

Week Five—The True Elder Brother

“My son, everything I have is yours.”

As a child, did you ever long for an older brother who was wise, kind and would look out for you? He would stand up to the bully, rescue you if you were in trouble, and let you hang out with his friends. He would know what you needed and would even talk with Mom and Dad on your behalf. This amazing big brother would knock on the door to your room just to see if you wanted to talk or go shoot some hoops. He would say, “That’s okay. I understand,” if you had been flippant with him or had lost the hat you’d borrowed—and then add with a teasing smile, “But don’t let it happen again!”

Have you ever considered the idea of Jesus being this kind of elder brother? Have you recognized that since you are a child of God, Jesus, the Son of God, is your *brother*? Have you understood that He has rescued you, stands up for you, and is always with you through the Holy Spirit?

Jesus came to earth as a mediator between God and man, an elder-brother who gave up his rights and his position to bring all those who have wandered far from God back home. Unlike the elder brother in our parable, Jesus was willing to pay the cost for forgiveness and reconciliation. Perhaps, all along, you have had the older brother you longed for and just haven’t seen it.

Memory Verse:

Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.

John 15:13

Definitions and Translations from the Greek

Brother (*adelphos*)

- 1) a brother, whether born of the same two parents or only of the same father or mother
- 2) having the same national ancestor, belonging to the same people, or countryman
- 3) any fellow or man
- 4) a fellow believer, united to another by the bond of affection
- 5) brethren in Christ; Christians, as those who are exalted to the same heavenly place

Mediator (*mesitēs*)

- 1) one who intervenes between two, either in order to make or restore peace and friendship, or form a compact, or for ratifying a covenant
- 2) a medium of communication, arbitrator

Read Chapter Five of *The Prodigal God*.
Highlight thoughts that stand out to you and ideas you'd like to discuss.

From your reading:

1. a) What is the first thing Keller says we need for “the inner dynamic of the heart” to be changed from one of fear and anger to one of joy, love, and gratitude (PG page 73)?

b) As we've looked at *lostness* over the past four weeks, have you been given a desire to be free from it? _____ If so, in PG page 75, what does Keller say this is an indication of?

c) Ask God to show you ways He is initiating love or seeking you. As He shows you, write it as a prayer of thanksgiving (Example: Thank you God, that I'm seeing you more clearly through the Scriptures.).

2. a) What is the elder brother's problem (PG page 77)?

b) What is the sin “under” this problem (PG page 78)?

c) What does deep, gospel repentance look like (PG pages 75-78)?

d) Did “God's initiating love” bring conviction to you? Respond in repentance and gratefulness. He is longing to change the “inner dynamic” of your heart so you can receive the fullness of His love.

3. Keller says that along with the initiating love of the Father and deep, gospel repentance, there is one more thing we need in order to change the heart. What is it (PG pages 85-88)?

4. (Pray: *Father God, point out what it cost You to forgive me--what price You paid to “bring me home.” Open the eyes of my heart to see clearly.*)

Through this chapter of *The Prodigal God*, what stands out to you about:

a) mercy and forgiveness?

b) the price God the Father paid for your forgiveness?

c) the price Jesus, the Son of God, paid for your forgiveness?

5. Which of the two quotes from the hymns in PG pages 88 and 89 means the most to you? Why?

Read the *Parable of the Lost Sons*, Luke 15: 1-3, 11-32, on SG page 4 or in your Bible.



Draw a *squiggly* circle around (or highlight) the word “brother.”

Digging into the Scripture:

6. **Read I John 4:7-21.**

- a) Which verses talk about God’s “initiating love”?
- b) In your own words, what do these verses say God has done for you personally?
- c) Are there places in your life you feel as if you are waiting for God to reach out to you?
If so, stop and ask God what the truth is. Wait. Listen. Write down what you *hear* as well as your response to God.

7. **Read 1 John 4:19-21 (DIG DEEPER with 1 John 3:15 and James 4:11-12).** Also look at the word “brother” you highlighted in the parable and the definition of “brother” on SG page 21.

- a) In your own words, write a definition of “brother.”
- b) By the elder brother’s treatment of his younger brother, what is revealed about his heart attitude toward his father and toward God?
- c) Ask the Holy Spirit if there is anyone for whom you need a supernatural infusion of love. Ask Him what your bitterness or resentment is costing you or how it is keeping you at a distance from God.

Ask God for His perception of the person. Write down what you sense.

Respond to God in repentance and pray a blessing over this person. How does God respond to you? Write it down.

8. a) **Read Matthew 3:16-17.** Whose Son is Jesus?

- b) **Read 1 John 3:1.** If you are a Christ-follower, what are you?
- c) Have you ever considered Jesus being your “older brother” before?
Meditate on that idea and ask God for His perspective. Ask Him to personalize it for you. Write down what you *hear, see, or sense*.

9. Read **1 John 2:1-2** and **1 Timothy 2:5-6**. From these verses and the definition of “mediator” on page 21, what are three ways Jesus meets the desires of our hearts for a “true elder brother”?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

10. Read **Hebrews 9:15** and **Philippians 2:5-8** (DIG DEEPER with **Hebrews 8**).

It is costly to be a “true elder brother.”

- a) What would the cost have been to the elder brother in our parable?

- b) What was the cost to Jesus to be our “true elder brother”?

11. a) Write out **Luke 15:31**.

b) Write out **John 3:35**.

c) If the elder son would have focused on all he had available to him because of his father, and on what it cost the father to keep loving a son as ungrateful as he was, what difference do you think it would have made in *The Parable of the Lost Sons*?

d) If you focused on all you have available because of your “true elder brother,” Jesus Christ, and the cost to Jesus and your Heavenly Father, how would your heart attitude and your actions be different? Ask God to give you divine insight. Take 5-10 minutes and wait for revelation. Write it down.

12. Read **Matthew 28:16-20** and review the memory verse (SG page 21).

a) Ask God if there is a place He is asking you to be a “true elder sibling” or to lay down your life in His kingdom today.

b) From the Matthew verses, what is His promise to you? What is your response?