

# SMALL GROUP LESSON: THE GOODNESS OF GOD

*The Real God, Part 1*

## Scripture: Luke 15:11–32

<sup>11</sup>Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup>The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them. <sup>13</sup>“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. <sup>14</sup>After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. <sup>15</sup>So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. <sup>16</sup>He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. <sup>17</sup>“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! <sup>18</sup>I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. <sup>19</sup>I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ <sup>20</sup>So he got up and went to his father. “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. <sup>21</sup>“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

<sup>22</sup>“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. <sup>23</sup>Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. <sup>24</sup>For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ So they began to celebrate. <sup>25</sup>“Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup>So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. <sup>27</sup>‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’ <sup>28</sup>“The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. <sup>29</sup>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. <sup>30</sup>But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’ <sup>31</sup>“My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. <sup>32</sup>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.’”

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## DISCUSSION STARTERS

Read through the questions below and pick the ones that would work best for your group. Chances are, you won't need to work through all of them! Ask the questions in your own words—don't feel that you need to read them "as is." And feel free to ask your own questions! Keep the overall objective in mind so that no matter what "path" your conversation takes, you end up driving home the objective.

## OBJECTIVE

To help your students understand that God's goodness means he wants the very best for us.

### 1. WARM UP

- Let's get started by talking about some examples of good people. Who is someone you consider to be good, and why?
- Based on what you remember from the message, what's your definition of God's goodness?

### 2. SET UP THE PASSAGE

"The Bible is filled with teachings and true stories about God's goodness. In today's study, we are going to focus on a popular teaching from Jesus that is commonly called the parable of the lost (or prodigal) son. This is an amazing story of a father's unconditional love for both of his children."

### 3. CONTEXT QUESTIONS (focus on scripture)

- Read the passage out loud (consider having a different student read it a second time).
- Does anyone have any questions about this passage? Did you find anything confusing or difficult to understand?
- Without looking at the passage, retell this parable in your own words. Does anyone else have something to add?
- In this parable, the father represents God. How is the father's goodness expressed in this passage?
- In this parable, the lost son represents the rejection of—and the return to—the father's goodness. When his money ran out and he fell on hard times, he chose to return to his father. Why did he make this decision?
- How was the younger son different when he returned?

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- In your opinion, why is this a parable about two sons? Couldn't the point have been made with just the story of the lost son? How would the teaching of this parable be different if it was about only one son?
- The older son represents the struggle with God's goodness being expressed to the younger son. Why did the older son have a difficult time with the father's goodness?
- Based on your study of this passage, how would you define God's goodness?

#### **4. APPLICATION QUESTIONS (focus on personal significance)**

- In your opinion, why do some people have a difficult time believing in God's goodness? In your own life, when is it difficult to believe in God's goodness?
- The younger son wanted something and received it, but then life took an unexpected turn. Describe a time in your life when you wanted something that ended up not being good for you.
- How can you personally better show God's goodness to others?
- In the message, we had three responses to God's goodness. Which one was most challenging for you personally and why?

1. Ask God to help you understand what is good.
2. Believe that God is good all the time, even when life is hard.
3. Give thanks to God for the good things in your life.

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