

God's Gift of Forgiveness

Teaching Plan

Teaching Tips

Ahead of introducing *God's Gift of Forgiveness* to the children, take time to familiarize yourself with the contents. Review this handout and how it correlates to the children's resource.

The resource is designed for children to interact with. Have the children follow along as you read aloud, and engage them in hands-on interaction with the resource, as suggested in the teaching steps below.

Background

We know that God has created us out of love and makes us part of his loving family in our Baptism. But when we make unloving choices—when we sin—we become alienated from God and his family. God continues to call us back, through his Son Jesus, in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, where we experience God's forgiveness, grace, and love. This is why we say that Reconciliation is a sacrament of God's love.

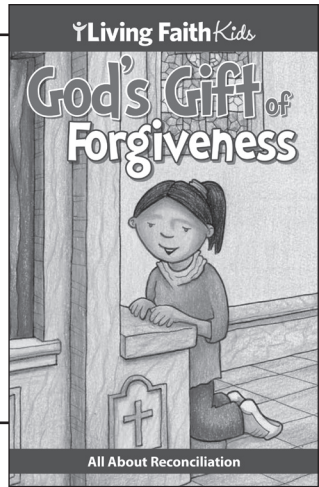
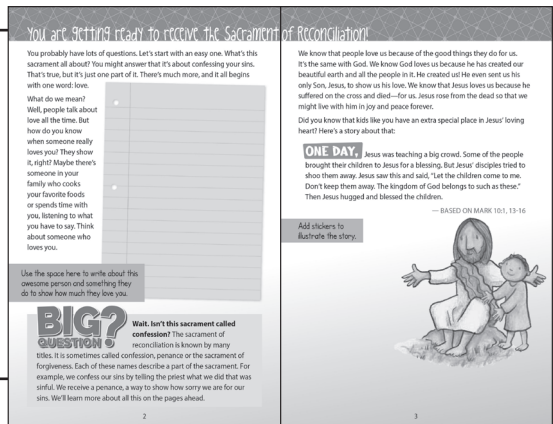
This booklet explains some of the concepts and symbols related to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, to help children prepare for and review the sacrament. Take note of the key words and concepts on each set of pages and how they connect to the sacrament: love, family, mercy, forgiveness, gifts, celebration, and peace.

Opening Prayer

Begin your lessons with prayer. Use the following or modify it each time you pray it with the group.

Jesus, we love you! We love our family. When we make choices that hurt the people we love, remind us that you always love us. Show us how to come to you in the Sacrament of Reconciliation to receive your forgiveness and healing. Amen.

Teaching Steps

Page(s)		
COVER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Direct the children to look at the cover of their booklets. Read the main title aloud. Ask, <i>Can you remember a time when someone forgave you for something you did? How did it make you feel? Loved? Accepted?</i> Discuss the art. Ask, <i>How do you think the child is feeling in this picture? Is the child talking or listening?</i> Explain that in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, Jesus wants us to talk and share about ourselves. We'll learn about what to say and how to get ready in this booklet. 	
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read aloud the header on page 2. Announce the date, if you know it, for the children's First Reconciliation. Share positive memories of your own experience receiving the sacrament. Read aloud the first paragraph on page 2. Reiterate the last line by asking, <i>What does it all begin with?</i> Love Read the next paragraph and instructions for the drawing. Once the children have finished, invite them to share and talk about their drawings. Read the "Big Question" text. Have the children underline the other names for the sacrament. 	
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read the text on the top of page 3. Then read the story aloud to the children. You might invite them to close their eyes and imagine what is happening as you read. Then have the children turn to the sticker sheet and add the appropriate stickers to show what happened in the story. 	

- **Read aloud the header on page 4.** Then read the paragraph beneath it. You might wish to read the paragraph a second time for emphasis.
- **Help the children complete the comic.** Invite them to spend a few minutes thinking about a memory. Explain that the boxes provide room to share more than one picture. In the first box, they might draw how they got ready for this event, or what happened before it. The middle boxes might show the event or memory itself. The last boxes might show what happened afterwards. Or they might use the boxes to share about several different memories.
- **Read the paragraph beneath the comic.** Ask, *Who is part of God's family?* Affirm and accept all answers. Then read the Gospel story at the top of page 5. Ask, *Whose voice came from above?* God's
- **Read the paragraph beneath the story.** Invite the children to think about what it means to be part of God's family and share their responses. To stimulate discussion, explain about people you know who are in heaven (family, friends, canonized saints, etc.) or other Catholics you might know around the world. Ask the children if they know of anyone else in Heaven.
- **Read the "Big Question" text.** Ask, *Have you ever been to a baptism?* Invite the children to share what they know about what happens at baptisms and share your own experiences as well.
- **Help the children find and place the sticker** in the Gospel story illustration.

WELCOME TO THE FAMILY

To understand reconciliation, there's more to know about love. And the best places to learn about love are in our families. Your family's love is special. It keeps you close to others where you go. The closer you love when you gather for special times, you might also share memories or even family plans. Can you think of a special family memory right now?

Use the space here to draw a scene about the special memory. Use the stickers to record your story.

You are also part of God's family! God loves his family and wants to keep us close to him, where we go and where we live. He wants to be close to each other and gather together when we can. Who else is part of God's family? Read the story on the next page to find out.

JOHN

John was baptizing people in a river called the Jordan. Jesus came and asked John to baptize him. John was shocked. "I need to be baptized by you," he said. "And yet you are coming to me?" Jesus said that this was what he wanted. "Allow it now," Jesus said. "Because it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." After Jesus was baptized, he came up from the water and the sky opened up. The Spirit of God could be seen coming down like a dove onto Jesus. A voice came from above, saying, "This is my beloved Son. I am well pleased with him."

—BASED ON MATTHEW 3:13-17

At his baptism, Jesus shows us that he is God's son. Jesus invites us to be baptized so that we, too, can live as God's children. At our baptisms, we are welcomed into God's great big family. We join countless other people who have been baptized just as Jesus was. Another way to describe God's family is the Church. That's everyone all around the world who has been baptized. That's people in church and people in homes, like Mary, the saints and people you know who have been baptized. So for a moment and think about what it means to be part of God's amazing family.

BIG? QUESTION

What if I haven't been baptized yet? God's love is infinite and never-ending. It doesn't stop with people who are baptized. God loves you and me, too. He wants you to join his family of children in baptism. When you choose to be baptized, you're saying "yes" to God's invitation. Imagine how happy that makes God!

For each pair (6-7, 8-9, etc.), follow the steps below.

- **Introduce each page pair by reading the header at the top.** Ask thought questions to emphasize these key concepts. For example, ask, *What does it mean to forgive?* (page 6); *How do you feel when you are invited somewhere?* (page 8); *What do you suppose God's gifts are?* (page 10).
- **Have the children circle words in boldface type.** Many of these words will relate to activities on these pages.
- **Read aloud each paragraph.** When finished with each page spread, ask questions that refer back to the headline. For example, after completing page 7 you might ask, *How did forgiveness happen in this family?*
- **Pause occasionally** to ask review and clarifying questions such as:

Page 7: *Why did the dad want to celebrate and rejoice?* His son was lost and had been found.

FAMILY FEELS FORGIVENESS

Even though families love each other, they sometimes make poor choices. Jesus once told a story about this.

ALAN had to leave. He planned to leave all of his money to them when he died, but his younger son didn't want to wait. "Please give me something now," he said. So his dad gave him everything that was coming to him. The son took the money and left home. He spent all of his money things that he had nothing left. The only job he could find was caring for pigs. He was so hungry that even the pigs' food made him feel sick. He was so sad and alone. He had lost his home. While he was out a long way off, his father spotted him. Filled with compassion, his father ran to him. He hugged and kissed him. "Father," the son said, "I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son." The father told his servants to bring out the finest clothes, a ring and some sandals for his son. "Let's celebrate with a good meal," he said. "Because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again. He was lost and has been found."

BIG? QUESTION When God forgives everyone? How is it going as we are sorry for what we've done. God will never stop loving us!

When the older son heard about it, he was angry. "All those years I served you, and you never did anything for me," he complained to his dad. "Yet you never gave me even the smallest gift. But when your son spends all your money and returns home, you throw a party for him?" The father answered, "My son, you are with me always. Everything I have is yours. But now you hardly ever celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again. He was lost and has been found."

—BASED ON LUKE 15:11-32

This story is called the Parable of the Prodigal Son. "Prodigal" means spending money carelessly. Jesus wanted to show how God our Father is like the father in the story. Even when we mess up, God still loves us with great compassion. Another word for compassion is mercy.

Find the words in the story in bold letters that come from the dad's mouth to fill in the spaces here.

M. _____
E. _____
R. _____
C. _____
Y. _____

GOD ALWAYS INVITES US HOME

The Prodigal Son made a choice to turn away from people who loved him. That's what sin is. It is choosing to turn away from God and God's family. It might be cheating on a test, not being truthful or using bad words. Every sin hurts someone, even if we can't see it right away. Sin also hurts us. It hurts the whole family of God.

Remember the story of Adam and Eve? They lived in a beautiful garden. Everything was good and perfect, and gave them a safe, free and joyful life. And everything they wanted was right there. But then one day, they decided to do anything they wanted except that from a certain tree. At first, Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden tree, and they were happy. But soon they were tempted to eat the fruit, and they chose to do it. As a result, we were made to feel pain, and they chose to do it. They felt lonely and sad. They were embarrassed and they hid from God. They felt lonely and sad and left their God.

Adam and Eve hid from God and cut off their relationship with God. Like Adam and Eve, we sometimes have a hard time being up to the hurt we cause when we sin. We might be embarrassed and try to hide. That doesn't help. And it's not what God wants for us. Sin separates us from God, and the people we love—our friends, family and the whole family of our Church. That's why Jesus wants to forgive our sins and heal the link we cause in our relationship when we sin. Like the Prodigal Son, we just have to go to our Father and ask forgiveness. God is like the father in the story. He sees us, even when we turn away. He looks us with love, mercy and compassion.

BIG? QUESTION What if I've only committed a tiny sin and I'm not sure if my relationship with God is broken? God knows if I just tell him what God wants for us. We're not sinners. We are called sinners. But if we're serious, we can actually break our relationship with God. But God wants it all in the sacrament of reconciliation!

Jesus explained how happy God is to forgive us:

SAY you are a beautiful thing and you are good. Would you please come to me often and search for the lost until you find it? Then you would pick it up and carry it home on your shoulders. You would call your friends and neighbors and say...

—BASED ON LUKE 15:4-8

Think the words by drawing in the from one sheep to the next in the order of above, write in the box.

ME FOUND MY
LOST SHEEP WITH
HAVE BECAUSE REJOICE

Page 8: **What is sin?** Choosing to turn away from God and his family

Page 10: **What is free will?** The ability to make our own choices

Page 12: **Who did Jesus promise to send?** The Holy Spirit

Page 13: **Who are we speaking to when we talk to the priest in the Sacrament of Reconciliation?** God

Page 14: **How will you celebrate after you receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation?**

- **Offer guidance.** If needed, help the children find and place the stickers and complete the activities on pages 7, 9, and 15. Note that the examination of conscience on page 11 is an individual, personal activity and children should not be expected to share their answers. Give them time to think about these questions silently, and encourage them to do this type of examination often, especially before receiving the sacrament.
- **Use the “Big Question” text to discover other questions** children may have about the sacrament. For example, after reading the question on page 11, you might ask if the children have any questions about what to say if they don’t have any sins to confess. Answer: Simply tell the priest you can’t think of anything. The priest may ask questions to help you.
- **Help the children practice for the sacrament** by role playing. You might have children take turns playing the priest while you play a person receiving the sacrament.

Closing Prayer

Lead the children in prayer.

**God, our Loving Father, you never stop loving us.
Thank you for helping us stay close to you through
your Son Jesus and your gift of Reconciliation. Amen.**

Living Faith Kids

God’s Gift of Forgiveness was written by Connie Clark and corresponding Teaching Pages developed by Connie Clark, David Dziena, David Mead, and Lindsay Taylor. Illustrations by Jim Burrows. Images by Shutterstock. Design by Jamie Wyatt. © 2021 Creative Communications for the Parish, a Division of Bayard, Inc., 1564 Fencorp Drive, Fenton, MO 63026, 800-325-9414. www.creativecommunications.com. All rights reserved. Printed in the USA.

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