and forgiving.</p>	<p><b>Telling the Story</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Read a picture storybook about forgiveness such as (Teddi Doleski, <i>The Hurt: Parables for Kids</i>). Identify key themes in the story. Discuss actions, feelings and consequences in the story. Use a graphic organiser to record students' responses.</li> </ul> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Before</th> <th>Middle</th> <th>End</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Action/Event</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Feeling</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Consequence</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Read <i>KWL</i>, 2nd edn, Book 2, Chapter 10, pp. 106–111.</li> </ul> <p><b>Wondering</b></p> <p>Invite students to wonder with you using the 'I Wonder' section in <i>KWL</i>, 2nd edn, Book 2, Chapter 10, p. 112.</p>		Before	Middle	End	Action/Event				Feeling				Consequence				
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Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
<p>It is important to recognise that students will focus on different aspects of the story. Some parts may relate more to their experience or understanding than others. Really try to ‘hear’ and ‘receive’ what they are saying. In so doing we model for the students the importance of listening to and learning from others.</p>	<p><b>Responding</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Present a giant puppet play to retell the story. Students work in small groups. Use two large A3 sheets of paper stapled together. Students draw and decorate the faces of the characters using materials such as crepe paper, wool, tissue paper, etc. Use a ruler to hold up the faces of the puppet.</li> </ul> <p>Students prepare and present the puppet play to the class. The play can be presented in the form of readers’ theatre (<i>Just Imagine 2</i>, Wintour, R).</p>	<p><b>Assessment of Learning</b></p> <p>This activity will indicate students’ understanding of the story of The Forgiving Father.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students select a Scripture story ‘what if’ alternative to discuss with a partner. What if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– the son didn’t go</li> <li>– the father didn’t give him money</li> <li>– the younger son spent it wisely</li> <li>– the older son wanted the money</li> <li>– the son didn’t come home</li> <li>– the father didn’t forgive</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Students record their discussion to share with the class.</p>	

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reread the story of the Forgiving Father.</li> </ul> <p>Identify key themes in the story. Discuss actions, feelings, and consequences in the story. Use a graphic organiser to record students' responses.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Before</th> <th>Middle</th> <th>End</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Action/Event</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Feeling</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Consequence</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Before	Middle	End	Action/Event				Feeling				Consequence				<p><b>Assessment of Learning</b> This activity will demonstrate students' understanding of the key characters and some of the themes in the story of The Forgiving Father.</p> <p><b>Assessment of Learning</b> This activity will demonstrate students' ability to relate the themes of the parable to their life experience.</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students complete diary entries from the perspective of the different characters in the story of the Forgiving Father.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Assessment of Learning</b> This activity will demonstrate students' ability to make connections between Scripture and their life experience.</p>																
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>List the three main characters in the story of the Forgiving Father (father, older brother, younger brother). Students think of a person in their lives who has acted in a way similar to each character. Students may write or illustrate their ideas.</li> </ul>																	

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	<p><b>Wondering</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What does the parable tell us about Jesus Christ?</li> <li>• What is the message of the story?</li> </ul> <p>Students complete the following: <i>the Prodigal Son teaches me ...</i></p> <p><b>Suggested Home Activity</b></p> <p>Students write and decorate a copy of the prayer in <i>KWL</i>, 2nd edn, Book 2, Chapter 10, p. 113. Students take this prayer home to pray together with their families.</p> <p><b>Praying the Word</b></p> <p>Students prepare for a prayer liturgy. They trace one hand on paper and write a prayer of sorrow on it. Place it in the prayer circle.</p> <p>Students participate in a prayer liturgy based on 'The Forgiving Father' (Lk 15: 11–24).</p>	<p><b>Assessment of Learning</b></p> <p>This activity will demonstrate students' ability to write a prayer of sorrow.</p>

## Part 2: The Sacrament of Penance

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
<p>The Church celebrates the boundless forgiveness of God through the <b>sacrament of Penance</b>. This sacrament brings about through word and gesture the restoration of relationship with God and others. Through the sacrament of ministry of the priest the Church community continues Jesus Christ’s ministry of forgiveness.</p> <p>Human beings, created in the image and likeness of God, are called into <b>relationship</b> with God. As such, we are called to live in right relationship with ourselves, others, God and all creation.</p> <p>We have the freedom to make <b>choices</b>. Sometimes we make choices that enhance life and <b>build</b> relationship. At other times we make choices that diminish life and <b>break</b> relationships. <b>Sin</b> is the term used to describe <b>deliberate</b> actions or attitudes that erode or <b>destroy</b> relationships with God and others. It is important that students come to see that they are capable of making choices that <b>build</b> relationships and make them grow, or choices that <b>break</b> and damage relationships. Our choices affect others. The unit is laying the foundations for future understanding of sacraments and issues of ethics and morality in the Christian life.</p>	<p><b>Telling the Story</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Key concept words:</b> <i>reconciliation, love, relationship, sacrament, forgiveness.</i></li> </ul> <p>Write key concept words on paper and place around the room. In groups students rotate around each key word and write as much as possible about that word. Students spend two minutes per word.</p> <p>Meet back as a class and share findings to create a class glossary of faith concepts.</p> <p>Explain any key words that are not understood.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read <i>KWL</i>, 2nd edn, Book 2, Chapter 10, Part 2, pp. 116–117</li> </ul>	<p><b>Assessment for Learning</b></p> <p>This activity will indicate students’ prior understanding and perceptions of the faith concepts of Penance.</p>

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
<p>Human beings need to be forgiven. We often find we have damaged relationships by the way we behave – we sin by failing to love. For a relationship to be restored there needs to be reconciliation – an apology, willingness to forgive and heal. Hence, reconciliation is a deeply human experience. It is also a deeply religious experience. God forgives us without limit. God, who is forgiving, invites us to forgive others.</p> <p>Engaging with the students in wondering about reconciliation will help them to begin to reflect on the choices they make in relation to others. It is important that students are given the opportunity to wonder about and reflect on their own experiences of forgiveness – both of being forgiven, and of forgiving another.</p>	<p><b>Wondering</b> Invite students to wonder with you using the ‘I Wonder’, section in <i>KWL</i>, 2nd edn, Book 2, Chapter 10, p. 118.</p>	
	<p><b>Responding</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students identify the sequence of the sacrament of Penance. In groups students artistically represent a symbol or action of each part of the sacrament. Collate each group’s representation and use these to display the sequence of the rite.</li> <li>• Students make a prayer card for someone they know who has celebrated the sacrament of Penance or who is preparing to celebrate the sacrament.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Assessment for Learning</b> This activity will demonstrate students’ understanding of the actions and symbols of the sacrament of Penance.</p>

Additional Reading for Teachers	Learning & Teaching Sequence	Assessment
<p><b>The sacrament of Penance</b> or Reconciliation is the sacramental way that people seek and experience forgiveness within the Catholic community. In the sacrament Christ, through the Church (in the words and actions of the priest), brings God's forgiveness. The sacrament helps people acknowledge responsibility for their sins. As part of the sacrament, people express sorrow for their sinfulness and celebrate God's forgiveness.</p> <p>To be reconciled is to make peace and <b>restore</b> the bond of relationship that sin has destroyed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learn and sing a suitable song.</li> <li>• Invite a student who has received the sacrament of Penance to talk to the class to share their experience of the sacrament of Reconciliation.</li> </ul> <p><b>Praying the Word</b> Students prepare and participate in a prayer liturgy based on James 5: 13–16. Include a song and the version of Psalm 51 in <i>KWL</i>, 2nd edn, Book 2, Chapter 10, p. 118.</p>	

## RESOURCES

### *To Know, Worship and Love, 2nd Edition*

Book 2: Chapter 10, Welcome Home.

### CDs

Freeburg, P and Walker, C 1994, 'I Am Sorry' in *Stories and Songs of Jesus*, OCP Publications.

Miffleton, J 1984, 'Prodigal Round', in *Wake Up the Earth*, North American Liturgy Resources.

### Teacher Resources

Nouwen, H 1992, *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming*, Doubleday, New York.

Dobson, D & Dobson J 1999, *Parables for Kids: 8 Contemporary Stories Based On Best Loved Bible Parables*, Library of Congress, USA.

Wintour, R 2002, *Just Imagine 2: More Creative Ways of Presenting Scripture*, Mountjoy Enterprises, Brisbane.

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION STANDARDS

This unit may be used to assess some of the Level 2 standards.

Students interpret biblical stories and stories in Church Tradition by making a response and expressing their own ideas, feelings and perceptions. Students recognise the Christian messages of love and stewardship by identifying the strengths and shortcomings of both their own and others' ideas, actions and feelings.