

God Is Waiting For Us To Return

To me the image of the father standing on a hill looking in the direction he saw his son go hoping to catch a glimpse of him returning is one of the most poignant and moving pictures that Jesus paints with his parables. It tells how God feels about his creation. It shows us how we should treat those who have left our congregation to try other forms of religion—or how we should treat our children who decide they have had enough of church when they turn 18—and it gives us three important points to practice when we find ourselves in the position of the father joyfully catching sight of his son returning home.

What is the first thing the father does? He runs to his son, puts his arms around him and kisses him. This is not a reserved unemotional man extending his hand to shake his son's in greeting—this is full blown joy—unrestrained and welcoming. This is the way God feels when we return to him after trying to do things our own way. It shows us we should never be ashamed or afraid to come back to God even when we know we have sinned because he will welcome us back with open arms.

The second thing the father does is forgive and restore his son to his position in the family. The son was humbly returning ready to accept the position of a servant but his father called for a robe and a ring and then celebrated his son's return! This how God treats us when we turn to him in heartfelt repentance. There is no hint of judgment from the father—who could very easily have enjoyed his son's humiliation by saying things like—"I knew you'd come crawling back someday—or See, I told you couldn't make it on your own"—no the father simply accepts his son's request for mercy and restores him into the family circle. (The circle of trust?)

The final thing the father does is show his desire for the two brothers to be reconciled to each other...Yes the younger son sinned and did not behave wisely---and the older son did feel hurt that his wayward brother was so easily forgiven, but the father wants a complete family...he doesn't ignore his older son's feelings

he simply explains that there should be reconciliation between them. This third point leads to some questions I would like us to think about in terms of our church family:

1. Which does Calvary have more of, returning prodigals or grumbling elder brothers and sisters?
2. What suggestions do you have for transforming our congregation into a place where prodigals are truly able to come home?

Think about these two questions and if you have an answer to one or both, jot them down and e-mail me or send me a card or just talk to me. I believe God works through all of us and He may use you to get a message to me.

How should we treat prodigals returning to their church home or their family home? The same way the father treats his son in this amazing parable. Welcome them enthusiastically, restore and forgive, then seek reconciliation. If we do these things, then we will be acting the way God would act and that can only please God.