

PRODIGAL GOD

prod·i·gal - adjective:
1. wastefully or recklessly extravagant
2. lavishly abundant

THE TALE OF TWO BROTHERS & THEIR WASTEFULLY EXTRAVAGANT FATHER

The following questions are intended to help you reflect on your reading of the book, *The Prodigal God*. They are also intended to form the basis of discussion questions for use in our Gospel Communities. The leader should select which questions are most appropriate, and take the initiative to take the group in the direction they feel the Spirit is leading them.

A NOTE ON WHAT A GOSPEL COMMUNITY IS

The reason our small groups are called a 'gospel community' and not a 'community group' or 'bible study' is because we want to be absolutely clear about their purpose. Our groups are to be places in which the gospel is brought to bare on the sins and situations of our life, so that the gospel would be believed and lived. As such, we are not just interested in studying the Bible, but seek to discover and being changed by the new layers and insights we find in the gospel. We are not just interested in talking in the abstract, but applying the gospel to each of our lives. Am I greedy? I need to know Christ's generosity in giving up his riches for me (2 Cor 8:9). Am I controlling? I need to know that Christ give up controlling his life to bring me life, and that therefore I can trust him to control my life (Phil 2:5-11). Am I anxious? I need to know that if God did the greater thing, in giving up his son for us, will he not do the lesser thing in giving us all things we need (Rom 8:32). Bringing the

gospel to bare on our lives does not just happen in a 'classroom' or a 'discussion group,' but happens the same as it happened for Jesus disciples: on the journey, over meals, during recreation, and after synagogue (i.e. church). Therefore we are a *gospel community*, and seek to do life together so that our brothers and sisters would see where we have stopped believing the gospel, and be able to bring it to bare on our life. Oh how we need this!

CHAPTER 3: REDEFINING SIN

Read Luke 15

1. Which of the two brothers in Jesus story would it be more dangerous to be? (cf. p. 47)
2. How is sin like a misguided quest for happiness? (cf. p. 29) Explain the two ways people try to find happiness as represented by the younger and older brother. (p. 29-30)
3. Keller uses the actions of the younger brother and the elder brother as an illustration of two ways people look at everything around them. He says, "*Each acts as a lens coloring how you see all of life, or as a paradigm shaping your understanding of everything. Each is a way of finding personal significance and worth, of addressing the ills of the world, and of determining right from wrong.*" (p. 29) Which of these lens colors the way you see all of life?
4. Perhaps you're a mix of these two ways to view life, perhaps you shift between moral conformity and self-discovery, if so why do you think you shift between these two?
 - a. Think about the reasons why at times in your life you have:
 - i. rebelled against community standards to peruse your own goals and aspirations
 - ii. given up personal freedom to conform to the standards of your community
5. What makes both brothers in the story lost? (p. 34)

6. Keller says that both the younger brother and the elder brother were chasing after the wealth of their father as a means to happiness. What did they use this wealth for?
 - a. Are you more tempted by freedom from things or control of things?
 - b. "Careful obedience to God's law may serve as a strategy for rebelling against God." (p. 37) Discuss

7. Despite seeking happiness in different ways, how are the older and younger brothers identical in what they want most in life? (p. 35)
 - a. What is the difference between obeying God to get things, and obeying God to get God? Is the difference all that significant?

8. What kept the elder brother from entering into the joy of the father? (v. 29)
 - a. Keller says, "*The elder brother is not losing the father's love in spite of his goodness, but because of it.*" (pg. 35) What was Keller trying to point out about the nature of sin in elder brother types?

9.
 - a. What would most people in the church say that sin is?
 - b. How does Jesus redefine sin? (vv. 12-14, 20; p. 43) How is it more than just failing to keep God's standards?

10. Religious people divide up the world by "good people" and "bad people" while irreligious people divide up the world by "self-discovered people" and "self-deceived people" (p. 32). How does Jesus divide up the world according to Keller?

	What is their fall narrative: <i>what is wrong with the world?</i>	What is their redemption narrative: <i>what will fix the world?</i>
<i>Younger brothers</i>		
<i>Older brothers</i>		
<i>Jesus</i>		

11. Why is the older brother son angry? (p. 38)
 - a. *“If, like the elder brother, you believe that God ought to bless you and help you because you have worked so hard to obey him and be a good person, then Jesus may be your helper, your example, even your inspiration, but he is not your Savior. You are serving as your own Savior.”* (p. 38) If anger, obedience and blessing are connected, how might you sever the root of anger in your life?

12. What is the only prerequisite for receiving the God’s grace? (Luke 18:14)

13. In the gospel “everyone is wrong, everyone is loved, and everyone is called to recognize this and change.” (p. 45) Is this the gospel proclaimed by the church today? Do you?

14.
 - a. Write out a confession of your inner younger brother sins and give your accountability partner a copy of it.
 - b. Write out a confession of your inner elder brother sins and give your accountability partner a copy of it.