



WORTHY

Discussion Guide Week 2

Last time we focused on the character of the father in the story and considered where we are on our spiritual journeys. Have someone share a quick recap of your previous discussion. This week, we will focus on the experience of the listeners by reflectively listening to the story again ourselves.

Introduction

Jesus told this story to the religious leaders of his day because they were misunderstanding and misrepresenting God's love. They criticized and judged Jesus for loving those they saw as unworthy and undeserving, much like the older son in the story. The story was meant to help them see a picture of God's love and see themselves more clearly.

We want this story to help us better see God and ourselves as well. To do that, we'll reflectively read the story, engaging our senses and using our imagination. Choose a facilitator to read the story and instructions in blue below out loud.

Activity: Reflective Reading

Get comfortable; you may want to close your eyes to help you listen. As the story starts, visualize the scene that plays out in front of you. Imagine that you're a cousin in the family, watching this interaction go down:

¹¹ Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. ¹³ "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. ¹⁴ After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. ¹⁷ "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸ I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' ²⁰ So he got up and went to his father.

(Pause)

Take a minute to reflect on these questions:

- *What is it like seeing your cousin or sibling reach this point? What emotions do you feel for him?*
Pause and give ~1 min of silence to reflect on the question before moving on.
- *What do you wish you could tell your cousin right now?*
Pause and give another ~30 seconds of silence to reflect on this question before moving on.

Let's continue with the story.

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

²¹ "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²² "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate. ²⁵ "Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ²⁷ 'Your brother has come,' he replied,

'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'²⁸ "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him.²⁹ But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends.³⁰ But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!' "³¹ "My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.'³² But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'"

(Pause)

Pretend that Jesus is standing next to you, seeing all of this happen.

- *If you could ask him any question about what's happening in front of you, what would you ask him?* Pause and give ~1 min of silence to reflect on the question before moving on.
- *Ask Jesus what he wants you to know about his love.* Pause and give another ~1 min of silence to reflect on this question before moving on.

Debrief & Share

1. What was that activity like for you? How easy or difficult was it to imagine the story? Did anything surprise you?
2. Share about your interaction with Jesus and what you learned about God's love.

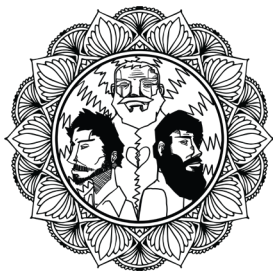
Discuss

Jesus told these stories that have deeper spiritual meanings. Here are questions to guide your discussion:



1. In the story, the younger son's actions and shame make him feel disqualified to be loved by the father. The older son believes his obedience has merited him love, yet he feels unloved and unrecognized by the father. In your opinion, what makes a person good or worthy to be loved by God? How does that impact how you live every day?

Christian worldview: This image represents that God created humanity out of love. The world was meant to be a loving place, one where we are accepted and valued, not because of what we do but because of who we are. Humanity was meant to be free and flourish, centered and grounded in God's love and acceptance.



2. The world around us doesn't seem like the loving place that God intended. Why do you think that is? What accounts for the evil and pain that we see around us?

Christian worldview: This image represents how humanity doubted God's love. In our selfishness, we untethered ourselves from God and wanted to live life on our own terms. We try to regain that sense of self-worth independent from God. But, trying to find love because of what we do will make us lose who we are. Our selfishness has affected how we see ourselves, our relationships, and even our relationship with God.

3. How do you think God feels about the current state of our world?

Next Steps

In the next week, take 5 minutes a day and try praying on your own. Ask Jesus, "Will you show me more of your love today? Is there anything you want to say to me?" Listen and see if you hear or see anything in prayer.