

PICTURE PERFECT

REFRAMING YOUR FAMILY STORY

Picture Perfect Series

Part 3 - "Prayers For Prodigals"

Small Group Material

November 12th, 2017

Leader Guide

Bottom Line: *While we wait for answers to prayer, are we waiting with our worries, doubts and fears, or are we waiting with Jesus?*

Study Verses: *Matthew 11:19, Luke 15:20-24, Ephesians 3:20-21, 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17*

Define The Win: *Participants would understand that no individual or family situation is too far gone that God's redemption can't impact it. They would begin to pray for the prodigals that they know and love. Group members would be vulnerable and transparent about their own family story and share the struggles they are facing.*

Key Points

- *Every family has its stories, no matter how hard they try to dress them up.*
- *We can run to Jesus in our mess, and He gets us. God is kind enough and strong enough to handle all of it.*
- *Prayerlessness is our declaration of independence from God.*
- *Prayer is keeping company with God. He infuses us with new strength as we are with Him.*
- *If we can't bring our problems to church then where can we bring them?*

- *When our children bring us to our knees, we're in the best position for God to help us.*
- *God has a way of bringing beauty out of brokenness.*
- *If redemption means God uses everything, then it is safe to assume God wastes nothing.*
- *As you face disappointment, don't just wait for Jesus, wait WITH Him.*
- *Idolatry is when you look for life or sufficiency in something that isn't God.*

ENCOUNTER

- **What do you do when things aren't "picture perfect" in your family or world? How do you deal with disappointment? How do you typically respond to the mess that exists in your family?**
- **When it comes to the issues you or your family face, how quick are you to bring those concerns to God or share them with others? What causes you to hesitate to pour your heart out in prayer?**
- **We're charged with praying for prodigals. How could praying for those who have gone their own way influence your response to them?**
- **As you face disappointment, don't just wait for Jesus, wait WITH Him. What is the difference between these two approaches to our disappointment?**

FORMATION

- **Read Matthew 11:19. What does Jesus being referred to as a "friend of sinners" teach us about God's heart for prodigals?**
- **Read Luke 15:20-24. What caused the son to come to his senses and make his way back home? What response was he expecting to receive upon returning? If God is represented as the father in this parable, what should we make of verse 20: "but while he was still a long way off, his father was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him?"**
- **Read Ephesians 3:20-21. How do we limit God when we say our family situation can't be redeemed or that a loved one is too far gone to be saved?**

EXPRESSION

- Read 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17. As it relates to your family situation, where does your heart need to be encouraged? Why have you lost faith and hope in these circumstances?
- Every family has its stories, no matter how hard they try to dress them up. What issues are you dealing with that you are afraid to share or let someone else walk alongside you in support?
- We're charged with praying for prodigals. Who needs to be in your prayers? Why does this individual or family come to mind? What specifically will you be praying for?

LEADER INSIGHT: *Families are filled with broken people who have their own struggles and failures. Even though we know this to be true in our head, we struggle to believe this in our hearts. Why is this the case? All we see, or at least all we center our attention on, are those "picture perfect" examples of ideal families seen in advertisements, movies and television shows. These pictures of perfection also flood our social media feeds where family after family posts the best of themselves.*

Even in Christian circles, we've been engrained to dress in our "Sunday bests." The blow up that happened on our way to church or the arguments that might have taken place during the weekend have no business being spoken when we worship. But, if we can't bring our problems to church then where can we bring them?

Every family has its stories, no matter how hard they try to dress them up or hide them. Silently we struggle alone. We lose hope and heart. We doubt that anything will change. We reason that our situation, or that family member who went their own way, is too far gone for God's redemption.

But, this is simply not the case. God has a way of bringing beauty out of brokenness. If redemption means God uses everything, then it is safe to assume God wastes nothing, including our pain, heartbreak and shame. We can run to Jesus in our mess, and He gets us. God is kind enough and strong enough to handle all of it. When our children or life bring us to our knees, we're in the best position for God to help us.

As we face disappointment, we shouldn't just wait for Jesus to act, we must wait WITH Him expectantly. Prayerlessness is our declaration of independence from God. On the other hand, prayer is keeping company with God. He infuses us with new strength as we stay connected to Him. While we wait for answers to prayer, we must ask ourselves whether we are waiting with our worries, doubts and fears, or are we waiting with Jesus?