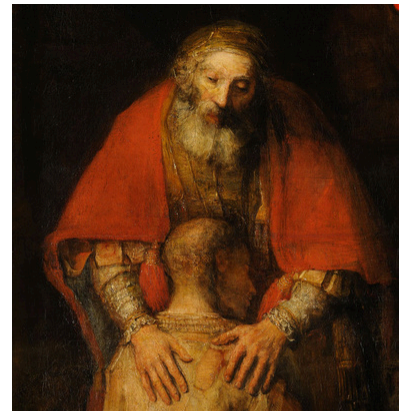


## Check-In

- Check in. How is everyone doing?

## Scripture

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.” Then Jesus said, “There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the wealth that will belong to me.’ So he divided his assets between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant region, and there he squandered his wealth in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that region, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that region, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, and no one gave him anything. But when he came to his senses he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.”’” So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate, for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate. “Now his elder son was in the field, and as he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf because he has got him back safe and sound.’ Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, ‘Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command, yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your assets with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’ Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.’”



## Prayer Requests

Spend some time sharing prayer requests with each other. As the small group leader, we ask that you do two things:

1. write them down
2. ask someone to pray

## Discussion Questions

- **What do you think of when you think of God?** Has that picture changed over time? If so, how—and why?
- **Which son do you most identify with right now—the one who wandered, or the one who stayed?** What does the father’s response to each say to you?
- **Where do you see distorted images of God showing up today?** How might we gently help ourselves or others trade those for the God Jesus reveals?

## Quote

What a person thinks of when they think about God is the most important thing about them. - **A.W. Towser**

## Did You Know?

James Bryan Smith is a theology professor and spiritual formation teacher who studied under Dallas Willard. In *The Apprentice Series*—beginning with *The Good and Beautiful God*—he helps Christians trade distorted images of God for the God Jesus knows. Smith teaches that we become like the God we imagine. If we believe God is harsh or distant, we’ll live in fear. But if we see God as loving, joyful, and full of grace, we’ll be shaped by that love. Transformation, he says, doesn’t come from trying harder, but from falling in love with the God Jesus knows and living in an interactive relationship with that God.