

# Parable of the Prodigal Son

How You View God Matters

WEEK 4

## OVERVIEW

1. Do I see myself or do I see God?
2. Do I see a God who values my performance or my presence?
3. Do I see God as a relationship or a roadblock?

## OPENING QUESTION

How would you describe your view of God? What images or words come to mind?

## INTRODUCTION

Our view of God matters, because when we see God in the wrong way, we won't want to listen or talk to him.

When we understand how generous and loving God really is, we will want to have a close relationship with him.

In this study, we'll ask ourselves three questions to better understand our view of God.

More resources at  
[deepspirituality.com/parables](http://deepspirituality.com/parables)

## 1. DO I SEE MYSELF OR DO I SEE GOD?

*Jesus told them this story: "A man had two sons. The younger son told his father, 'I want my share of your estate now before you die.' So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons.*

– **Luke 15:11-12 NLT**

- **How did the sons view God?** We can learn a lot about our view of God from how the sons see their father.
- **The younger son's view of God:** The younger son doesn't see his father as a person or a relationship, but as someone who should give him what he wants (money) on demand. The younger son is focused on himself and what he can get from his father. His wants, rather than his relationships, consume him.
- **How entitlement affects our view of God:** He has an attitude of "You owe me because I'm me," which is entitlement. Entitlement hurts our view of God because it turns him into a resource. Though God does want to provide for us, he is more than a resource. He wants a relationship with us.
- **How does this relate to me?** The son's entitlement doesn't stop the father from loving him, but that entitlement does affect the way the son views and treats his father.

### How our view of God can change

Let's take a look at what the younger son did after his father generously gave him what he wanted:

*"A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and moved to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money in wild living. About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve. He persuaded a local farmer to hire him, and the man sent him into his fields to feed the pigs. The young man became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him. But no one gave him anything. When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, 'At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger! I will go home to my father and say, "Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no...*

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## NOTES

## 1. DO I SEE MYSELF OR DO I SEE GOD? (CONT'D)

*...longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant.” – Luke 15:13-19 NLT*

- **The entitled distance themselves from God:** The younger son gets what he wants and then distances himself from his father.
- **What changes our view of God?** The son learns that this distance has consequences, and his perspective on his father changes. He comes to his senses and starts appreciating his father. His focus shifts from himself to their relationship.

### Pause and reflect

- Am I more self-focused or God-focused?
  - What consumes your mind the most in a given day? Are my thoughts centered around me and my wants? Or on my relationships with God and others?
- What are some things I have been experiencing that could help me “come to my senses” and appreciate my relationship with God?

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## NOTES

### 2. DO I SEE A GOD WHO VALUES MY PERFORMANCE OR MY PRESENCE?

One amazing thing that happens when you change your perspective from self-focused to God-focused is you begin to understand God's heart for you in a new way. God just wants you to be present in the relationship, not perfect:

*"So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him. His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.'*

*But his father said to the servants, 'Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast, for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.' So the party began."*

- Luke 15:20-24 NLT

- **God wants our presence, not our performance:** The father notices his son while the son is still a long way off. We can assume this is because he is looking for his son, eagerly anticipating that one day he would return! The fact that the father runs to his son as soon as he catches a glimpse of him tells us that the most important thing to God is our presence, not our performance.
- **God's love for us is so enormous** that he's willing to forgive us for any sins we have committed towards him. He wants our relationship and loves it when we want a relationship with him, too.

#### Pause and reflect

- How do I handle guilt in my life? Do you respond to it by hiding and distancing myself from God and others, or do I let my guilt make me more grateful to God for his forgiveness?
- Make a decision today to be honest with God and others about anything you feel guilty about so you can experience God's compassion and be present in your relationship with him.

## NOTES

### 3. DO I SEE GOD AS A RELATIONSHIP OR A ROADBLOCK?

The younger son has returned safely home to his father, but the story isn't over yet. There is another brother who can also teach us a lot about how we view God:

*"Meanwhile, the older son was in the fields working. When he returned home, he heard music and dancing in the house, and he asked one of the servants what was going on. 'Your brother is back,' he was told, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf. We are celebrating because of his safe return.' The older brother was angry and wouldn't go in. His father came out and begged him, but he replied, 'All these years I've slaved for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends. Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the fattened calf!' His father said to him, 'Look, dear son, you have always stayed by me, and everything I have is yours. We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!'" - Luke 15:25-32 NLT*

- **What is the older son's view of his father?** The older brother believes that if he is „obedient“ he should be entitled to his father's money, property, and possessions. This makes his relationship with his father a transaction rather than a connection. He then gets angry, feeling like it is unfair for his father to celebrate the return of the younger brother, who has been “disobedient,” while the older brother has spent years following all the rules.
- **God is not a roadblock:** The older son in this story has a lot of good in his life, but he misses out on it because he only sees his father as a roadblock.

#### Pause and reflect

- How do I respond when I don't get what I want from God right away? What does this show about how I view him?
- What are some situations in my life that God could be using to show me he is a relationship and not a roadblock?
- What might I miss out on in my relationship with God when I view him as a roadblock instead of a relationship?

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## NOTES

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## CONCLUSION

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### Wrapping up

- How do you view God: as a resource, a roadblock, or a relationship?
- Study the Gospel of John in the Bible to help you shift your focus from yourself to God so you can see him for who he truly is.