

# Group Life

Face-to-face, vital relationships that optimize life change



**COMMITMENT 1  
GROWING  
DISCIPLE**

## EVERYDAY LIFE CHRISTIANITY 7 COMMITMENTS

**1 GROWING DISCIPLE**  
(PERSONAL LIFE)

**2 HOME BUILDER**  
(HOME LIFE)

**3 CARE GIVER**  
(SMALL GROUP LIFE)

**4 GOOD STEWARD**  
(CHURCH LIFE)

**5 WORKER PRIEST**  
(VOCATIONAL LIFE)

**6 COMPASSION CITIZEN**  
(SOCIETY)

**7 MISSION AGENT**  
(THE WORLD)

**Our Purpose:**  
*Bringing lives to  
Christ and Christ  
to everyday life*

SERIES: Prodigal God • Lesson: 2

**FOR GROUPS MEETING AUGUST 8-14, 2009**

## “Two Lost Sons”

*Luke 15:11-24*

### OPEN

#### Ground Rules for Healthy Small Groups

After a time of refreshments, gather the group and review your group’s ground rules.

- We will make our group and meeting time a priority.
- We will keep confidences.
- We will participate in the meeting but not dominate.
- We always have an empty chair for newcomers, so invite your friends.
- Small group life extends beyond the meeting.
- *Review any additional ground rules of your group. . . .*

#### Opening Prayer

Ask someone who is comfortable praying aloud to open the group in prayer and to welcome Christ to the meeting and ask God the Holy Spirit to lead.

#### Everyday Life Christianity

Our purpose is to bring lives to Christ and Christ to everyday life. This study focuses on the first everyday commitment—to be a Growing Disciple (in my personal life).

*I take Christ into my personal life by practicing the personal and corporate spiritual disciplines of worship, prayer, and the study of God’s Word for the purpose of growing in the knowledge of God and developing a Christlike character and lifestyle.*



## ADDITIONAL NOTES:

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### GROW

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Most of us are familiar with the concept of the “black sheep of the family,” the one family member who always seems to be making the wrong choices for the wrong reasons: The relative who causes great concern and worry, who seems most concerned about fulfilling his or her own desires and has little respect for the feelings and sacrifices of others. . . . The person who puts others in harm’s way, either financially, physically, psychologically, or emotionally. Boy, they can get on our nerves and ruin a reunion!

This week’s Scripture focuses on one such “black sheep” who is known as the “Prodigal Son.” He made terribly greedy and selfish choices, yet his father’s love for him was unconditional. The key verses for this study are Luke 15: 20, 23–24:

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. . . . (verse 20)

“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. (verses 23–24)

If you are reading along in *The Prodigal God* by Timothy Keller, this lesson covers Chapter 2.

### DAY 1

Find yourself a relatively quiet and comfortable place to sit and meet with God. Begin your study time today with a short prayer, praising God for his unconditional love, which we will see in our study of the prodigal son.

1. Read Luke 15 again this week. As you read through the chapter, answer these simple questions to remind yourself about the setting and the people who are present as this well known parable is told. (You may need to backtrack in your Bible until you find an answer).
  - When does this take place? (Hint: see Luke 14:1.)
  - Where does this take place? (Hint: see Luke 14:1.)



## ADDITIONAL NOTES:

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- Who is telling the parable?
  
- How would you describe the likely atmosphere of the room? Why?

Close your study time with a short prayer, praising God for the wisdom and truth of his word.

### DAY 2

Open your time in prayer, asking God for wisdom as you read the short passage for today. Ask him to open the eyes of your heart to apply today's Scripture to your own life.

The parable opens with the younger of two sons asking for his share of his father's estate.

2. Begin today's study by reading Luke 15:11–13. The parable opens with the younger of two sons asking for his share of his father's estate. What is the driving force behind the younger son's request? How does this request impact the father and the family?

Once he has his share to the father's estate, the young man leaves for a distant country. A "distant country" does not simply mean that he wanted to sightsee for a while. "Distant country" has a deeper meaning and does not simply refer geographic distance. It refers to a land and people far removed from the Jewish history, culture, beliefs and practices that were so carefully passed down to this young man by word and example. He demonstrates complete betrayal of his family and his community.



## ADDITIONAL NOTES:

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3. In what ways do you go to a “distant land” in your day-to-day life?

Close your study time in prayer asking God to help you eliminate your travels “to a distant land” today and every day.

### DAY 3

Open your time in prayer, thanking God for the many blessings He has given you: family, financial resources, health, home, food, clothing, and so forth. (You may find writing them down in a list form helpful.)

After he spends all he had there is a severe famine in the distant country and he found himself in a desperate situation. He found himself a job feeding pigs. Though work is worthwhile, especially when you are starving, the Jewish audience for this parable would have balked at feeding pigs, as pigs were considered to be “unclean”. To get a job feeding pigs told the Jewish listeners two things: how far this son had strayed from his family roots and just how desperate he was.

4. Read Luke 15: 14–20. How did the son attempt to take care of his own needs? Did it work? Explain your answer

5. What state was he in when he “came to his senses”? What was his plan? What was he going to do? What was he going to say?



## ADDITIONAL NOTES:

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6. Why did it take so long for the younger son to come to this realization?

When the younger son realizes that he is envying the pigs and wanting to be treated as one (i.e., he wants to eat), he remembers that he isn't a pig, but a human being, his father's son.

7. What would have likely happened to the younger son had he chosen to remain feeding the pigs?

Look again at the list you made of the blessings God has given you. This is a basic list, but it reflects all that the prodigal son loses, or at least thinks he has lost.

Close your study time in prayer, thanking God for all that is yours because you are his child.

### DAY 4

Open with prayer, asking God to search your heart for any sin you may be harboring. Confess it to him and ask him to help you hear his word through a heart and mind that have been cleansed by the power of his love for you.

8. Read Luke 15:20–21. Consider the condition the younger son was likely in when he met his father: dirty, smelly, barely clothed, thin, penniless, and ceremoniously unclean as well. What was your initial reaction to the father's welcoming of the son?

**ADDITIONAL  
NOTES:**

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9. Why was the father able to ignore his condition, embracing and kissing the son?

10. How did the son explain his current condition? What did the prodigal son say to his father about his own expectation for his position within the family after returning in such a sad state, and why don't you think he held out any hope for being "reinstated" as a son?

As you close today, ask God for a heart that cares for the lost.

**DAY 5**

Pray that this study will help you to more fully comprehend the depth of God's love for his children, whatever our condition may be.

The father's response to his son's arrival is surprising on several levels. No lecture, no banishment, no punishment. Actually the opposite occurs. The father tells his servant to get the best robe, and put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet—all symbols of position in the family. The order is given for it to be done quickly. The father does not want his son to remain in his sorry state for one second longer.

The fattened calf is brought for a feast and celebration, not for a trial. What was the reason for the party? "This son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found" (verse 24).

11. Read Luke 15:22-24. Why do you think the contrasts of dead/alive and lost/found were used to describe the prodigal son?



**ADDITIONAL  
NOTES:**

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12. After all the prodigal son did to God, himself and his family, was he beyond the love and forgiveness of his father? Explain your answer.

13. Look at your own life. Knowing what you have learned about the unconditional love and forgiveness of your Heavenly Father, is there anything you have done that is beyond his willingness to welcome you back home as his child? Is this truth easy to accept? Why or why not?

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**P R A Y**

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Close your study in prayer. Thank God for this powerful story describing the passion he has for you, his willingness to be always watching for your return in order to shower you with his love, grace, mercy and forgiveness. Pray for the courage and strength to always set aside pride and fear in order to choose life with the Father. What a blessing it is to be his child!

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