



## Introduction

God intends the church to be known as a place for people to experience acceptance, belonging, and unconditional love. Sadly, the church is known more for what it is against, rather than what it is for, resulting in many bad church experiences. Consequently, many people remain far from God. But Jesus reminds us through his own example and in his teachings that God is for those who are far from him. All is not lost. The church can be known as being a place where people can see and experience the heart of God.

## Discussion Questions

1. Describe a time you were either tempted to or actually walked away from something you were involved with because of a bad experience. Did you ever go back? Why or why not?
2. Word association: When you hear the word "church," what word comes to mind?
3. Why do you suppose Christians are tempted to be the world's "big brothers"?
4. What behavior in others turns you into a Christian "big brother"? What can you do to treat people in your life more like the Father than the "big brother"?
5. *When we choose to represent the Father, not the "big brother," it will make a difference. What is one way you can begin to represent the Father to those who may have only experienced the "big brother"?*

## Moving Forward

Jesus was a friend of sinners. He genuinely enjoyed hanging out with those whom the religious elite of his day actively avoided. And those who were unlike him genuinely loved being around him. In Jesus, they both saw and experienced the heart of his Father. As the church, it is our joy and duty to continue in his example, reflecting the Father's heart and inspiring others to follow Jesus.

## Changing Your Mind

*"My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'" (Luke 15:31-32)*