



Feeling Alone?

Do you sometimes feel alienated from God? Does he seem distant? Why?

What people often desire most is “to belong.” The worst is to be left out or alienated.

1. Describe the impact of feeling alienated, alone, isolated, or disconnected.
2. What happens when a teenager or young adult longs for belonging but doesn't get it at home?
3. Explain the different ways people try to fill that inner longing to get close to God, be accepted by him, to belong, or at least avoid his wrath.

[Watch scene: At the Sea of Galilee. Look for the way Jesus describes the Father's acceptance.]

- *What struck home most as you watched?*
- *What questions emerge for you (to be considered later)?*

Seeing Ourselves as the Prodigal Child

What do you treasure most? Jesus said that where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matthew 6:19-21). Where your heart is, your actions follow.

Jesus told about a privileged son who selfishly wanted his father's riches more than he wanted a relationship with his father. He thought happiness would come from being totally independent—doing anything he wanted ... not life under his father's care or control. So he asked for his inheritance before its time and then lived his own wild, self-centered agenda of spending life on himself ... until it drove him to despair.

The Prodigal
Son &
The Waiting
Father

Read the Account:
Luke 15:11-24

 Read the account in Luke 15:11-24.

4. Come up with your own modern prodigal son story. What might Jesus have used to illustrate this if he had first told it to our culture today?
5. Identify areas in your life where you have wandered away from God ... become distant. What became of the treasure you pursued?
6. What do you think caused the change of attitude in the prodigal son to return to his father?

Understanding the Waiting Father

The prodigal son was drawn back to his father the more he recalled the great benefits he had walked away from.

7. What were some of the things the son realized he had abandoned when he left his father's house?
8. What is your heavenly Father like? Use the passages below as starters to discussing what life is like living in God's presence. What are you abandoning if you walk away from him?

Matthew 6:25-26 *"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ²⁶Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?"*

Matthew 10:26-31 *"So do not be afraid ...²⁹Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father's care. ³⁰And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. ³¹So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows."*

Matthew 7:11 *"If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!"*

John 14:2 *"My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?"*

The religious elite were offended that Jesus "welcomes sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:2). But Jesus made it clear that he had "come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). God describes us all as sheep who have wandered away. He seeks us and does what is necessary to bring us back.

9. Paraphrase how it is possible for the almighty, just, and holy God to accept us back, even though we are sinners unworthy of his glory.

Titus 3:3-7 *At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. ⁴But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.*


Romans 5:6-10 *You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly ... ⁸God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! ¹⁰For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!*


2 Corinthians 5:18-21 *All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ ...¹⁹not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation ...²¹God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

Finding the Joy in Belonging

The story of the prodigal son is tied to two similar illustrations (Luke 15). In one, the shepherd goes out of his way to rescue one lost sheep. In another, a woman sweeps the house clean looking for one lost coin. Both, describe how valuable each individual is to God who “wants all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:3).

10. In Jesus’ stories, each search ends with excitement and rejoicing—a taste of what is important in heaven.

 **Luke 15:6-7** (Lost Sheep) “Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ ⁷I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent...”

 **Luke 15: 22-24** (Lost Son) “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.”


- Relate a similar attitude of joy you have experienced in life and connect it to the emotions described with our return to God.
- Identify what the Father provided for his prodigal son to help him realize he was fully accepted into the family and could call this home again.
- What does Jesus give us to assure us of our restored relationship with him ... that we belong with and to him?
- Read the rest of the story in Luke 15:25-32. What’s with the older brother? When do we experience a similar reaction to God’s welcoming grace (perhaps even in our own hearts)?


*Part of
Denying Self
is
basing my
identity on what
God says I am
instead of the
labels I or others
place on me.*

Your Forgiven Status with God Changes Everything

We belong! Through Jesus, God makes us his children. This is a supernatural relationship born of God himself (John 1:12-13; 3:3-8) through the powerful gospel message in his Word (Colossians 1:5-6). Understanding our relationship to God as children is a key part of belonging to the kingdom of God (Matthew 18:1-4) giving us a calm, secure sense of belonging under his care and protection. Through faith in Jesus, we may approach God with freedom and confidence and ask anything.

11. Capture some of the joy and privilege of being “a child of God” and describe how that status has an impact on your life.

 **1 John 3:1-2** See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ²Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

 **Romans 8:1-2, 15-17** The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship.... ¹⁵And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” ¹⁶The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. ¹⁷Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. (cf. Galatians 4:4-7)

Reconciled

Brought from being enemies to being reunited as friends—at peace and harmony with each other
Colossians 1:19-23

📖 Hebrews 2:11 *Both the one who makes people holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters.*

God draws us into an intimate relationship with him through Jesus. God actually makes his home with those who love him and obey his teaching (John 14:23). Faith in Jesus makes us part of God's family ... a family filled with people of all ages, languages, ethnic roots the world over who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:2). Peter would later call it a "holy nation, a people belonging to God" (1 Peter 2:9). Paul calls it the body of Christ actively displaying the grace and glory of Jesus, who is the Head.

📖 1 Corinthians 12:4,7,12-13, 25-26 *There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them ... ⁷Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good ... ¹²Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body ... ²⁵so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. ²⁶If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. (cf. Colossians 3:12-17)*

12. What encouragement do you find in being part of the body of Christ, the family of God?

God's children also set their hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God preparing a place for us to bring us to his glory, so we can be where he is (John 14:1-6, Colossians 3:1-4).

13. What do you look forward to most "in your Father's house?"

📖 Revelation 21:1-5 *Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ²I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." ⁵He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."*

Put it into Practice

The only way you can really get to know the heavenly Father and be a part of his family is through the Son (Luke 10:22, John 1:18; 14:6). Getting to know the true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent gives eternal life—being "at home" with him now and looking forward to being eternally in his presence. He fashioned us for that very purpose (2 Corinthians 5:1-8).

- Let the phrase, "Jesus welcomes sinners" color your attitude toward yourself ... and others.
- Start each day seeing yourself as a child of God who depends on his care and guidance.
- Keep your heavenly home in sight as you live out each day.

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