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***The Prodigal God: Introduction***

***February 20-21, 2010***

***Luke 15:1-2, 11-31***

Additional copies are available on the small-group tables.

*“So he told them this parable... ‘There was a man who had two sons’” Luke 15:3, 11*

The word Prodigal does not mean “wayward” but actually means

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**Notes**

(Please use this space to note thoughts or insights you learned from today’s message.)

*“Jesus is showing us the God of Great Expenditure, who is nothing if not prodigal toward us, his children. God’s reckless grace is our greatest hope...” “The Prodigal God”, pg. xv*

**Quick Review**

This week Luke chapter 15 was introduced along with the two audiences Jesus was speaking to: “the tax collectors and sinners” and “the Pharisees and the teachers of the law.” The message of the parable was reviewed so you could understand exactly what the audience heard Jesus say that very day. This parable is not about one lost son but is a story of two lost sons. What is one thing from the sermon you want to make sure your small group talks about?

**Small Groups**

**Getting to Know Each Other**

Spend time in your small group getting to know each other. Allow everyone to speak. Let this be a time that you can escape and understand other’s points of view. Ask God to show your group a new way to view the gospel and that all would be helped by it.

1. If you could have an endless supply of food, what would you get and why?
2. Tim Keller starts off the introduction section of his book by saying, “This short book is meant to lay out the essentials of the Christian message, the gospel.” Explain in one sentence what you believe is the essential Gospel message. Is it possible to get it all out in one sentence? If you struggled with this, what made it so difficult?
3. After hearing the first message in this series, what is one subject that you hope is talked about concerning this section of Scripture?
4. As you begin this study with your group, share with one another what you hope to get out of this six-week study?

**Into the Bible**

1. Parables are earthly stories with heavenly meanings. Before we start to make an assumption about these parables in Luke 15, let’s take a look at why Jesus told parables:  
**Read Matthew 13:34-35 and Mark 4:10-12.** Why did Jesus tell parables? Does this make sense?  
**Read Mark 4:13-34** to see if this makes any more sense. Has this changed the way you look at and understand parables?

2. To get a better understanding of what the people were trying to understand when they were listening to Jesus, let's re-read the parable from the sermon to see if you can place yourself in the shoes (or sandals) of the original hearer. If there is time, look at a couple of other parables to see if you can interpret the earthly story and heavenly meaning. **Read Luke 15:11-32.** (Optional parables to read: Matthew 22:1-14, Mark 4:26-29, Luke 13:6-9, John 10:1-6)

#### **Application**

1. Now that you have heard the cultural and historical background to the parable of the lost sons, list some things you found interesting, shocking or absurd. If this story was told today would people get the same message? Retell the story in a way that might be applicable to today's audience.
2. In the introduction to the book Tim Keller says, "One of the signs that you may not grasp the unique, radical nature of the gospel is that you are certain you do." Reflect on this particular phrase and explain what it means to you.
3. At first glance do you see yourself as the younger brother or older brother? Why?
4. In what ways did the father show his love to both sons? Do you think that he was fair in the way that he dealt with both brothers? If you thought it was unfair, what would have been a better way to handle the situation?
5. Is there anything else that you read in the introduction of the book that you wanted to discuss at this time?

#### **Prayer**

In your prayer time ask that God guides your group to learn and grow in new and powerful ways. Share with the group one way they can pray for you or something going on in your life. To ensure a comfortable environment, please be mindful that comments shared should remain within the confines of the group unless they want it shared with the larger community.

### **Family Groups Into the Bible**

Read Luke 15:11-31

#### **Application Ages 2-11**

1. Have you ever heard a story you didn't understand? How did you figure it out? (possible answers: ask a parent, read something else on the subject, etc.)
2. We know God loves us sooooo much! Talk about a few examples that show how much God loves us.

#### **Ages 12-18**

1. Think of a time you've tried your absolute best to follow all the directions or rules of a task. What was the outcome of your efforts?
2. Now think of a time you may have allowed selfishness to take over and you ignored the needs of others. What feelings come to mind as you reflect on this memory?
3. Have you ever done something perfectly and expected recognition, but instead you were overlooked? Maybe you were the perfect student, but were punished with your class when they were unruly. How did you feel? What did you do? How would God have wanted you to respond?

#### **For Families of all ages**

Take time within your family to discuss the ways that God has shown his love to your family.

#### **Prayer**

Spend time together praying for one another and ask God to continue helping you build a strong family bond.