



God's Reconciliation: Worship

'A Dialogue' for adults Sourced from www.lightlive.org

Find 2 readers to play the characters in the dialogue. They may wish to use costume. Allow them time to read and practice together before the session. Keep the conversation snappy.

Read Luke 15:11–32 then introduce the dialogue as follows:

'Jesus told some shocking stories. Our problem is that we have become immune to the shock or just don't understand how they would have sounded when Jesus first told them. So in order to see the impact on first century Jews lets listen to two viewpoints.'

Jude: Stories are part of our heritage. Part of our culture. History has been handed down to us through story and festival. And so the use of stories by Jesus was a welcome method of communication.

Chris: We have called this story 'The prodigal son'.

Jude: Prodigal would seem to be too good a term. He begins, after all, with a heartless demand. The demand for his inheritance.

Chris: In our society the request seems almost reasonable. It could have been a sensible move to avoid tax.

Jude: You must understand that a father with grown up sons would have been an elder statesman in his community. A man commanding huge respect, a man of immense dignity. This was a terrible insult and to say it to his own father – it amounts to saying 'Father, I wish you were dead.' He even went on to sell the land and take the cash. It is hard to think of anything that would have grieved his father more.

Chris: Any parent could tell you where the story might lead. Give a young man lots of money and there'll be extravagance, the wrong friends and then a stretch of bad luck and before you know it there's nothing left.

Jude: He ended up with the pigs, which for a Jewish boy was the lowest of the low. A job that had with it a curse. There was no way back from such disgrace.

Chris: So deciding to go home was unlikely.

Jude: It was a move that would have shocked the community. But we are in the realm of stories here and of course those first listeners would have been eager to hear one of the return from exile stories. They were looking for release from the Romans and a new kingdom of God. Jesus even used that phrase about the son

being dead and now being alive, which could have been borrowed from the great exile dream the valley of the dry bones. Although it was a family tale it has the makings of a good kingdom story.

Chris: But the son couldn't bank on a welcome. In fact he only hoped to be a labourer hired by the day, not even a family slave.

Jude: The welcome he got was shockingly over the top. The father actually ran to meet him, no man of his status would ever run and then he threw a ridiculously lavish party.

Chris: Perhaps that was because Jesus liked to party. Eating and drinking with people was something he really seemed to enjoy.

Jude: I am not sure that that was wise or a good example. The people who partied with him were not those who adhere to the rules of our religion. They were not the best examples of our society. I don't think I would have felt particularly comfortable joining in.

Chris: The older brother in the story had a similar view. He seemed to think that there was too much of a celebration for someone who had been so insulting to his father and had disgraced the family name. In fact he went so far as to complain in front of the guests.

Jude: Well he saw himself as the injured party – for years he did the work, stayed at home, and toed the family line. But the way the father pleaded with him was completely undignified. In our world such a step would have been unlikely.

Chris: The story is left hanging. With your background, what would you think the older son would have done?

Jude: Yes, unusual not to complete the story. One presumes it was so that the hearers worked out the ending for themselves.

Chris: Of course, the older son has the perfect opportunity to join in. His father had explained the situation and had actually come out of the party to invite him in.

Jude: But then we have to remember the party was celebrating a man who had blown his father's gift on immoral living. His brother probably felt that his reputation and his standing in society were more important. He may well have felt it prudent to stay outside.

Chris: Like those, I suppose, who criticised Jesus for partying with the riff-raff.

Jude: One is caught between an invitation to what is obviously meant to be the new kingdom of God and the desire to keep up religious and moral standards.

Chris: (Quietly but distinctly.) We all are.



How do you see yourself? Reflection

Read Luke 15:11-32, then read the following slowly possibly using 4 different readers. Use silence at the end to give people time to think and respond. You could use the response activity below which uses Psalm 32 or the PPT prayer.

1. The view from the pigsty

The younger son saw himself as someone who...
Had lost everything
Had done wrong
Just might be able to return to his father's house.
So he made the move for home.

2. The view from the party doorway

The elder son saw himself as someone who...
Felt badly hurt
Had a legitimate complaint
Tried so hard to get it right
Did not want to be left out, but couldn't join in.
He found it impossible to move, he excluded himself.

3. The view from the father's heart

He saw...
Two sons, both loved and for whom he was prepared to lay aside his dignity.
One making his way back with a confession in his heart, so he welcomed him with forgiveness and love.
One stuck outside with his self-rejection, so he offered him his presence and his pleading.
He invited both to join him in the celebration of a new start where love counts more than dignity and forgiveness more than immorality.

4. What is my view of myself?

Someone who... Has made a complete mess?
Has done something that I feel is unforgivable?
Has tried hard with life?
Cannot shake off the belief that being right is most important?

God's welcome is there however we see ourselves. In the story it depended on the heart of the father, not on the character of the son. That's true in life.



Creative prayer

Based around Luke 15:11-32

1. Play some music while you distribute the pieces of clay pot (ensure that sharp pieces are not given to small children if they are present).
2. Encourage everyone to think of something 'broken' in their life that they could put right, and what they might do about it. For example, if they have broken a promise, argued with a friend, or had a row with their brother.
3. Read out, or say together, the following prayer:
'Lord, we admit that some things have gone wrong in our lives. We offer you these broken pieces, as a sign that we want to learn how to put things right with you and with other people. Amen.'
4. Ask people to bring the pieces to the front, to show that they want to do something about the situations they have been thinking about.

Or

Using Psalm 32

End the service by Celebrate together that God loves to forgive us. Read out Psalm 32:1,2,11. Then give out paper balloon shapes and felt-tip pens. Invite people to write or draw something that they want to say to God about his love and forgiveness. Sing together a lively worship song as the 'balloons' are gathered together and hung up.

Or

Use PPT prayer, which can be found on the AMD web page

Song ideas

And can it be'; 'Before the throne of God above'; 'Father God, I wonder'; 'Faithful one, so unchanging'; 'Father, your love is a faithful love'; 'God forgave my sin'; 'Here is love, vast as the ocean'; 'How deep the Father's love for us'; 'Lord, I come to you'; 'The love of God comes close'; 'There's a place where the streets shine'; 'To be in your presence' and 'Ubi caritas' (an English translation of this song from Taizé is also sung in many churches).

Extra Ideas

Testimony

Ask for someone in the congregation to prepare a testimony on the theme of 'Coming back to God'. Ask them to say how their relationship with God has been affected by experiencing his love and forgiveness.



True stories

The story of the prodigal son is one that has resonance with other stories in other cultures; missionaries have used these to illustrate that God has been reaching out to that group of people all along. Refer to an example from *Christianity Rediscovered* by Vincent J Donovan (SCM Press, 2001 edition, p64).

Illustration

Refer to the popular animated film *Finding Nemo*. The story is an illustration of a father's love for his son. The son, Nemo, leaves his home and father seeking independence and adventure but his father never gives up hope of being reunited with him. There is a clear parallel with the constant love of the father in the Prodigal Son story, and with God's love for us.

Also see:

All Age Lectionary Services Year C Fourth Sunday in Lent by Scripture Union. Available to borrow from Shelley Porter.