

# CREATION



Featuring downloadable clips  
from the film *Creation*,  
in cinemas 25<sup>th</sup> September 2009

## Church Service Outline

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**Theme:** *The Father-love of God*

**Main Bible passage:** *Luke 15:11-32*

### Introduction

This service focuses on our relationship with God the Father. It is based around the parable of the Lost Son in chapter 15 of Luke's Gospel, which uses the love of a human father for his children as a picture of God's love for humanity. This story allows us to explore in the service both the relationship between human parents and children, and also our own relationship with our heavenly Father. Although the service uses some liturgy from the Anglican New Patterns for Worship, our intention is for the service to be usable in a variety of Christian traditions and denominations. Feel free to adapt any elements of the service which do not fit the requirements of your congregation.

The film *Creation* (Icon films, released 25<sup>th</sup> September 2009) tells the story of Charles Darwin's relationship with his devoutly Christian wife, Emma, and explores the impact that his research and the death of their beloved daughter Annie had on each of them. This service does not address the question of how Darwin's theories relate to Christian beliefs about the creation of the world. Instead we are using clips from the film to help us explore the love of God the Father for his children. If you want to explore other issues arising from the film *Creation*, including the subject of evolution and creation, you can find more resources at [www.damaris.org/creationmovie](http://www.damaris.org/creationmovie).

It is worth remembering that for some people the idea of fatherhood, and of God as a Father, is difficult and painful. Some individuals may have bad memories or experiences of a human father (or another parent or family member), and this may make it difficult for them to think of God as a Father – and of themselves as a 'child' of God. It is worth being aware of this as you plan your service and being sensitive to the needs of particular individuals where appropriate, as well as looking to help everyone at the service to grasp something of God's perfect father-love.

## Bible Briefing

Jesus' story in Luke 15:11-32 is the third in a series of three parables about things that are lost. But unlike the preceding lost coin and lost sheep parables, the story of the prodigal son provides insight into the reasons for, and consequences of, the son's 'lostness'. The younger son wants to be free from his father and decides he would rather determine his own course (vv. 12-13). He leaves in search of something better: a life of pleasure without onerous responsibilities. The reaction of the older son to his brother's return (vv. 28-30) betrays the fact that he, too, is in need of reconciliation with his father. The resentment that he shows suggests a lingering, burning sense of grievance rather than an isolated reaction to this single situation. Both sons miss the point: their father doesn't want submissive, servile labour, but the loving companionship of his sons (vv. 31-32).

The same is true of our relationship with God. If our 'Christianity' is merely a matter of duty, devoid of love and true relationship, we will long for something else and will believe that fulfilment and happiness lie elsewhere. And we would be right – Christian faith is first and foremost about a restored relationship with God. A self-proclaimed life of faith that ignores this relationship will be just as unsatisfying as turning our back on God and living a life of hedonistic self-gratification.

God's response is one of loving patience and forgiveness. The cost of reconciliation is entirely on his side. The patriarch in Jesus' parable humbles himself to win back his lost sons. He throws aside his own dignity to run to meet his younger son, embracing him and showering him with love (v. 20). He could choose to speak accusatory words, but instead he is filled with joy and chooses to celebrate (vv. 22-24). And when his older son shuns him publicly (vv. 28-30), he reaches out to him too, assuring him of his equal love (v. 31).

Why did Jesus tell this story? Luke 15:1-2 tells us that the Pharisees were complaining that Jesus was the friend of sinners. In response, Jesus told them a story that showed he was fully aware of the consequences of sin and that he took sin seriously. Choosing to live without God (as the 'sinners' and the younger son did) leads to separation from him and hopelessness (vv. 16-17). However, obeying his laws dutifully without loving him (as the older son and the Pharisees did) leads to an embittered and jealous spirit (vv. 25-28). Neither path leads to relationship with God.

Our only hope lies in God's willingness to humble himself and reach out to each of us in our sin. As Romans 5:8 says: 'God shows his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.'

## Suggested songs and hymns

<i>'Dear Lord and Father of mankind'</i>	(John G. Whittier. Songs of Fellowship; Complete Mission Praise)
<i>'Father God, I wonder'</i>	(Ian Smale. Songs of Fellowship; Worship Today)
<i>'Father, I want you to hold me'</i>	(Brian Doerksen. The Source)
<i>'Hear the call of the kingdom'</i>	(Stuart Townend. Keith Getty and Kristyn Getty; Spring Harvest 2007)
<i>'How deep the father's love for us'</i>	(Stuart Townend. Songs of Fellowship; Worship Today)
<i>'Lord, I come to you (power of your love)'</i>	(Geoff Bullock. Hymns Old & New; The Source; Complete Mission Praise; Songs of Fellowship)
<i>'Praise, my soul, the King of Heaven'</i>	(Henry F. Lyte. Songs of Fellowship)
<i>'O God of love (how good it is)'</i>	(Louise and Nathan Fellingham. Songs of Fellowship)
<i>'O for a closer walk with God'</i>	(William Cowper. Songs of Fellowship; Mission Praise; or the new arrangement by Stuart Townend)

### Before the service

Play the trailer for the film *Creation* as the congregation arrives.

Download from [www.damaris.org/creationfilmclips](http://www.damaris.org/creationfilmclips)

### Leader's introduction to the service

**A very warm welcome to our service. We are going to explore the idea of what it means to be called God's children and to know him as our heavenly Father. We will thank and praise God for being a loving Father to us and ask him in our prayers to help us to live more fully as members of his family.**

As you came in, you may have noticed us playing the trailer for the film *Creation*, which is in cinemas from 25<sup>th</sup> September and which tells the story of Charles Darwin. We are going to be watching two clips from the film during our service, each showing contrasting pictures of the value and worth of children. We will also be looking at Jesus' parable of the Lost Son, from chapter 15 of Luke's Gospel, to help us get a clearer sense of what it means for us to be God's children, and what it means for God to be our Father.

In our prayers, we will ask God to help us to live more fully as his children, so that we might help to draw others into God's family.

We begin our worship with some opening words of praise.

**Leader:** Opening words of praise.

**All:** *See what love the Father has given us,*

**that we should be called the children of God.**

*You are my sons and daughters,  
this day I have begotten you.*

**See what love the Father has given us.**

*As many as received him,  
to them he gave power to become the children of God.*

**See what love the Father has given us.**

*Glory to the Father and to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit.*

**See what love the Father has given us.**

*That we should be called the children of God.*

(cf. 1 John 3:1)



### First hymn/song

## Bible Reading part 1

### Leader's introduction to the reading:

Today we are going to hear our Bible reading in several parts throughout the service. This will allow us to hear the story unfold and to respond to each part of it through our worship. At this point, just before the confession, we hear the dilemma in which the younger son finds himself. As he prepares himself to throw himself on his father's mercy, we do the same before our heavenly Father.

[Read Luke 15:11-19.]

## Confession

**Leader:** In the first part of our story from Luke's Gospel, we heard of the son who runs away from his father's house. After losing everything he set out with, the son realises what he has done. He says to himself: 'I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son...'

Like that son, each one of us has run away from our heavenly Father by the wrong things we have thought, said and done. Let us pause for a moment to bring to mind those things for which we want to ask God's forgiveness.

[A few moments of silence are kept.]

**Let us return to the Lord our God and say to him:**

**All:** *Father,  
we have sinned against heaven and against you.  
We are not worthy to be called your children.  
We turn to you again.  
Have mercy on us,  
bring us back to yourself  
as those who once were dead  
but now have life through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**Leader:** When his son returns, the father is filled with joy. In the same way, our heavenly Father is overjoyed when we return to him. Let us now hear words which assure us of God's forgiveness:

May the God of love  
bring us back to himself,  
forgive us our sins,  
and assure us of his eternal love  
in Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

Hymn/songClip from *Creation* movie**Leader's introduction to the clip:**

We have begun to think about the relationship between a father and his child, and how that mirrors the relationship between us and our heavenly Father. We are now going to see an extract from the film *Creation*, which will help us to think about the value that the world sometimes places on children.

In this part of the film, Charles Darwin is telling stories to amuse his daughter Annie while she poses for a photograph. As you watch, think about the nature of the deal that the sailors offer the islanders, and the way that the islanders respond.

[Show *Clip A: Tierra Del Fuego*]

Download from [www.damaris.org/creationfilmclips](http://www.damaris.org/creationfilmclips)

**Leader's follow-up to the clip:**

What we saw in this part of the film might bring up questions for us, such as:

- How could the explorers (with their Christian background) make such an offer?
- Why did the islanders accept such an offer?
- What does this part of the film seem to say about the attitude at the time towards children?
- What do we think God would say about this attitude?

[You may want to allow people to offer some thoughts in response to the questions.]

There's something appalling about the scene, isn't there? Perhaps that's because we know that children are worth far more than buttons, even shiny ones. Of course, in every period of history, human beings make mistakes and make the wrong choices. In the next part of our service, we will explore something of God's relationship with us, his children, and see how our heavenly Father always offers a welcome to those who have failed or gone the wrong way.

Bible Reading part 2**Leader's introduction to the reading:**

We are going to have the second part of our Bible reading now. We have heard how the son has decided to come home to his father's house. The next part of our Gospel reading shows us the reaction of the father when his son comes home. The father's welcome is a wonderful picture of the joy which God feels about each one of us.

[Read Luke 15:20-24.]

## Sermon Part 1

Parents and children don't always agree, but they will often both agree to one thing: that the other party doesn't understand them. This is particularly true during teenage years, as children are growing towards maturity and establishing their own independence. Even though the concept of being a teenager has been around for only 50 years or so, this isn't just a modern phenomenon. Here is a quote from history which shows us that this misunderstanding between adults and children is nothing new:

*The children now love luxury; they have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise. Children are now tyrants, not the servants of their households. They no longer rise when elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up dainties at the table, cross their legs, and tyrannize their teachers.*

Those words are traditionally attributed to the Greek philosopher Socrates, who lived in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC. If they truly are his words, then it seems that very little has changed in the area of human relationships between parents and their children.

In the story from Luke's Gospel which has been unfolding throughout our service, we have heard about a young man whose disregard for his father and desire to be out on his own tears the family apart. If we want to understand them a little better, it is worth learning something about how such a family would have behaved.

At the beginning of Jesus' story, the younger son asks his father to divide up his property and to give him his share, and his father agrees. The younger son, in order to get together the cash he needed for his journey, must have sold his share of the land on to someone else. This would have had a number of effects. For one thing, it would have reduced the family's standing in their community, as they now had only half as much land as before. For another, it would have brought great shame on the father. By asking for his share while his father was still alive, the younger son was effectively saying to his father, 'I wish you were dead.'

The son's actions show a massive lack of concern for his father's feelings and his standing in the community. Of course, in our society, it is commonplace for children to leave home as they approach adulthood, to set out to college or into the world of work. But in the culture in which Jesus told this story, this was unheard of; the son would bring further shame on his family by leaving home and forsaking his obligation to care for his father in his old age.

And what is the reaction of the father to all of this? Does he argue? Does he disown his son? Does he lecture him on the proper behaviour for a child in such a family? No; he does none of these things. As his son prepares to leave the family home, with money he is not yet entitled to, and with little thought for his father's welfare, the young man's father bears all of these hurts without a word.

At this point in the story, we might begin to expect that something unusual is going on. This isn't the way we would expect a child to behave. More interestingly, it certainly isn't the sort of response we would expect from a parent. What sort of person is this father? What inner strength enables him to accept his son's hurtful request and to allow him to go freely, with no recrimination?

The story then follows the son's journey as he heads to the city, where he squanders his father's hard-earned wealth. In a matter of weeks, the son loses everything which his father worked for years to build up. How much worse could the boy make the situation which he has created? Well, he does manage to take things a little further: Once all of his money is gone, he can only survive by taking a job looking after pigs. For a

young man from a Jewish family, having anything to do with pigs was bad enough; but to be feeding them – and hungry enough to want to share their food – is unthinkable.

By this time, the young man is at the end of the line. He is hungry, penniless, alone and completely disillusioned. He has nowhere left to turn, no route open to him, except for one: he could go home. Of course, this will involve a change of heart – the son resolves to admit that he has hurt his father, and also hurt God. And, what's more, the son decides that what he has done has disqualified him from being called his father's son. It seems that the young man now understands how his behaviour has damaged his relationship with his father. As the story says, 'the son came to his senses', and now he understands what went wrong.

As we think about the son's return home, we could reflect on the title of this story which Jesus told. Traditionally, this story in Luke's Gospel is known as the story of the Lost Son, which seems very appropriate. But it might also be known as the story of the Loving Father, because the most remarkable character in the story turns out not to be the son, but the father. Hold that thought as we watch another clip from *Creation*. In this scene, Charles Darwin talks about his grief for his dead daughter Annie, the girl from the scene we saw earlier. Notice the pain of fatherhood when the child is lost and far away.

[Show Clip J: *A Great Consolation*]

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There's no doubting the love that Charles Darwin, like most fathers, has for his children. There's no missing the intense grief and pain he feels at being separated from them when they have died. Understanding the depths of love that Charles Darwin had for his children can help us to understand the reaction of the father in our parable. The son returns home, but while he is still miles away from the front gate, his father spies him in the distance. Perhaps all this time, he has been scouring the horizon, looking and hoping to see his son's return. And when he sees him, the father is filled not with anger or judgement, but with compassion – he feels love and concern towards his son. And so the father does something which would have been unknown for a man of his time: he runs to meet his son. The father throws aside his dignity in order to reach his son as fast as he can, with his robe tucked into his belt and his coat flapping in the wind.



As the father welcomes his lost son home, we see a picture of God's love for his world, for each individual, for you and for me. The father looks into the distance in the hope of seeing his child coming home; God the Father does the same for any one of his children who have wandered away from him. The father runs to throw his arms around his son on the road; God runs to meet us when we make our journey back to him and is not afraid to lay aside his dignity. The father throws a lavish party to welcome home his son; there is rejoicing in heaven when even one lost child returns to God.

So the son has returned home, and the party is in full swing, but the story isn't quite finished yet. There is still one more strand of the tale to tell, and we are going to hear that read now.

## Bible Reading Part 3

[Read Luke 15:25-32.]

## Sermon Part 2

As the story tells us at the beginning, the father had two sons. The elder son is the opposite to his brother: he is loyal, hard-working and obedient. But the return of his younger brother has angered him: he cannot see why the younger son deserves all this fuss and certainly can't see why he deserves a celebration in his honour.

If we look more closely, we can see that things in the family are more complicated than the elder brother makes out. He has not been working for his father in recent years because, as the property has been divided between the two sons, the elder son is in fact now a partner in the family business. Now that his younger brother has lost his share of the wealth, any money spent on the celebrations will be coming out of the elder brother's share. Looked at like that, it is not hard to see the elder brother's point. Why should the younger son get this special treatment as a reward for his wild living?

But what the elder son does not fully appreciate is his father's love for both of his children. Middle Eastern culture at that time was strongly based on the concepts of honour and shame. It wouldn't have been at all surprising for the father to disown his younger son for the shame he had brought on their family. As we saw in verse 19, that was what the younger son expected, and we can miss just how extravagant an act of love it is for the father to overlook everything that has gone before and to welcome his son back into the bosom of the family.

Perhaps it's understandable that the older son is annoyed at all the attention being lavished on his no-good brother. But the father is not making a special case for the younger son; he doesn't love him any more than the older son, the one who faithfully stood by him when his brother was off sowing his wild oats. As he says himself in verse 31, 'You are always with me, and everything I have is yours.' But he's delighted to have his lost son back again, so he does what many of us might do in such a situation – he throws a party to celebrate!

The beauty and mystery of this story allows us to find a place within it, and to identify with the people, events and emotions it contains. Wherever we find ourselves in this tale, the outrageous love of the father challenges us to think again about our ideas of what it means to be accepted and loved. Both of his children were surprised by such great love. You and I can be wonderfully surprised by the great love which God the Father has for you and me, and for all of his children.

## Hymn/song

## Intercessions

**Leader:** Let us pray to God, our heavenly Father.

**Father of all,**

*All: hear your children's prayer.*

**Your son Jesus Christ showed you to be a loving Father to the world.**

**We pray for those who do not know your love for them,  
or whose idea of a loving God has been damaged and distorted,  
that they may come to know the truth of your love.**

**Father of all,**

*hear your children's prayer.*

**The lost son left the protection of his father's home.**

**We pray for those who have been forced to leave their homes,  
either because of violence or abuse or war,  
that they may find shelter and security.**

**Father of all,**

*hear your children's prayer.*

**The lost son began to be in need, and longed for food and warmth.**

**We pray for the many families in our world who live in poverty and want  
that they may receive a fair income, access to the basic needs of human life  
and the opportunity to live in peace.**

**Father of all,**

*hear your children's prayer.*

**The father watched for the return of his son, and was overjoyed at his safe return.**

**We pray for all parents, that you will give them the wisdom, patience and love  
they need to help their children to grow to maturity.**

**Father of all,**

*hear your children's prayer.*

**The elder son saw his brother's return and could not rejoice.**

**We pray for those who can see only darkness and sadness in life  
that they may be freed from anxiety and loneliness,  
and be helped to see the good in themselves.**

**Father of all,**

*hear your children's prayer.*

**The father showed his love for both the younger and elder son.**

**We pray that we may be able to weep with those who weep  
and to rejoice with those who rejoice  
and that we may all know the love which you have for each one of us.**

**Father of all,**

*hear your children's prayer.*

## Ending

**Leader:** In our worship we have explored the ways in which human beings fall short of the relationship with our heavenly Father. But we have been reminded of the love, acceptance and welcome which God has for us all, regardless of how many times we turn away from him. As our worship ends and we go out into the world, let's ask God to help us to live fully as his children.

In darkness and in light,  
in trouble and in joy,  
help us, heavenly Father,  
to trust your love,  
to serve your purpose,  
and to praise your name;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

## Closing hymn/song



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