

DIGGING DEEPER

A Guide for Reflection and/ or Discussion

Welcome to *Swine Song*, what we hope is something God will use to remind you of how deeply He loves you. He has packed so much truth about who He is and who we are into this brief story about a family, so we hope you'll take the opportunity to sit down with this guide and a Bible to explore this powerful parable. We'll work over the course of several sessions, ideal for both small group discussion and individual reflection, and we urge you to record your insights in a journal or notebook as we go on this journey together (you'll need it to make the most of the last session). As we mention in the DVD's liner notes, we think this is the greatest story ever written, and we'll all gain far more from it if we dig deeper...

Session One – Introduction

We'll be examining just about every aspect of the story as we go along, but while *Swine Song* is still fresh in your mind, answer these introductory questions:

1. Which character(s) do you identify with most? Why?
2. What is the main lesson God conveys to (and through) that character to you?
3. If you knew this story before watching *Swine Song*, what in this story struck you in a new way this time? Why?

Every story takes place within a specific culture (including your story), so let's look at some of the cultural factors that form the background for the story of *Swine Song*. This story was originally told within 1st Century Hebrew culture, so let's look at the following:

1. Since inheritance is a major theme in the story, read Deuteronomy 21:15-17. What does it tell us about how property was passed to the next generation? Why?

2. Keep reading in Deuteronomy 21 – verses 18-21 this time. What is your reaction to this command? Why do you think it's there? What does it say about how the father acts in *Swine Song*?

3. Read Deuteronomy 14:1-8. Which verse makes contact with our story? Why were these commands issued?

4. What do Deut. 14:2 and 1 Peter 2:9 have in common? Read 1 Pet 2:1-12 for context. Why are we called to be different from the culture that surrounds us?

5. What role does culture play in the lives of the family members in *Swine Song*? What lesson(s) on culture lie within the story? What role does culture play in your life? What role do you think it *should* play?

Session Two – Setting the Context

Swine Song is a retelling of Jesus' parable in Luke 15:11-32. To establish the context for the story, read the entire chapter of Luke 15.

1. What is the setting in which Jesus tells this story for the first time? Does that highlight any aspect of the *Swine Song* story?

2. Jesus tells two brief parables before the one upon which *Swine Song* is based. What message(s) do those parables convey?

3. Luke 14:25 tells us that there is a large crowd with Jesus, and then Luke 15:1 says that the Pharisees and scribes are listening,

and listening closely. Do the stories of the lost sheep and coin have a different meaning for the crowd than for the religious leaders? Which meaning applies most to you? Why?

Session Three – Leaving Home

Now that we've established both a cultural background as well as the circumstances under which Jesus told His followers this story, let's look more closely at our parable.

1. What does Jesus say about the younger son's leaving? In our *Swine Song* adaptation, what motivates the younger son to leave?

2. In *Swine Song*, the younger son accuses his father of trying to make the son become just like the father. What was the father doing in order to make his son become "just like" him? How does God try to make you become "just like" Him?

3. The younger son talks about how many rules his father has. Why do you think the father put them in place? Why has God given us commands to follow?

Session Four – Living It Up

1. What happened to the younger son when he left his father's home and his father's rules behind him? He thought he was having the time of life, but then learned better. Describe your experiences that have been similar.

2. The younger son's new friends hurt him in more than one way – how? How does 1 Corinthians 15:33 relate? How much of your current behavior can be attributed to what your peers expect of you? Do you ever feel uncomfortable with how they expect you to act? How can you change the situation?

3. What was the son's "rock bottom" that God used to help him realize how far away he'd gotten? What have the "rock bottoms" been in your life, and how did God use them?

Session Five – Turning Around

1. When the younger son decides to go back home, he plans to propose that he work for his father as an employee. What does this suggest about the way he thinks of his father and their relationship?
2. It must have been pretty hard for the son to admit he was wrong and to head home. What do you think helped him take those important steps? The churchy word for this turnaround process is "repent". How has God helped you repent in the past?
3. When he says in the end that he doesn't understand his father, what is it that the son doesn't understand? What surprising things have you learned about God? What is He currently revealing to you about Himself?

Session Six – Coming Home

1. The father waits on the front porch every day, watching and hoping for his son's return. When the son does come back, the father races to him in joy and laughter. What does this say about God and us?
2. Read Luke 19:10. How does it relate to the father's behavior? Now read Hebrews 11:6. How does it describe the son's homecoming? What does it mean for us?
3. In addition to running and embracing the younger son on his return, what else does the father do? What do these three things convey about God and us? How do they relate to the other two parables in Luke 15?

4. How does it make you feel to consider your capacity to bring joy to the Father?
5. The father makes clear that the son is forgiven. What does forgiveness feel like?

6. The father also welcomes his son back into the family. What does the family represent? How does being part of a community help us in our walk with God?

7. The father also says that some of the effects of the younger son's sins cannot be done away with. Even if forgiven, what are the consequences of sin in your life that you still have to deal with? How is that part of God's plan? How can you use those consequences to His glory?

Session Seven – Stuck at Home

Remember the context in which Jesus told this story: He knew that religious leaders were listening closely. The older brother holds important lessons for them, and for us.

1. When the older son learns of how the father has reacted to his brother's return, how does the older son react? Why? Do you ever feel that way? How?

2. Was the older son enjoying his life on the father's farm? The father tells the older son that he could have asked for anything and gotten it, but never asked. Are you enjoying your life in God's family? What could you be asking for that God is waiting to give you?

3. What was the older son doing that made him think he was making his father happy? Did that make the father love the older son more? Why does the father love his two sons? Why does God love you?

Session Eight – Lessons Learned

1. If you have time, reread Luke 15:11-32, then watch *Swine Song* one more time. What things stood out to you differently this time?

2. Read your answers from previous sessions in your notebook or journal. What insights from this study do you want to carry with you? Highlight them in your answers.

3. God has given you something special – you! You are unlike any other son or daughter He has ever made. No matter what you've done or how far you've gone, he will always welcome you home. No matter how much you think you're earning His favor by doing all the right things, he will always love you because you're His child. What are you doing with what your Daddy's given you?

4. What would you *like* to do with the life He has entrusted to you? Have you asked Him about it? What steps should you take next? Pray about what He's shown you, and ask Him to help you become like Him!

We pray that you've been blessed by this time of reflection. If you're through with your copy of *Swine Song* for a while, loan it to someone! The transforming power of God's radical love for us is truly amazing. We pray that God brings every person who sees *Swine Song* deeper into their relationship with Him. We ask for your prayers on our behalf as well as we strive to keep telling His Story to others. Keep praying for us, and make sure to keep checking in at <http://muddinyoureye.org> for the next chapter, to read our blog, or sign up for our podcast. Plus, drop a note and let us know how God has used *Swine Song* in your life. Blessings!