

RESCUED

God's Story. Your Invitation.

Session 6: Come Home

Luke 15:11-24 • about 55 minutes • Leader Guide for 6th Grade TRE

Part 1: Before You Begin

Read this before class. Tonight is about what returning to God actually looks like, told through the best story Jesus ever told. It leads naturally to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and it should end with the door to Confession open, not with pressure to walk through it tonight.

Where we are in the story

The students have met Jesus, watched him seek the lost, seen that he is God, watched him die for them, and met him risen. Tonight the question turns personal: what happens when someone who belongs to God walks away, and then wants to come back? Next week: how we live this together in the Church.

Tonight's aim

Students discover that the father in the parable runs to his son before the son can finish his apology, and that coming home to God is exactly like that. By the end of the hour every student should be able to say, in their own words, that God's mercy is waiting for anyone who turns around, and that the Sacrament of Reconciliation is where Catholics come home.

The passage in plain terms

A younger son asks his father for his share of the inheritance early. Many readers hear that request as a deep insult, as if he wished his father were already gone; Luke records the request, not the son's feelings. The father gives it. The son leaves for a far country, wastes everything, and ends up feeding pigs, so hungry he wants their food (15:11-16). Then, Luke says, he came to himself (15:17). He plans a speech: Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants (15:18-19).

He heads home. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him (15:20). The son starts his speech and never gets to the part about being a servant. The father is already calling for the best robe, a ring, shoes, and the fatted calf: this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found (15:22-24).

Two details for the students. First, the father sees the son while he is still far off; Luke does not say he was watching, but we can imagine it. Second, the father runs to welcome his son before the son begins his confession.

What the Church teaches

The Church uses this parable to describe the whole process of conversion and repentance: the son's misery, the moment he comes to himself, his journey home, and the father's generous welcome (CCC 1439). It is the Church's own picture of what happens in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

The Church calls this sacrament by several names: conversion, Penance, Confession, forgiveness, and Reconciliation (CCC 1423-1424), and it teaches that the priest acts in the person of Christ as his sacramental minister, so that it is Jesus himself who forgives through the priest's absolution (CCC 1441-1442, 1448). The parable shows the Father's heart; the sacrament's own foundation is John 20:21-23, where the risen Jesus gives his apostles the authority to forgive sins, and tonight the students read that verse themselves. Before sending them toward Confession, give them the shape of it: examine your conscience, be sorry, intend to turn away from sin, confess honestly to the priest, receive absolution, do your penance, and try to repair the harm (CCC 1451, 1456, 1459-1460).

Be honest about the difference between feeling sorry and turning around. The son felt his hunger for a long time before he came to himself and started walking. Repentance is a direction, not just a feeling. And do not assume every student has already made First Reconciliation, or has a close relationship with an earthly father; the parable is about God, and some students will need that said out loud.

Saints who said yes

St. Augustine

We met him in Session 2: the young man who ran from God for years while his mother prayed. He is also the man who came home. When he finally turned around, he did not sneak back; he wrote a whole book, the *Confessions*, telling God the truth about everything. He learned what the prodigal son learned: the father was watching the road the whole time.

St. John Vianney

A parish priest in a small French village in the 1800s who was not a strong student and almost did not get ordained. But people came from all over France to confess their sins to him, and he spent up to sixteen hours a day in the confessional. He is remembered for saying that God's mercy is greater than any sin. The Church made him the patron saint of parish priests, the men who sit where the father stood, watching the road.

Questions students may ask

- Why did the father give him the money in the first place? Because love does not force anyone to stay. God lets us walk away. He does not stop loving us while we are gone.
- Did the son really repent, or was he just hungry? Both. It started with hunger, and it became a decision to go home and tell the truth. God can use anything, even an empty stomach, to turn us around. What matters is that he walked.

- Why do Catholics confess to a priest instead of just to God? Because Jesus gave his apostles the authority to forgive sins (John 20:21-23), and that authority has been handed down to priests. The priest is Christ's minister in the sacrament: when he says the words of absolution, it is Jesus who forgives you and brings you back to his Church. And you get to hear it.
- What if I am scared to go to Confession? Nearly everyone is, the first time and sometimes every time. The son rehearsed his speech too. You can tell the priest you are nervous or do not remember what to do, and he will help you. He is there to help you come home.

Materials

Catholic Bibles with page numbers ready for Luke 15, Isaiah 55, and John 20, pencils, name tents, reflection cards. Bring the parish Confession schedule to hand out.

Timed plan

Welcome and opening prayer, 5 minutes. Opening situation, 4. Reading Luke 15:11-24 in segments, 5. Discovery questions, 17. Flashback to Isaiah 55, 5. John 20:21-23, 4. Personal question, 4. Catholic connection, 8. Prayer, one step, and closing, 3.

If you are running long: shorten the opening situation to one answer. Never cut question 3, John 20, the Catholic connection, or the prayer.

Part 2: Discussion Guide

OPENING PRAYER

Leader prays, everyone answers Amen. Father, you watch the road for every one of us. Tonight, help us come to ourselves, turn around, and walk home. Amen.

WHERE WE ARE IN THE STORY

Read aloud: *We have met Jesus, seen him seek the lost, seen that he is God, watched him die for us, and met him alive. Tonight Jesus tells a story about what it looks like to come back to God after walking away.*

OPENING SITUATION

Read aloud: *Imagine you did something wrong, and you know you need to tell someone, but you keep putting it off. Every day it gets a little harder. What are you afraid will happen when you finally say it? What would make it easier?*

Leader: Keep it fictional; no one is asked to disclose anything real. Two or three answers. Then say: Jesus told a story about someone in exactly that spot.

READ LUKE 15:11-24

Read the passage in segments, in parts: a narrator, the younger son, and the father. Read verses 11 to 16, then question 1. Read verses 17 to 20, then questions 2 and 3. Read verses 21 to 24, then questions 4 and 5. Anyone may pass on reading aloud. Give the page number for Luke 15 before you start.

Leader: Some students will know this as the Prodigal Son. Prodigal means wasteful. We are reading only through verse 24 tonight; the older brother in verses 25 to 32 is a story for another day.

DISCOVERY QUESTIONS

Read verses 11 to 16

1. In verses 11 to 16, what does the younger son ask for, what does he do with it, and how bad does it get?

Answer • share after the discussion

He asks for his share of the inheritance now, while his father is still alive, a request most readers hear as a deep insult. Then he goes far away and wastes all of it. Then a famine hits, he has nothing, and he takes a job feeding pigs, which for a Jewish boy was about as low as it could go. He is so hungry he wants to eat the pigs' food, and nobody gives him anything. He has hit bottom.

Read verses 17 to 20

2. Verse 17 says he came to himself. What does he decide to do, and what does he plan to say (verses 18 and 19)?

Answer • share after the discussion

He decides to go home and tell his father the truth: I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son. He plans to ask for a job as a servant. He does not expect to be a son again. He just wants to be home.

3. Read verse 20 slowly. What does the father do when he sees his son, and when does he see him?

Answer • share after the discussion

He sees him while he is still far off; we can imagine him watching the road. He has compassion, he runs, he embraces him, and he kisses him, all before the son says a single word. The father does not wait for the speech.

Leader: This is the heart of the night. Let the students find every verb in the verse: saw, had compassion, ran, embraced, kissed.

Read verses 21 to 24

4. Compare what the son planned to say (verses 18 and 19) with what he actually gets to say (verse 21). What part does he never finish?

Answer • share after the discussion

He never gets to the part about being a hired servant; Luke moves straight to the father's orders. The son came home hoping for a job, and the father gives him back his place as a son: the best robe, a ring, shoes, and a feast. He gets more than he dared to ask for.

5. What do you think Jesus wants his listeners to understand about coming back to God?

Answer • share after the discussion

That God is like this father. He does not wait for us with his arms crossed; he runs when he sees us turn around. Coming home to God is not about getting the speech right. It is about turning around and walking. He does the rest.

FLASHBACK: ABUNDANTLY PARDON

Read aloud: *The father ran. Six hundred years before Jesus told that story, a prophet said the same thing about God. We flash back to Isaiah, where God is calling his people to return to him and receive mercy.*

Read Isaiah 55:6-7 (give the page number; one reader)

1. What does the prophet tell the unrighteous man to do, and what does he promise God will do?

Answer • share after the discussion

Return to the LORD, and God will have mercy on him; he will abundantly pardon. Not barely pardon. Abundantly. The robe and the ring and the feast in tonight's story are what abundantly looks like when a son comes home.

BACK TO THE PRESENT

Read aloud: *Back to the road home. The son had a speech ready about being a servant, and the father was already running.*

FIND IT: JOHN 20:21-23

Read aloud: *The story shows us the Father's heart. Now find where Jesus gives his Church the power to forgive. Turn to John 20, verses 21 to 23, and read them aloud. What does Jesus breathe on the apostles, and what does he give them the authority to do?*

Answer • share after the discussion

On Easter night, the risen Jesus breathes on the apostles and says, Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven. He gives them the authority to forgive sins in his name. That authority has been handed down to bishops and priests ever since, and it is why Catholics confess to a priest: Jesus himself forgives, through the priest.

Leader: *Give page numbers. This verse is the sacramental link; the parable is the picture of the Father's heart.*

THE PERSONAL QUESTION

Read aloud: *What is the difference between feeling sorry about something and actually taking a step to put it right? Think of one thing in your own life. What would the step be? Write one word on your reflection card.*

Leader: *A full minute. No sharing. This is a private question by design.*

THE CATHOLIC CONNECTION

Share after the discussion

Here is what the Church says about tonight. The Church uses this exact story to describe what happens when a person turns back to God (CCC 1439). There is the misery, the moment of coming to yourself, the walk home, and the father's welcome. Catholics have a place where that walk home happens. It is called the Sacrament of Reconciliation, or Confession.

Here is what happens in Confession. You examine your conscience, you are sorry for your sins, and you intend to turn away from them. You honestly confess your sins to the priest. Through the priest's absolution, Christ himself forgives you and brings you back to his Church (CCC 1441-1442, 1448). You do the penance the priest gives you and try to repair the harm you caused. If you are unsure what to do, the priest will help you. And the story shows you the most important thing before you walk in: the one waiting for you is not angry. He runs.

Leader: *Hand out the parish Confession schedule here. Do not pressure anyone to go tonight or name a date; open the door and leave it open. Students depend on adults for rides and permission; invite them to ask for help, and never treat not getting there as unwillingness. If a student has not made First Reconciliation or is not baptized, handle it privately with a parent; never ask sacramental status in front of the group, and never ask students to tell the group their sins.*

PRAYER

Leader: *Remind them, every time: you do not have to feel anything special. Feelings are not the measure of God's grace.*

Read aloud: *Let us pray. Talk to God in your head while I say these words. Father, I have wandered off in ways only you and I know. Help me come to myself and turn around. I know you are watching the road. Amen.*

ONE STEP THIS WEEK

Read aloud: *One thing this week. Those of you who are baptized Catholics and have prepared for Confession: ask your family to help you go before our next session. The schedule is in your hand, and your family can go to the church together, each making your own private confession. Those preparing for Baptism or for First Reconciliation: ask the parish, or me, to help with your next step. And everyone, every night this week: Father, I have sinned; help me turn toward you.*

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, you saw us while we were still far off, and you ran. Give us the courage to turn around, and the trust to let you welcome us home. Amen.

MEMORY VERSE

“While he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran.” (Luke 15:20)

Part 3: Leader Reference Card

TONIGHT'S PASSAGE

Luke 15:11-24 (read aloud in segments); flashback Isaiah 55:6-7; John 20:21-23 read live

SUPPORTING REFERENCES

- John 20:21-23 (read live: Jesus gives the apostles authority to forgive sins)
- Luke 15:25-32 (the older brother, not read tonight)

CATECHISM

- CCC 1439 (the parable as the picture of conversion)
- CCC 1423-1424 (the names of the sacrament)
- CCC 1441-1442 and 1448 (Christ forgives through the priest's absolution)
- CCC 1451, 1456, 1459-1460 (contrition, confession, penance)

SAINTS WHO SAID YES

- St. Augustine (Confessions; summarized)
- St. John Vianney (1786-1859, patron of parish priests; summarized)

MATERIALS

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NOTE

Bring the parish Confession schedule. Open the door; do not push anyone through it.