

INTRODUCTION

We all have relationships that feel weird—they're awkward and uncomfortable.

We don't want them to be, but they are.

MAYBE you can't find a way to talk to an adolescent.

MAYBE you're not sure what your parents really think of you and you can't muster the nerve to ask them.

MAYBE you've felt yourself drifting away from a close friend.

MAYBE you see potential for friendship in a new acquaintance, but that person is holding you at arm's length.

FOR A LOT OF PEOPLE,
THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH
GOD IS WEIRD AND AWKWARD.

He can feel distant and uncaring—maybe even angry or judgmental. People think of him as a surly old man, a disapproving parent, or a humorless scold.

You may believe in God, but still wonder what he wants from you.

Does he like you?

Is he aware of how stressful life is—how you hate your job or are stressed out about your mortgage or concerned about your health or can't even believe how much it still hurts that your mom is gone?

Does he even care?

What if God does care?

What if he *wants* a relationship with you?

What if he wants to interact with you in a way that is honest and transparent—*intimate*?

What if he wants your life to be filled with joy and peace?

That's the kind of God we all hope and long for, right?

If that's how God is, it would not only change your spiritual life, it would change the way you relate to other people.

IT WOULD CHANGE EVERYTHING.

WEEKLY READING: INTIMACY WITH GOD

Boiled down to its simplest form, the entire Bible—Old and New Testaments—is a record of God’s pursuit of intimate relationship with his creation. God made everything around us so that it would reflect his glory and creativity. He made us in his own image to do the same. And he gave us the freedom to choose to love him . . . or not.

In Luke 15, Jesus tells three stories¹ to illustrate God’s radical and relentless love for people.

In the first one, a man who has a hundred sheep loses one of them. So he leaves the ninety-nine and goes looking for the one until he finally finds it. The man is so happy he calls his friends and family together to celebrate.

In the second story, a woman with ten coins loses one of them. She turns her house upside down looking until she finds the lost coin. Like the man with the sheep, she celebrates recovering the coin with friends and family.

In the most famous story, a rebellious young man asks his dad for his inheritance (even though his dad is still alive) and then sets off on his own because he’s tired of living by his father’s rules. The young man squanders his money, learning the hard way that people who are your friends because of what they can get from you tend to disappear when you run out of stuff to give. When the young man realizes how much he’s messed things up, he swallows his pride and goes back to his father’s house, fully expecting to be punished.

INSTEAD, HIS DAD THROWS A PARTY AND INVITES ALL OF THEIR FAMILY AND FRIENDS—HE’S JUST HAPPY THAT HIS SON HAS COME HOME.

What Jesus’ stories tell us is that God doesn’t only look down on the mass of humanity from afar and feel love. He knows us and loves us individually. He cares about us personally. When we’re lost, he finds us and brings us home. When we run away, he doesn’t write us off. He waits patiently for us to return, ready to forgive and accept us.

¹ Luke 15:1-32

WE RESIST GOD BECAUSE WE DON’T TRUST HIM.

What if I depend on God and he lets me down? What if he takes advantage of me? What if he doesn’t really have my best interests at heart?

When we decide that we can’t trust God’s love for us, our relationship with him becomes religion, which is just a quest to find the right combination of belief and ritual to get God to do what we want him to do. Because religion isn’t relational, it reinforces our sense that God is distant and judgmental.

That kind of non-relationship with God eventually makes us judgmental. It’s no way to live. It’s definitely not God’s design.

The most powerful relational dynamic in the world is trust.

When two people set aside their own agendas on behalf of each other, it creates an unbreakable bond of trust between them. Each knows that the other has his or her best interests at heart.

God has already demonstrated his trustworthiness. When he sent Jesus to die for our sins, he put our need for salvation ahead of his son’s suffering. By serving us, he invited us to trust him enough to obey him.²

² Philippians 2:6-8