The Father is Always Waiting for You
By Dr. Ed Jordan

In Luke 15:11-32 we find one of the Bible's most famous parables, known as the parable of the Prodigal Son. A parable is an illustrative story used to convey truth. This parable seems to focus upon a son who left his family and God behind to live a rebellious life, taking his inheritance with him. He blew all the money on a lascivious lifestyle, and on many "friends" who helped him spend it. Those friends evaporated when the money dried up, and the son was left in great need.

He became so desperate that he took a job feeding pigs. For a Jewish boy, this was sinking to the depths of depravity. This element of the story is designed to show the depths into which we can sink when we choose to live outside the love, care and protection of God, who is depicted in this parable as the father of the two sons.

This parable is usually presented as evidence of man's sinfulness, and that eventually some of those who live sinful lifestyles will wake up ("he came to his senses"), choose to repent ("I will arise and return to my father"), confess his or her sin ("I have sinned against Heaven and in your sight"), and ask for forgiveness and restoration to at least a servant relationship in the father's house ("I am no longer worthy to be called your son, make me as one of your hired servants."). [The above quotations are from Luke 15: 17-19 NASB.]

However, there is another very important emphasis in this parable. It is the role of God, as portrayed by the father. Lutheran theologian Helmut Thielicke wrote a little treatise on this entitled "The Waiting Father." Anytime we study Scripture we need to realize that Scripture not only reveals the nature of people, but that it primarily reveals the nature and activities of God.

So, what do we learn about God in this parable? Many of God's characteristics are revealed in verses 20-24. The father saw the son while the son was still a long way away. This means the father had been waiting for the son to return, watching the road for a poof of dust, or a distant figure coming up the road. God waits for us as well, waiting and watching for us to come to our senses and return to Him.

The father had compassion on his son, took off running to meet him, and welcome him back. God longs for us to come back to Him, to realize that we have blown it, and to decide that we need to return to His love and care. When we make that decision and begin the journey back, God runs to meet us, hugs us, welcomes us, and personally escorts us back home. He did not make the sinful son grovel and beg for restoration. When God saw the repentance as evidenced by his son's changes of direction, disposition, and dislocation, He ran to welcome His loved one back home.

The father also demonstrated grace to the son. He restored the son back to full family-member status. Grace is God giving us what we do not deserve! He gave him a ring, a robe and sandals, and then threw a celebration feast. Joy and celebration await every rebel who comes to his or her senses, and realizes that real quality of life is only found in the presence of God. God is continually watching the road, waiting for the one He loves to decide to return to live in daily fellowship with Him.

Do you see yourself in this parable? Are you the parent waiting for an estranged child to return and be relationally close to the family again? Are you the child who went out to experience life on your own? Have you had a change of heart, and just need some encouragement to take the journey back into a healing relationship? Are you the elder brother who resents that the sibling who squandered half the family's wealth, has returned and restored to equal position with the son who stayed home and worked? If this describes your situation, remember that the future is yours to choose. God awaits your decision, and your soon return!

Thanksgiving gatherings often include such scenarios, and the wounds that came from past conflicts. Often we are not looking forward to going home, because there is a lot of unresolved baggage that accompanies it. Yet, Thanksgiving gives us all a chance for a "do-over," a return, a second chance to live joyfully with our family. If you do not live near enough to dine together, take

time to call and express your gratitude for each of them. Come back to the Father, and those who love you!

Award-winning columnist Dr. Ed Jordan is pastor of Gwynn's Island Baptist Church, Gwynn, VA. He can be reached at szent.edward@gmail.com. Dr. Jordan's new book: *"Doing Love! It can change your life!"* can be purchased on Barnes&Noble.com or Amazon.com.