

The Prodigal God by Tim Keller

Questions by Will Pavone

Chapter 1

Start out by reading Luke 15:11-32 out loud for the group (you could have a volunteer read also) .

- 1) What are some of your thoughts about this first chapter in Prodigal God?
- 2) How did Dr. Keller's explanation of the historical context help us to see Jesus' purpose for telling the parable?

On P. 10 the author says, "The targets of this story are not "wayward sinners" but religious people who do everything the Bible requires. Jesus is pleading not so much with immoral outsiders as with moral insiders."

- 3) In the context, who were the moral insiders? Why was their morality a hindrance to accepting Jesus' teaching in the gospels? How is our own morality sometimes a hindrance in fully trusting Jesus on a daily basis?
- 4) Dr. Keller asserts that we may not have a lot of "younger brothers" in our churches because churches are more full of elder brothers than we'd like to think. In your experience, do you think this is right? Has there been any hint of an elder brother attitude at any time in your own Christian life?

Let's pray and ask that God would continue to open our eyes to see the truth of this parable and its implications over the next few weeks.

Chapter 2

1) How did we like this 2nd chapter?

- 2) Do you remember what the younger son's request (for his share of the estate) communicated to the Father? (A: It was as if he was saying he wished he were dead).
- 3) What do we learn about the character of the Father in the parable based on his response to the younger son's request? What is the picture of the Father when he sees his son returning after he squandered his inheritance? How does that mirror the heart of God the Father when a sinner comes to Him?
- 4) Speculate as to what the younger son might have been thinking when the Father lavished his love on him? How would he have felt in that moment?
- 5) If you trusted Christ as an adult, what did it mean to you when you realized that God's love and acceptance is a free gift?

6) What was the response of the elder brother when he learned of the feast? Why would he have reacted like that? How was the Father's response counter intuitive once again?

7) What has God been teaching you through this parable and Tim Keller's exposition of it?

Chapter 3

1) What are the two ways to find happiness in this life that Dr. Keller says are illustrated in this parable? (P29) Describe some of the characteristics of each pathway to happiness?

2) Many religious people end up throwing in the towel and pursuing a life of self-discovery (i.e.: a pastor who runs away with his secretary) while others who have lived the younger brother lifestyle for years will turn to religious morality in order to make up for their immorality. **Why is neither one of these paths the way to true fulfillment? Which of the two is more subtly dangerous? Why?**

3) According to Keller both sons were alienated from the Father and the Father extended grace and acceptance to both of them. How did the Father do that for the younger brother? How about the elder brother? So at the end of the parable, who is reconciled to the Father and who is still alienated from Him?

4) What does the author mean when he said that this parable gives us a deeper understanding of sin as being more than just failure to keep God's laws? (P43 middle paragraph answers this succinctly)

5) Keller says: There are two ways to be your own savior and Lord, one is by breaking all the moral laws and setting your own course and the other is by keeping all the moral laws and being very, very good. How does the message of the gospel differ from both of these approaches? (P. 45)

6) Why do we need to remind ourselves of this message everyday?

Chapter 4

1) How are you enjoying the book so far? Could someone summarize the chapter for us?

2) What is "elder-brother lostness"? What are the signs listed throughout the chapter?

3) It is possible for a true believer to have some of the characteristics of elder-brother lostness at times. What are the most common ones in your own experience in Church?

4) Ultimately elder brothers live good lives out of fear not out of joy and love. What aspects of the Christian life can default to being motivated out of fear rather than joy and love? (Answer: things like obedience, giving, coming to church, etc.)

5) Read John 15:11 out loud for the group. How do Jesus' words in John 15:11 help to deconstruct our elder-brother, slavish pursuit of obeying Christ's commands?

6) What kind of prayer life did Keller say is characteristic of an elder brother? Why is this?

7) Next chapter we will begin to see the remedy for our elder-brother-ness but in the meantime, how might we pray for and encourage someone who struggles with elder-brother characteristics?

Chapter 5

1) Both younger and elder brothers need God's initiating love like the Father demonstrates in the parable. Let's start by sharing some things we are thankful for when it comes to God's initiating love towards us.

2) On pages 76-77 Keller talks about a deeper repentance being more than just remorse over bad deeds. Keller says that people must repent of the things they've done wrong but what else must a person repent of? (*Answer: we must repent for the reasons for our right doing, our attempt to be our own savior and lord. The Pharisee's motivation for being "good" was a self-salvation project.*)

3) Since there are similar morals between monotheistic religions, what then is the main distinctive of Christianity? How would you communicate that to a person of another faith?

4) Who does Keller say is our "true elder brother"? How is this so? How does this inspire a deep and abiding trust in our true elder brother?

5) Keller says, "To the degree we see the beauty (worth, value, love, etc.) of our true elder brother we will be free from the fear and neediness that creates either younger brothers or elder brothers." Discuss some practical implications of this statement.

Chapter 6

1) In what way are Christians exiles who are longing for home?

2) At the end of the parable there is a feast of joy and celebration. Dr. Keller relates that feast to a feast in Revelation 19. Do you remember what that feast is?

3) What will the feast that believers are longing for be like? How can these descriptions help us to think more concretely (rather than abstractly) about heaven and our eternal destiny? Did any of the descriptions on page 103 and 104 surprise you when it comes to thinking about heaven?

4) Can someone articulate what our hope is for the future as believers?

5) What specifically has God been teaching you through this parable/book?

Chapter 7

1) As believers in Christ our eternal destiny is the feast of Joy in the Kingdom of our God forever. How should what we believe about the future impact the way we live today? (Keller listed some implications, what were they?)

2) How does Keller say that biblical change takes place? What role does the gospel play in a believer's sanctification?

3) Talk about how you've been encouraged to grow in your faith as a result of being in community throughout your Christian life? How have you been encouraged to grow in this 8week small group experience?

4) What did you like about Prodigal God? How has this book helped you in thinking about God, the gospel, the Christian life?

5) Pray and ask that God would do a mighty work in the lives of the people in this small group through the message of prodigal God.