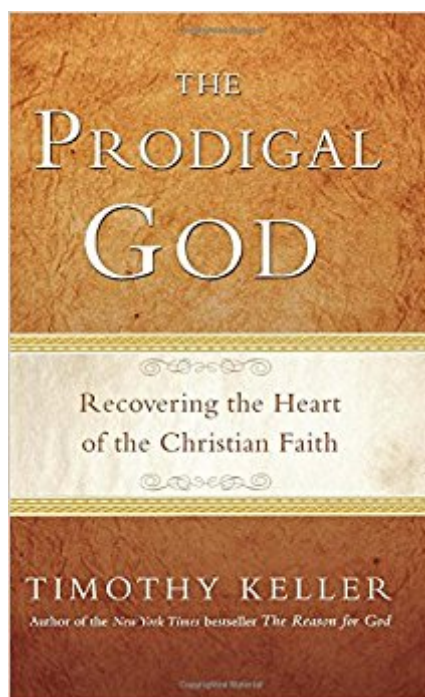


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The Prodigal God: Recovering The Heart Of The Christian Faith



Synopsis

The New York Times bestselling author of *The Songs of Jesus* uncovers the essential message of Jesus, locked inside his most familiar parable. *Newsweek* called renowned minister Timothy Keller "a C.S. Lewis for the twenty-first century" in a feature on his first book, *The Reason for God*. In that book, he offered a rational explanation of why we should believe in God. Now, in *The Prodigal God*, Keller takes his trademark intellectual approach to understanding Christianity and uses the parable of the prodigal son to reveal an unexpected message of hope and salvation. Within that parable Jesus reveals God's prodigal grace toward both the irreligious and the moralistic. This book will challenge both the devout and skeptics to see Christianity in a whole new way.

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Customer Reviews

"This short book is meant to lay out the essentials of the Christian message, the gospel." So begins Timothy Keller's new book *The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith*. Keller targets both seekers who are unfamiliar with the gospel and longtime church members who may not feel the need for a primer on the gospel. Keller's book, as the provocative title suggests, is built on one of Jesus' most famous stories: the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15). Keller contends that "on the surface of it, the narrative is not all that gripping." But, he contends that "if the teaching of Jesus is likened to a lake, this famous Parable of the Prodigal Son would be one of the clearest spots where we can see all the way to the bottom." Keller has taught from this passage many times over the years, and says, "I have seen more people encouraged, enlightened, and helped by this

passage, when I explained the true meaning of it, than by any other text."The book is laid out in seven brief chapters which aim to uncover the extravagant (prodigal) grace of God, as revealed in this parable. Keller shows how the parable describes two kinds of "lost" people, not just one. Most people can identify the lostness of the "prodigal son," the younger brother in Jesus' story, who takes his inheritance early and squanders it on riotous living. But Keller shows that the "elder brother" in the parable is no less lost. Together, the two brothers are illustrations of two kinds of people in the world. "Jesus uses the younger and elder brothers to portray the two basic ways people try to find happiness and fulfillment: the way of moral conformity and the way of self-discovery." Both brothers are in the wrong, and when we see this, we discover a radical redefinition of what is wrong with us.

When I received a copy of *The Prodigal God* I was greatly intrigued by the title. To be honest I thought the author was trying to be a little too cute in his choice for a title. As a result I jumped right in and in effort to figure out where he was going, could not put the little book down. Author Tim Keller recently wrote the bestselling book *The Reason for God* to reach out to skeptics. Here in *The Prodigal God* it seems as though he is reaching out to both those who are flagrantly irreligious and to those who are by common estimation, morally and religiously together. Keller helpfully reminds us (me) of the definition for prodigal: "recklessly extravagant, having spent everything". Many of us may have a definition that centers on a returning wayward son rather than the reasons why he was actually returning. Keller aims to remind us of the God-centeredness of this parable and by application the stinging rebuke that it is intended to have upon the Pharisees and all of their self-righteous grandchildren. Throughout the book Keller deals with the characteristics of the younger brother (morally bankrupt), the older brother (morally upright) and the Father (representing God who is abundant in grace to the contrite and opposed to the proud). A strength of this book is the way in which the author keeps the gospel out of the commonly constructed religious categories. The gospel is never about what you and I do but about what God does. Therefore to try to put Jesus and his message into some sort of parallel religious system simply does not work. Keller writes: It is typical for people who have turned their backs on religion to believe that Christianity is no different. They have been in churches brimming with elder-brother types.

After the publication of *The Reason for God*, *Newsweek* hailed Tim Keller as "a C.S. Lewis for the twenty-first century." That is a lofty comparison and one I'm sure must make Keller quite uncomfortable. Yet at some level the comparisons are becoming undeniable. Keller's ability to communicate to believers and unbelievers alike and to do so on an intellectual level clearly parallels

that of Lewis. Where Keller's first book offered an explanation as to why we should believe in God, his second, *The Prodigal God*, focuses on Jesus' best-known parable (and arguably the best-known and most-loved story of all-time) to challenge both believers and skeptics. In this book Keller makes no claim to originality. He states forthrightly that the message he conveys here is based on a sermon first preached by Dr. Edmund Clowney. That simple sermon, a fresh take on the parable of the Prodigal Son, changed Keller's life and in many ways shaped his ministry. Over the years he has often taught from this parable, both at his church and elsewhere, and he has seen God's hand of blessing in this message. And here he offers it in the form of a short book. Traditionally, readings of the parable of the Prodigal Son have focused on the younger son and his reconciliation with his father. We learn from such readings that God is willing to receive all those who wander from him. Yet too often we overlook that third character--the older brother. Were the story only about the father and the younger son we would expect that the Pharisees, among those who first heard Jesus tell this parable, would react with joy. Yet we know from Scripture that they walked away in disgust and disbelief. Why? Because the parable pointed to them as examples of the older son.

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