

**The
Prodigal
God**

Finding Your Place at the Table

A Discussion Guide

Session One: The Parable

Definition of Prodigal

1. Recklessly extravagant
2. Having spent everything

Before viewing the video

What was your reason for coming to this study?

Have you read the *Prodigal God* book?

Read Luke 15:1-3, 11-32 aloud.

While viewing the video use this space to take notes.

Following the video, these questions are for individual answers and for group discussion.

1. Was there anything in the video that was new to you or had an effect on you? Did you hear anything that raised questions in your mind?

2. Who do you identify more with, the younger brother, or the elder brother? Why?

3. How close is a great feast to your idea of heaven?

You may have many questions after viewing the video that will be answered in more depth over the next five weeks as we proceed through this study. I encourage you to get a copy of the *The Prodigal God* by Timothy Keller. The next session is drawn from the Introduction and Chapter One.

Session Two: The People Around Jesus

"There two types of people around Jesus when he begins to tell the parable. Tax collectors and sinners, Pharisees and teachers of the law. Now, tax collectors and sinners are like the younger brothers. They've run off. They live the way they want. The Pharisees and religious leaders are like the older brother. They stay home, they comply, they are very good."

Session Two: Video Recap

Discussion Questions.

Page references are to *The Prodigal God* book..

1. If you read the Introduction and Chapter One of the book, what was new to you or had an effect on you? Did you read anything that raised questions for you in your mind?
2. Consider the audience to whom Jesus told this parable. What does that tell us about the traditional name of the parable? (see pages xiv and 7-9)
3. How have you seen both religious and irreligious lifestyles lead to spiritual emptiness? Share some examples.
4. Can you think of any other incidents from Jesus' life where he comes into conflict with the Pharisees and teachers of the law? Why do you think they were opposed to Jesus and his teachings?
5. Why do you think many churches are not attracting the broken and marginalized with Jesus' messages of Grace?

Please read Chapter Two and Chapter Three for the next session

Session Three: The Two Lost Sons

"You have two sons – one good, one bad. But both have been alienated from the father. And you come to realize, they both want the father's things but not the father. They've been using the father to get the things they really love – which is the wealth and the status. But one has been doing it by being very, very bad and the other has been doing it by being very, very good."

Session Three: Video Recap

Discussion Questions.

Page references are to *The Prodigal God* book.

1. If you read the Chapters Two and Chapter Three of the book, what was new to you or had an effect on you? Did you read anything that raised questions for you in your mind?
2. There is no evil that the father's love cannot pardon and cover, there is no sin that is a match for his grace. (p. 24)

How can this be seen in this parable, in other Bible stories, or in your own experience?

3. The younger brother believes he is no longer worthy to be called his father's son. What does that tell you about his view of what it takes to be loved and accepted? Is this view prevalent today?
4. If God's grace is absolutely free and we cannot earn it or merit it in any way, what motivation is there to live an obedient life?
5. You can rebel against God and be alienated from him either by breaking his rules or by keeping all of them diligently" (pp 36-37). Explain this statement using examples, if possible. (See pages 37-39)

6. How do people seek to control God through their obedience?

7. How are the younger and elder brother different? How are they alike? Use the diagram below to collect your thoughts (see pages 33-36)

Younger Brother Characteristics	Shared Characteristics	Elder Brother Characteristics

8. Where does the elder brother find his significance and happiness? Where do we tend to look for our significance and happiness? Be specific.

9. Do you agree or disagree that being the elder brother is a more spiritually desperate condition than being a younger brother? Why? (See pages 46-47)

10. If you asked the average person on the street to define the word "sin", what would they say? How does Jesus challenge this definition in the parable? (see page 43)

Please read Chapter Four before the next session

Session Four: The Elder Brother

“There are two kinds of lostness. That’s the reason Jesus put the elder brother in the parable. You can escape God as much through morality and religion as you can escape God through immorality and irreligion.... Elder brothers obey to get things to from God, and if those things aren’t forthcoming, they very angry.”

Session Four: Video Recap

Discussion Questions.

Page references are to *The Prodigal God* book.

1. If you read the Chapters Four of the book, what was new to you or had an effect on you? Did you read anything that raised questions for you in your mind?
2. One way to fill out the diagram from the last session is below. Add to the elder brother characteristics from what you read in Chapter 4 of the book.

Younger Brother Characteristics	Shared Characteristics	Elder Brother Characteristics
Lives a self indulgent life	Lost	_____
	Wants Contol	_____
Tries to get the father’s things by disobeying	Alienated from father	_____
	Wants father’s things, not father	Lives obedient Life
Breaks the rules	Does not love the father	Tries to get father’s things by being good
	Want happiness	Keeps the rules
Self-discovery	Father has to go to him	Moral Conformity
	Father has to invite him to feast	_____
	Love by the Father	_____ _____

3. Fill out the following table to help you think about the relationships between the people in the parable.

How does the elder brother view ...	himself
	his brother
	his father
At the start of the parable, how does the younger brother view ...	himself
	his brother
	his father

4. “The first sign you have an elder-brother spirit is that when your life doesn’t go as you want, you aren’t just sorrowful but deeply angry and bitter.” (p. 49)

What thoughts, feelings, and assumptions lead to such anger and bitterness? (pages 49-50)

Session Five: The True Elder Brother

"For us there is a true elder brother. There is one who love and obeyed the father completely ... one who earned everything –he earned the robe, he earned the ring, he earned everything. But at the end of his life, what do we see? He doesn't get a robe, he got stripped. He doesn't get the fatted calf, he got vinegar. ... And this true elder brother comes to us and says, "I did it all for you." ... In other words, salvation is obsoletely free, but unbelievably costly for him."

Session Five: Video Recap

Discussion Questions.

Page references are to *The Prodigal God* book.

1. If you read the Chapters Five of the book, what was new to you or had an effect on you? Did you read anything that raised questions for you in your mind?
2. "We will never find God unless he first seeks us." (p.75)
How has this been true in your own experience? Where in the Bible cam we see this?
3. "To truly become Christians we must also repent of the reasons we ever did anything right. Pharisees only repent of their sins, but Christians repent for the very roots of their righteousness, too." (p.78)
How is this explanation different from the way most people understand repentance?
How does this change the way you repent?
4. What would help you identify the "sin under all other sins"? (p 78) How can you dismantle that particular sin beneath other sin?

Session Six: The True Feast of the Father

“According to the Bible, because of true elder brother, God is someday going to make this world home again. He’s going to wipe away all death, and wipe away all suffering, and wipe away all tears, and he’ll give us new bodies that run and are never weary. And it will be the ultimate feast.”

Session Six: Video Recap

Discussion Questions.

Page references are to *The Prodigal God* book.

1. If you read the Chapters Six and Seven of the book, what was new to you or had an effect on you? Did you read anything that raised questions for you in your mind?
2. What positive images come to mind when you hear the word “home”?
3. How is our longing for home explained by the biblical narrative of creation – fall – redemption – restoration?

Creation
(pages 95-96)

Fall
(page 96)

Redemption
(pages 101-102)

Restoration
(pages 102 – 103)

4. “[Jesus] love can become more real to you than the love of anyone else. It can delight, galvanize, and console you.” (p. 108)
How has Jesus’s love delighted, galvanized, or consoled you or someone you know?

5. “The ultimate purpose of [Jesus’ life and death] is not only individual salvation and pardon for sins but also the renewal of this world, the end of disease, poverty, injustice, violence, suffering, and death.” (p. 110)

6. Do you agree with Martin Luther that “religion” is the default mode of the human heart? In what ways can “religion” be an obstacle for us as we seek to obey Christ? (p. 115)

7. “Behavioral compliance to rules without heart-change will be superficial and fleeting.” (p. 119)
How have you found this to be true in your own experience? How then is real, lasting change possible? (pages 118-119)

