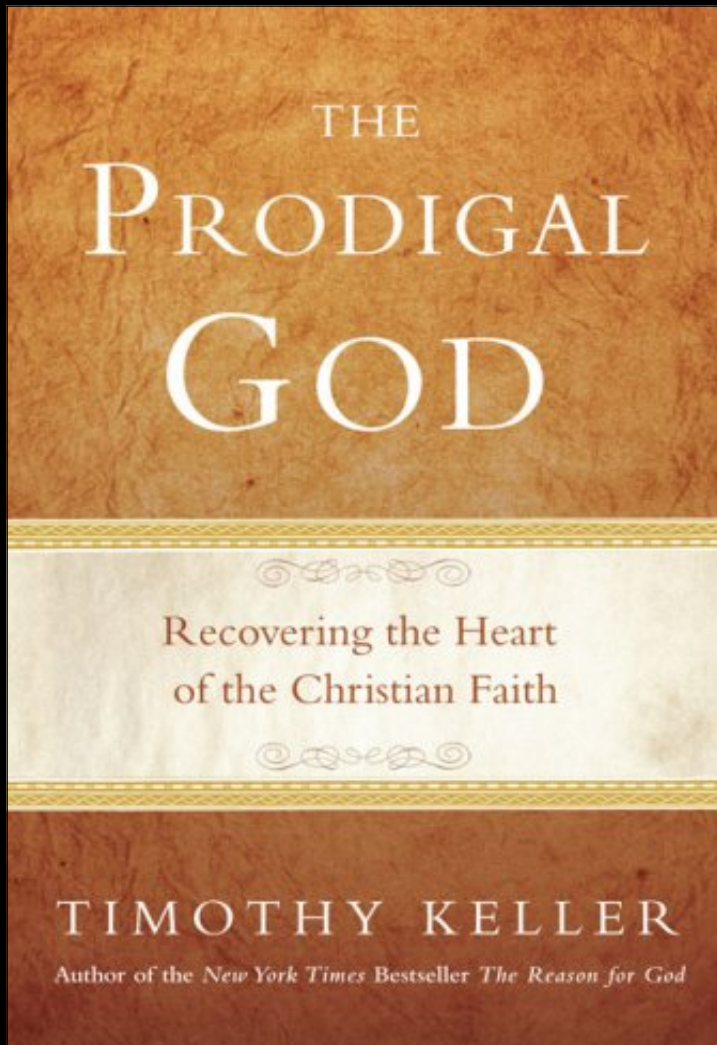


## book summary



### Why read it

In *The Prodigal God*, Keller uncovers the essential message of Jesus, locked inside his most familiar parable. Within that parable, Jesus reveals God's prodigal grace toward both the irreligious and the moralistic. This book will challenge both the devout and the skeptics to see Christianity in a whole new way.

The Prodigal God

by Timothy Keller

Book summary by

Mark Goodrich, Pastor of Serving  
Grace Community Church

Tim Keller's book The Prodigal God starts off by defining what he means by "Prodigal God." Prodigal is an adjective that he defines on the first page as... "*recklessly extravagant, having spent everything.*"

As you can figure, the book is about one of the most widely read parables taught by Jesus. The story is commonly known as the Parable of the Lost Son, found in Luke 15. This is a story that anyone who has come to a saving faith in Christ can identify with on some level. But Keller takes the reader much deeper and beyond what our understanding might have been from previous reading and study of this classic parable.

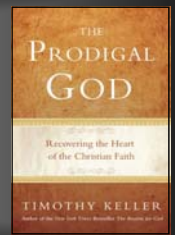
Any Christ follower, young or old in the faith, will be taken much deeper into the implications and application of this story and find that Jesus' teaching, along with Keller's exposition, may hold more for us who are church-ed than for those who may be prodigals.

Continued on next page

# Leadership Summary

## Book

leaders are readers



Continued...

As you recall, the three main characters in this story are a son who asks for his full share of the inheritance, then heads off to seek and to find his own way in life. The second central character in the story has always been, for most of us, the father. The father is the one who goes above and beyond all reason....showing love and compassion in an unconditional way towards a son who comes crawling back, in an attempt to restore his place back home. Thus, the Prodigal God...his love is extravagant. The father in the story is the God whom we have come to know and serve... a father of unconditional and surpassing love.

Keller brings us face to face with the third character in the story, the older brother. Keller states that, to Jesus, the primary focal point of this parable is the older brother. He is the focus of the central message because of Jesus' primary target audience for the teaching.

Jesus' audience was not the 'lost' but the 'found'. Keller states, "...*the targets of this story are not "wayward sinners" but religious people who do everything the Bible requires...*" Keller is right up front saying that the irreligious and the religious are spiritually lost, both life paths are dead ends, and every thought that the human race knows about how to connect with God has been wrong.

Keller gives us a chapter that redefines sin as..."*most people think sin is failing to keep God's rules of conduct, Jesus' definition goes beyond it, but he states ...the way of moral conformity (older son) and the way of self discovery (the younger son) both end in the same place.*"

Along with a redefinition of sin, Keller redefines for his readers a concept of lostness and it should not surprise you that he takes us face to face with the son who is really lost...the older son.

Keller's overall message in the book and his fresh look at the parable is, for us the readers, to gain a deeper understanding of the gospel. Keller states, "*When you realize that the antidote to being bad is not just being good, you are on the brink.*" The brink he refers to is a deep and clear understanding of the gospel.

I found many times I echoed the author's description of both the lost son and the older son but I was challenged and surprised as to the insights I gained about my own "older brother" characteristics.

Keller's exposition on the parable touches such themes as hope, forgiveness, spiritual change, and commitment. The most challenging idea for me was a deeper understanding of my responsibility as His son. Keller wrote "*If I was saved by my good works - then there would be a limit to what God could ask of me. I would do my duty and then deserve a certain quality of life. But if it is really true that I am a sinner saved by sheer grace—at God's infinite cost—then there's nothing he cannot ask of me.*"

What does the book have to do with leaders? Everything and nothing. It's a book every leader should read because it's a challenging and insightful look at one of the foremost teachings of Jesus. If Jesus was teaching this parable today, I wonder if the audience would be church attendees, elder brothers who need to listen, to know and explore on a deeper level a message of reckless and extravagant love.

## Go Deeper

You might want to visit the website

[The Prodigal God](#)

You can Listen to Timothy Keller's  
Sermon series on Luke 15

Check out other resources  
For personal study and  
small group discussion

[Curriculum Kit](#)

[Video Trailer](#)  
By Tim Keller