

The Prodigal God

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Preface

Timothy Keller’s remarkable short book, *The Prodigal God*, deserves to be read by every believer and non-believer alike. It is a remarkable treatment of what is probably one of the two best-known parables of Jesus (“The Good Samaritan” being the other). The so-called “Parable of the Lost Son” (a misleading label, as Keller shows) opens up the entire realm of basic Christian teaching—both the grace offered to the “worst sinner” and the warning leveled at the judgmental believer.

Before teaching this class, it is essential that the leader read the entire book at least once to capture the entire scope of Keller’s exegesis and to be prepared to help the class “discover” the deepest meanings of the parable. When I first announced this class to my church family, several people openly wondered how we could spend four weeks on just 22 verses (Luke 15:11-32), but I worried about faithfully uncovering the material in that time. Four weeks turned out to be just about right. We could have spent a little more time in a few places, but the pace was slow enough to “get it” and fast enough to maintain interest.

The questions in each lesson sparked great discussion, but leaders should obviously feel free to adapt this curriculum to meet the needs of their congregations.

I sincerely hope many will have the opportunity to (1) read *The Prodigal God* and (2) share its riches with others.

CLASS ONE

Introduction

The so-called Parable of the Prodigal Son—in both what it says and what it does *not* say—is perhaps Jesus’ deepest, most compelling, and most simultaneously compelling *and* disturbing explication of the nature of God, the human condition, the nature of sin, the cost of atonement, and the ultimate hope for mankind.

Tim Keller, author of [The Prodigal God](#), on which this class series is based, says that if Jesus’ teaching is compared to a lake, this story is the clearest spot—one where we can see all the way to the bottom.

The Parable

Read Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

[Use whatever translation/version you prefer. The English Standard Version (ESV) is reproduced below. The underlined words are key to the primary lessons of the parable, but there’s no reason to emphasize them as you read.]

¹Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. ²And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." ³So he told them this parable...

¹¹And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. ¹²And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. ¹³Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. ¹⁴And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

¹⁷"But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! ¹⁸I will arise and go to my

father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your [hired servants](#).'

²⁰"And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and [ran](#) and embraced him and kissed him. ²¹And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'²²But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the [best robe](#), and put it on him, and put a [ring](#) on his hand, and shoes on his feet. ²³And bring the [fattened calf](#) and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. ²⁴For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.

²⁵"Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. ²⁷And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.'

²⁸But he was [angry](#) and [refused to go in](#). His father [came out](#) and entreated him, ²⁹but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have [served you](#), and I [never disobeyed](#) your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!'

³¹"And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³²It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"

The People Around Jesus (context)

In most teaching and preaching, what is the usual focus of this story?

Usually, the father's joyful, free reception of his younger son.

This story is usually called, "The Prodigal Son." Is that an appropriate title?

Inappropriate title may mislead us as to what Jesus is teaching.

Who are the listeners? (1-2)

Two groups

- Tax collectors and sinners
- Pharisees and scribes

What characterizes each group?

- Tax collectors and sinners = those living outside the Law and the standards of the community
- Pharisee and scribes = those upholding the traditional morality, Bible-believing worshippers

How is each group responding to Jesus?

- Tax collectors and sinners – "drawing near to" him; listening attentively
- Pharisees and scribes – puzzled and angered

What bothers the "religious" people?

Who are the three primary characters in the story?

Father, younger son, elder son

Who is represented by these three main characters?

- Father = God
- Younger son = Tax collectors and sinners
- Elder son = Pharisees and scribes

To whom is Jesus directing his teaching in this parable?

Pharisees and scribes, the "religious" moralists of the community

If we focus primarily on the father's reception of the younger son (and, by analogy, God's reception of sinners), what is the danger?

Sentimentalizing, missing Jesus' primary point, universalism, free grace, etc.

What is Jesus' purpose in telling this story?

Shatter our categories, redefine sin, summarize the human condition, reveal what we need, invite us to the festival feast, religious moralism as a particularly deadly spiritual condition, etc.

What does *prodigal* mean?

Merriam-Webster Dictionary

- 1: characterized by profuse or wasteful expenditure : lavish <a *prodigal* feast> <*prodigal* outlays for her clothes>
- 2: recklessly spendthrift <the *prodigal* prince>
- 3: yielding abundantly : luxuriant —often used with *of*<nature has been so *prodigal* of her bounty

What might be a better heading for this parable?

Two Lost Sons, The Moralist Son, The Prodigal God

In what ways does this story play out in today's world?

Culture wars, turned off by religion masquerading as Christianity, attitudes toward church

At its beginning, Christianity was not considered a religion and its adherents were called "atheists." Why?

None of the trappings of traditional religion: Where's your temple? Who are your priests? Where are the sacrifices to please your gods? It was a non-religion!

Why most Westerners now consider Christianity a religion and moralism?

Who was most attracted to Jesus' teaching?

Who is most attracted to today's preaching?

If the preaching of our ministers and the practices of our parishioners do not have the same effect on people that Jesus had, then we must not be declaring the same message that Jesus did. (Tim Keller, *The Prodigal God*, pp 15-16)

CLASS 2

The Two Lost Sons

A drama set in two acts

Act I, Scene 1 (v. 12)

What is shocking about the younger son's request?

[Oldest son received double portion, therefore, 1/3 is due to younger son, but only at father's death]

Disrespect, desire to be out from under father's control, lack of love, wants him dead, relationship to father only a means to an end (now tired of it), etc.

How might we expect a wealthy patriarch to respond to such a request?

Disown, banishment

How do people usually respond to rejection?

Anger, pain, retaliation

What would be involved in fulfilling the son's request?

Sell off property, loss of status and respect

Divided his property (*bios*, "life")

How might the father's peer have reacted to his decision?

Incredulity

Act I, Scene 2

What is the result of the younger son's journey of self-discovery (vv. 13-16)?

Degradation, poverty, humiliation, shame, desperation

When he "came to himself" (came to his senses), what plan does he devise (vv. 17-19)?

Note: if no one brings out plan to compensate, ask "Why does he plan to ask to be a hired servant rather than a household servant?"

Return home, confess, repent, ask to be hired out so he can begin to compensate his father as restitution, and only then (perhaps) be restored to the family. In other words, he hopes to EARN his restoration

Act I, Scene 3 (dramatic climax)

How might we expect the father to act when he sees his son in the distance?

Here comes that good-for-nothing son of mine who tore my life apart and broke my heart. He'd better have a good explanation!

What is surprising about what the father first does upon seeing his son?

RUNS! Very unexpected for a respected patriarch

What does the father think of his son's business plan?

Doesn't even allow him to get through his rehearsed speech. Greets him with joy and love, calls for servant to fetch the best robe, ring, and sandals.

What would the best robe in the house be? What does it represent?

The father's own...a sign of the son's immediate, unequivocal restoration to the family; the ring is a symbol of wealth and dignity; sandals distinguished him from servants. Father not waiting for son to pay off his debt or duly grovel

What is the significance of the feast with the "fatted calf."

Meat an expensive, rare delicacy and fatted calf would be the most treasured; the father intends to throw a party to end all parties (perhaps the biggest in his life), and the entire community was probably invited to share in the father's joy.

What is the lesson of Act I?

The lavish prodigality of God's grace. The father's love and acceptance are absolutely free!

Is Grace then universal? No atonement for sin? No need of a savior?

NO! The story does not end there, and Act II demonstrates the costliness of Grace

Act 2, Scene 1 (vv. 25-30)

Why is the elder son so angry?

Claims rights based on behavior (served you, always obeyed)

How does the elder son's reaction show his heart to be strikingly similar to his brother's?

Neither loved the father for himself but only for what he got out of it; resentful, slavish, disrespectful (Look you!)

Act II, Scene 2 (vv. 31-32)

How might we expect a typical father to respond?

Disown, banish, anger, etc.

How does he respond?

Lovingly, pleads with him to join the celebration

Act II, Scene 3 (vv. 33ff)

Let's read the climax of Act II, beginning at verse 33

That's it? It can't be! The listeners must have been on the edge of their seats to learn the elder son's response. Would the family be fully restored?

Why doesn't Jesus finish the story?

The conclusion is not yet determined because his real audience are the Pharisees and scribes, the older brothers of the community and those who will plot his death, with whom he is pleading to respond to his message, to enter the festival feast of the Father.

Redefining Sin

What are the two basic ways in which people try to find happiness and fulfillment?

- Moral conformity
- Self-discovery

Is our culture polarized between these two paths?

Does everyone fall into one of these two categories?

Variations (movement between, secret lives, etc.), but still only two primary approaches

In what ways is the younger brother sinful?

Obvious! Self-indulgent, dissolute, out-of-control, alienated

Why doesn't the elder brother go into the feast?

Because "I never disobeyed your command." Losing the father's love in spite of his goodness, but because of it! Barrier is not sins but the pride he has in his moral record; not wrongdoing but (self-)righteousness.

How are the hearts of the two brothers strikingly alike?

Both want independence from his father; self-determination; both attempt to control through their own actions

What then is Jesus teaching?

Neither son love the father for himself

Both using the father for their own self-centered ends

THEREFORE, you can rebel against God and be alienated from him either by breaking his rules *or* by keeping all of them diligently!

What is sin?

Self-salvation

Jesus as helper or example, but not Savior

Sin is not just breaking the rules, it is putting yourself in the place of God as Savior, Lord, and Judge just as each son sought to displace the authority of the father in his own life.

Everyone falls into one of the two camps:

- Liberated, tolerated, open-minded people who claim the religious bigots are the problem in the world
- Moral conformists who claim the liberal, immoral people are the problem in the world.

The gospel says everyone is wrong, everyone is loved, and everyone is called to recognize this and change.

Luke 18:14 "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

Times of London: What's wrong with the world?

G.K. Chesterton: "Dear Sirs, I am. Respectfully Yours, G.K. Chesterton

But why does Jesus construct the story so that one of the brothers is saved, restored to a right relationship with the father, and one of them is not?

Perhaps Jesus is saying that both forms of self-salvation are equally wrong, *but* each one is not equally dangerous?

How might the elder brother's condition be more dangerous?

Self-blindness; hurts others

CLASS 3

Redefining Lostness

What does it mean to be spiritually lost?

What are the signs of elder-brother lostness?

- When your life doesn't go as you want, you aren't just sorrowful but deeply angry and bitter
- Joyless, fear-based compliance
- Lack of assurance

Who needs to know about elder-brother lostness?

Precisely the people who are least likely to recognize it
Churches are brimming with elder brothers
Many genuine Christians can be elder-brotherish

Why do skeptics claim Christianity is "just another religion"?

Is Jesus exaggerating elder-brotherness?

Who is missing from the parable?

The True Elder Brother

How can we escape the shackles of our lostness?

In the parable, both sons deeply insult their father, demonstrating their lack of love.

How does the father approach each son?

God's initiating love; we can't escape the shackles of our lostness on our own. If we sense our lostness and begin to want to escape, we need to recognize this is an external influence (God's initiating love)...it cannot be explained by anything in nature.

How can remorse and regret just be elements of a pointless self-salvation project?

How do we ever know how much remorse and regret is enough?

We must not only repent of our wrongdoing, but *also* the reasons we ever did anything right!

But this is only the brink of Jesus' message, not the heart because it only tells us what we must turn from, not what or whom we must turn to!

THREE parables in Luke 15

1. Parable of the Lost Sheep (4-7)

⁴"What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? ⁵And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' ⁷Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

2. Parable of the Lost Coin (8-10)

⁸"Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? ⁹And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' ¹⁰Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

3. Parable of the Lost Sons (11-32)

What are the common elements of these three parables?

- Something is lost (sheep, coin, sons)
- Gets it back
- Festive rejoicing and celebration

What is the striking difference between the Parable of the Lost Sons and the other two?

Someone goes out and searches diligently for the sheep and the coin, but no one goes out to search for the younger son.

Who should have gone out and searched for the lost son?

A true elder brother

God to Cain: "You are your brother's keeper."

Why must mercy and forgiveness be free and unmerited to the wrongdoer?

If a wrongdoer has to do something to merit it, then it isn't mercy

Forgiveness *always* comes at a cost to the one granting the forgiveness

What is involved in bringing the younger son back into the family? Is there no atonement?

The elder brother loses a substantial portion of his already-diminished inheritance

What is Jesus inviting us to do by putting a flawed elder brother in the story?

Imagine and yearn for a true older brother

Who is the true elder brother who does not appear in the story directly?

Jesus...he went to a "far country" and paid an infinite cost to bring us into God's family.

There was no way for the younger brother to return to the family unless the older brother bore the cost himself.

Philippians 2:6-8

Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Two Hymns

John Newton

*Our pleasure and our duty,
though opposite before,
since we have seen his beauty
are joined to part no more.*

William Cowper

*To see the Law by Christ fulfilled,
and hear his pardoning voice,
changes a slave into a child
and duty into choice*

The choice is not between two poles: self-discovery or moral conformity. The solution lies on a different plane altogether. We will never stop being younger brothers or elder brothers until we acknowledge our need, rest by faith, and gaze in wonder at the work of our true elder brother, Jesus Christ. (The Prodigal God, p. 89)

CLASS 4

Redefining Hope

What do you consider the most sweeping theme of the Bible?

There will be several answers, but try to lead to: Exile and homecoming; the human condition as profound, constant homesickness.

- Adam and Eve, Cain, Jacob, Joseph, the Israelites, David...

What evokes *home* for you?

C.S. Lewis on homesickness:

Our commonest expedient is to call it beauty and behave as if that had settled the matter. Wordsworth's expedient was to identify it with certain moments in his own past. But all this is a cheat. If Wordsworth had gone back to those moments in the past, he would not have found the thing itself, but only a reminder of it; what he remembered would turn out to be itself a remembering. The books or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them; it was not in them, it only came through them was longing. These things—the beauty, the memory of our own past—are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshipers. For they are not the thing itself... Now we wake to find...[w]e have been mere spectators. Beauty has smiled, but not to welcome us; her face was turned in our direction, but not to see us. We have not been accepted, welcomed, or taken in...

Our life-long nostalgia, our longing to be reunited with something in the universe from which we feel cut off, to be on the inside of some door which we have always seen from the outside, is no mere neurotic fancy, but the truest index of our real situation. ("The Weight of Glory")

Why do we feel this homesickness?

We were created in the garden of God, but we chafed under God's authority and lost our home for the same reason the younger brother lost his. Now we live in a world that no longer fits our deepest desires.

How do we seek to recreate the home we long for?

All sorts of pathologies and denials of our true desires

In the Parable of the Lost Sons, was the younger brother's successful return to home a certainty? What were the barriers?

No; he had rejected his father and his community; he had lived a dissolute life; he had squandered his resources, etc.

How might the elder brother have been a significant barrier?

Poisonous attitude; does the younger brother see the other's hypocrisy? Is he therefore "turned off" to the family? Might the elder brother be one reason the younger one wanted to leave in the first place?

Why is it so difficult for people to find our way home?

- Brokenness *within* human beings

Is the brokenness of human beings the only barrier to homecoming?

- Brokenness *around* human beings (natural world is also fallen; decay, disease, death, natural disasters)

A final, real homecoming would mean a radical change not only in human nature but in the very fabric of the material world.

Jesus announced that he was bringing in the "kingdom of God" (Mark 1:15). Did his life and words fit the expectations of those around him?

- Not born in a palace
- No home
- Ultimate outsider (political, economic, religious)
- Humiliating death, *outside the city gate*, including separation from God (And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?", Matthew 27:46).

What had happened?

In his resurrection, Jesus achieved victory over the forces of death, decay and disorder; when he returns, he will make this victory complete:

^{4b}Behold, your God will come...He will come and save you. ⁵Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; ⁶then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy... ¹⁰And the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. (*Isaiah 35:4/10*)

In the Parable of the Lost Sons, what is happening at the end of the story as a result of the younger son's return?

A feast

What other feasts are central parts of the Bible narrative?

- Original feast in the garden of God (The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it, *Genesis 2:15*)
- Last Supper/Communion
- Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:9)

Where does the Marriage Supper of the Lamb occur?

The New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:1-4; 22:1-2) – The new heavens and the new earth
^{21:1}Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ²And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

What significant feature is found in the New Jerusalem?

^{22:1}Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ²through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the [tree of life](#) with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

What do you conclude from the presence of the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden *and* the New Jerusalem?

At the end of history the whole earth has become the Garden of God again.

The Feast of the Father

There is a glorious feast in the New Jerusalem at the end of history:

⁶On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. ⁷And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. ⁸He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken. (*Isaiah 25:6-8*)

Jesus depicts salvation as a feast:

I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, (Matthew 8:11)

What are the ways to experience a feast?

1. Experiential (senses)

What was Jesus' first public miracle? Why?

Turning water into wine at a wedding reception; Jesus came to bring festival joy
Salvation is experiential (*taste and see*, Psalm 34:8) as well as legal:

There is a difference between believing that God is holy and gracious, and having a new sense on the heart of the loveliness and beauty of that holiness and grace. The difference between believing that God is gracious and tasting that God is gracious is as different as having a rational belief that honey is sweet and having the actual sense of its sweetness. (Jonathan Edwards, Sermon, "A Divine and Supernatural Light").

2. Material – a physical experience

As God was creating, what did he say about his creation?

It was "good" (also "very good")

Karl Marx claimed that religion is "the opiate of the people." What did he mean? Is this true of Christianity?

* Passive about hunger, sickness, and injustice

* Sadly, too many Christians agree—this world is a trial (or an illusion) prior to the reward (or punishment); but the Gospel is something very different

What is God passionate about?

Responses may be varied but should eventually come to poverty, injustice, sickness,

Loneliness

What do Jesus' signs and miracles represent?

- * A reminder of how the world is supposed to be *and*
- * A foretaste of how it will be again (in the new heavens and the new earth)
- * Therefore, a *restoration* of the original created order

“Christianity is by no means the opiate of the people. It’s more like the smelling salts.” (*The Prodigal God*, v. 113)

3. Individual (nourishment)

To grow and survive physically, what must we do?

Eat and drink regularly

To grow and survive spiritually, what must we do?

Eat and drink the Gospel of the grace of God (communion is a reminder)

On what principle does religion operate?

I obey—therefore I am accepted by God

On what principal does the Gospel operate?

I am accepted by God through the work of Jesus Christ—therefore I obey

Is believing the Gospel sufficient?

No, religion is the default mode of the human heart; we must constantly reset our operating system to gospel mode

What is the sign that we don't deeply believe the Gospel?

We go back into default (religion) mode, looking to other things besides God and his grace as our justification, hope, significance, and security (human approval, financial success, family/clan identity, power and influence)

Can we change this through mere will power?

Then how do we grow in the image of Christ?

How did Paul motivate others to give? Improve marriages?

* Example of giving: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.” (2 Corinthians 8:9)

* Example of marriage: “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her...so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. (Ephesians 5:25,27)

The two edges of grace:

Some years ago I met a woman who began coming to Redeemer, the church where I am a minister. She said that she had gone to a church growing up and she had always heart that God accepts us only if we are sufficiently good and ethical. She had never heard the message she was now hearing, that we can be accepted by God by sheer grace through the work of Christ regardless of anything we do or have done. She said, "That is a scary idea! Oh, it's good scary, but still scary."

I was intrigued. I asked her what was so scary about unmerited free grace. She replied something like this: "If I was saved by my good works—then there would be a limit to what God could ask of me or put me through. I would be like a taxpayer with rights. I would have done my duty and now I would 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."

Others say, "Well, if I believed that I was saved by sheer grace, not because of my good works, the I could live any way I wanted." What does the Parable of the Lost Sons have to say about this notion?

Act I only! Grace is free, but also infinitely costly

4. Communal (interdependence)

Why is being part of a Christian community vital to spiritual growth?

The insights, experiences, struggles, victories of others all contribute to our understanding of God, Christ, and the Gospel.

C.S. Lewis was part of a famous circle of friends called the Inklings, which included J.R.R. Tolkien and the author Charles Williams. After Williams died, Lewis wrote a meditation on his death in his book, *The Four Loves*:

In each of my friends there is something that only some other friends can fully bring out. By myself I am not large enough to call the whole man into activity; I want other lights than my own to show all his facets. Now that Charles [Williams] is dead, I shall never again see Ronald's [Tolkien's] reaction to a specifically Charles joke. Far from having more of Ronald, having him "to myself" now that Charles is away, I have less on Ronald... In this, Friendship exhibits a glorious "nearness by resemblance" to heaven itself where the very multitude of the blessed (which no man can number) increases the fruition which each of us has of God. For every soul, seeing Him in her own way, doubtless communicates that unique vision to all the rest."

Only if you are part of a community of believers seeking to resemble, serve, and love Jesus will you ever get to know him and grow into his likeness. (The Prodigal God, p. 127)

Babette's Feast – neither wholesale accommodation to nor rejection of the material world is sufficient to experience the full goodness and grace of God.