



SERMON SERIES BY PASTOR SANDY ADAMS

SCARY FAMILIES: PART ONE

WHEN A DAD THROWS HIS FAMILY UNDER THE BUS

TEXT: GENESIS 12:10-20

This morning we're beginning a new series of Bible Studies I've entitled, "Scary Families." I've subtitled the messages, "Taking the Fright out of Family Life." Hey, families can be scary... absolutely frightful...

For starters you find a woman you like... well, hopefully you love her... *but you don't really know her...* And the odds of you getting to know her before the wedding is "*slim to none.*" She's putting her best foot forward. She's hoping to lasso a man and get him to the altar. It's only after she seals the deal that she's willing to let her hair down and let the real wife show. And when that happens it can be scary!

Of course, the same holds true for a newlywed wife. She wakes up from the wedding, and discovers *the perfect gentleman* doesn't always brush his teeth - nor shave twice a day. He rarely, if ever, eats with a napkin. While he sleeps, he makes awful noises and emits terrible odors. I mean, none of this was apparent while they were dating. It was as if the guy led a double life.

Then you show up for the first family get-together, *and it starts to make sense.* No wonder my spouse is so weird - *look at the family!* These folks are spooky! My mother-in-law has an agenda. Then there's the crazy uncle. And the creepy step-parent. *This is scary.* Family reunions feel like an episode of "*The Walking Dead.*" You wonder if there're zombies in the barn. And here's the funny thing... *Your spouse's family* scares you almost as much as *your family* scares your spouse. *Ready or not, you're part of a scary family!*

And to top it all off... after surveying your spouse's gene pool you start to wonder what your own kids are going to look like... And this gets "*horror show*" spooky! Is my baby going to have his Uncle's nose?... Or her Grandma's hips?... Or will he be bald by 25 like that strange cousin?... Wow! Family life is frightening...

Remember Forest Gump's famous line, "*Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're going to get.*" In a very real sense that's also true of families. You never know the surprises you'll encounter in family life... *The only guarantee is that there're no guarantees.* People change. Circumstances change. Sometimes for good, sometimes for bad, sometimes you're not sure whether it changed for good or bad... *Babies are born, kids grow up, the elderly die, jobs are lost, new employment is found, moves are made, sickness occurs, teens make mistakes, wayward kin turn over a new leaf, adults go off the deep end.* And if you're a creature of habit all this change is very scary!

I had a guy tell me once, "*I could never be with the same woman for a lifetime.*" Immediately I recognized his ignorance. The guy knows nothing about marriage. If he had a clue he'd realize when you stay married to the same woman for a lifetime you end up with tremendous variety - *for your wife is always changing.*

After 31 years I've lived with numerous dress sizes, and hair colors, and body types, and just about every mood you can imagine. I've made love to a 20-something babe, a nurse, a pregnant woman, a home-maker, a soccer mom, a Bible teacher, and now a grandma - *and I never thought it could be so good!* Hey, family life can be scary at times, *but it's never boring.* Even two happily married people - from relatively normal families - have no idea the changes, and challenges, and opportunities tomorrow holds...

Each week I'm going to start our study with a few photos of *scary families*. Here's this week's sampling... **Kids with Guns.** This is really scary... What are their parents thinking? *"Come on kids let's get a picture by the Christmas Tree with your new automatic rifles."* **Kid getting kissed.** *"Ok, Ok, I'm not sure I need this much affection... Control yourselves, would you..."* **Going for a walk.** *"Marge, let's go for a walk on the interstate. The view from the exit ramp is lovely."* **Here's a Dad gone nuts.** All four of his girls dress up in their new PJs, but for some odd reason the dad goes topless. Trust me, this guy is very, very scary.

And that brings me to this week's lesson. Here's its title, ["When A Dad Throws His Family Under The Bus."](#) Nothing creates a scarier situation for a family than when dad succumbs to cowardice - *throws in the towel.* When he shirks his responsibility, and abandons his leadership, and stops fighting for his family... *life gets scary...* That's what we find at the end of Genesis 12...

Let's work through the passage together. The story starts in verse 10, **"Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram..."** (God will later change his name to *Abraham*. And out of habit I'll refer to him by both names.) So **Abram went down to Egypt to dwell there, for the famine was severe in the land."** If we were to list the great men in the OT we could make a case for Noah, or Joseph, or Moses, or Joshua, or David, or Elijah, or Daniel, or Nehemiah... But at the top of the list would sit Abraham. *He was the first of God's chosen people!* The founder of Israel.

Three times in the Bible, Abraham is referred to by the exalted title, **"friend of God."** He was God's pal. Even the Muslims call him, **"El Khalil"** - **"The Friend."** When the NT authors seek to illustrate saving faith they point to Abraham as an example. He **"believed God and it was accounted to Him for righteousness."** A full third of Hebrews 11 - a chapter called **"The Hall of Faith"** - is preoccupied with the faith of Abraham.

Once a tour bus was traveling through the European countryside. It seemed every town or village could boast of some great resident who had been born there. When the bus stopped for gas, one of the passengers rolled down his window and asked the man on the stoop. **"Were there any great men born in this town?"** The old man answered, **"No, only babies."** The point is, great men don't start that way. They're *made not born.* Or you could say they're *born again.* Such was the case with Abram. Joshua 24:2 implies that Abe and his family started out as idol-worshipping Babylonians. Abraham was a sinner... saved by grace. *And in Genesis 12 he shows his frailty and faults...* God called Abram out of Babel, and brought him into a new, fruitful land. It would belong to Abram and his descendants for all eternity. But as soon as famine hits, rather than trust God, *the father of faith* tucks tail and bolts for the Nile. Egypt had storehouses full of food. Abram wouldn't need to have *faith* in Egypt...

"And it came to pass, when he was close to entering Egypt..." He could see the pyramids off in the distance. **"He said to Sarai his wife, 'Indeed I know that you are a woman of beautiful countenance.'"** What makes this amazing is that Sarai was 65 years old at the time. Here's a woman who went shopping for a bikini with her social security check. No cosmetic surgery for Sarai. No *knife* for Abe's wife. She was a *silky senior.* Sarai was retirement age, but still hot enough to get recruited to join the harem of a lusty Oriental Sultan.

This kind of maturer, ageless beauty is unusual, but it's not unprecedented. In fact, I did some calculations. According to Genesis 23:1 Sarai lived to be 127 years old. If my wife lives to be 100 years old *and she could*. (Her grandma lived to be 102.) That means 52 is to 102 what 65 is to 127. That puts it all in perspective. I'm like Abram - married to a *foxy free bird!* The pretty Sarai and Kathy Adams are two peas in a pod.

But Abram reveals his fears in verse 12, "Therefore it will happen, when the Egyptians see you, that they will say, 'This is his wife'; and they will kill me, but they will let you live." *They'll murder me to abduct my wife.* You'd hope Abram would answer this threat with courage. He'd say, "honesty is always the best policy." Or he'd *buck up* and trust in God's protection. Or he'd *man up* and lay down his life to defend his wife.

But no, he hides behind a skirt. In order to save his own skin, he begs his wife, Sarai, to lie to the Pharaoh. "Please say you are my sister, that it may be well with me for your sake, and that I may live because of you." What a wimp - a coward. He buckles under to fear. Sarah was a *knock out*, but all a fearful Abram is worried about is getting *knocked off* - so to safeguard his own life he tells his wife to fib... "Baby, take off your wedding band. Claim to be my *sis* - a *Miss not a Mrs.*" Genesis 20:12 explains that this was partially true. Sarai was Abram's *half-sister* - her dad's daughter - an arrangement that was morally accepted at the time. But Abram requires Sarai to go further and disavow their marriage. He orders her to falsify the truth. A supposed godly Abraham isn't being a strong moral influence on his wife. His priority is self-preservation.

And Abram's fears came true. We're told in verse 14, "So it was, when Abram came into Egypt, that the Egyptians saw the woman, that she was very beautiful. The princes of Pharaoh also saw her (they were first to spot her beauty) and commended her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken to Pharaoh's house."

The most amazing thing about this story is that Sarai *complied*. The Bible doesn't say she lied as Abram requested. That would've been a sin, and a wife should never sin against God, even if her husband suggests it. But Sarai didn't buck Abram either. She submitted to her husband's wishes even when it was a mistake. Twice in the NT Sarai is commended - *once for her submission* - *once for her faith*. There's not a greater example of faith than when a wife yields to a husband. When a beautiful, honorable lady like Sarai stands down, and lets her flawed husband lead his family, it reveals tremendous feminine intuition on her part.

Whenever a husband shows a lack of judgment his wife is in a pickle... If she *doesn't take over* he'll make a mistake. But if she *does take over* he'll stop trying and vacate leadership. And often that ends up a worse outcome than his blunder. If a wife doesn't let her man *learn to lead* she'll stunt the ole boy's growth. A wise wife is willing to *step back*, and make room for her husband to *step up*. She trusts God to oversee his decisions, *and in Abram's case*, even over-rule them. In the process, the husband *grows*, and God *shows* His faithfulness to the wife. *God protects submissive wives*, but while she's being tested it can get scary! *Just ask Sarai...* What a pathetic situation this was... She's led off by *salacious sinners* - while Abram, a man who vowed to love and protect his wife - stands by with arms folded, afraid to lift a finger to stop them.

Verse 16 tells us the Pharaoh "treated Abram well for her sake. He had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male and female servants, female donkeys, and camels." As the supposed brother of Sarai, Pharaoh honored Abram. This might've been payment for Sarai. It could be that not only *fear*, but *greed* also motivated Abram. If so, that means Abram threw his wife under the bus not only to save *his hide*, but to multiply *his herd*. That would be an even scarier situation.

One thing is for sure, Pharaoh's sheep, and donkeys, and camels were the equivalent of blood money. How could a man be so callous? Hang his wife out to dry, just to add sheep to his flock. That's *baaad*. Abram should've been punished for his betrayal, rather he was rewarded. *I bet it ate at his conscience*. Surely, if he owned an ounce of manhood he ended up despising the favor he gained for turning over Sarai. Every token of the Pharaoh's gratitude stuck him like a dagger. His good fortune only added to his shame.

Rather than protect Sarai's purity and dignity he'd placed his beautiful bride in a compromising position. Where was his wife now? Who's hands were holding Sarai? Had she been violated? *What a jerk he'd been? And now to be rewarded?* He could barely sleep at night, or hold down his food. The man felt wretched. He threw his wife under the bus; then climbed into the driver's seat and ran over her for good measure. It reminds me of Bobby Petrino... One moment, he's got a wife and four kids - he's Head Coach of one of college football's finest programs - making \$4 million a year - probably, the most popular fellow in Arkansas... The next moment he's on TV in a neck brace, facial abrasions, fired and disgraced, his marriage in trouble. *How did it happen?* Well, in a nutshell, **he threw his family under the bus for a few bites of forbidden fruit**. I'm not picking on Bobby... But I couldn't think of a better example of a man throwing away so much so fast on a single lapse of judgment. He compromised not just his family, but everything he'd worked for...

Abraham also threw an awful lot under the bus... It was more than just Sarai that Abram disregarded. Think of all he jeopardized just to make life easier on himself... **a promise** from God, his **prestige, a princess** - even his heirs, his future **posterity**... Remember Abram was the benefactor of incredible **promises** from God. While in Babel - stuck in the emptiness of idolatry - God chose this man Abram. There was nothing special about him, but out of the thousands of people who lived in that region God in His grace spoke to Abram. This was *amazing mercy!* God took this man across the Fertile Crescent to a rich and prosperous land. The land of Canaan was described as **"a land flowing with milk and honey."**

And God made three promises: A beautiful, bountiful land... Descendants who would multiply into a great nation... And one son - *Abraham's seed* - who would bring salvation to the world... **Sod, seed, salvation**. But these staggering promises depended on Sarai. Abraham's promised son would come through his wife. When Abe threw Sarai under the bus, he was ultimately tossing away the promises of God with her.

I think about this a lot... The success I desire is not just about me. Thirty-one years ago I took a wife, and it would be a hollow victory if I achieved my goals without the woman who has stood by my side in the process. I've got what I think are some godly ambitions, but trust me, they're empty if they don't include my family. Abram added **"sheep, servants, camels...** (he was) **treated well"** - *but all the while he was living a hell!* I believe a success that alienates or neglects your wife and kids is not a prosperity that God authors. Abram threw away God's blessing along with Sarai.

But notice too, when Abram threw Sarai under the bus, he also threw away a **prestigious reputation**. How could Abram not think that eventually the word would get out, and he'd be known in his nomadic circles as a coward, a liar, a slime-ball? A man hiding behind his wife's skirt would never be treated seriously. This incident put a deep dent in his reputation. The world of Abram's day was a patriarchal culture where men fought and died for their family's honor. A man's name and reputation was his most valuable possession. It meant something in that society. *And it still does to some people*. I know I want to be a man who keeps his promises - *certainly to my family*.

I suppose Bubba Watson now holds the most prestigious award in sports. He owns a green jacket. It's about time the Masters was won by a southern boy named Bubba. I loved Bubba's post tournament remarks. He thanked His Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and gave a shout out to his college fans... "Go Dawgs!" But the way Bubba feels about his green jacket is the way every man should feel about the reputation he wears. Bubba wouldn't dare spill gravy, or get butter on that jacket. *Why would we risk staining our reputation?*

How could Abraham be so nonchalant with his good name? Didn't he value the prestige his life had earned? *How could it be so easy to just throw it all away?* It's ironic, hard work goes into earning a good reputation, whereas sometimes all you have to do to ruin one is nothing. He just stayed quiet. And often that's all it takes. **A failure to act can stain a reputation.** When Abram threw Sarai under the bus, he was tossing God's **promise**, his **prestige**, **and a Princess**. Sarai wasn't just a pretty face or a well proportioned figure to Abram - lots of *effort, patience, hard work*, and *growing together* had gone into their relationship.

The Hebrew name "**Sarai**" means "**contentious**." Abram lived for years with a gal named "**contentious**." Solomon also had some experience with such a woman... Proverbs 21, "**Better to dwell in a corner of a housetop, than in a house shared with a contentious woman.**" And Proverbs 27, "**A continual dripping on a very rainy day and a contentious woman are alike...**" Abram and Sarai were both married to a drip, *but they worked it out*. That's what real loves does... it doesn't run, and it doesn't quit... **it works it out...**

Abram loved Sarai until God changed her name from "**contentious**" to "**Sarah**" - which means "**Princess**." How do you throw a Princess under the bus with whom you've invested decades, effort, sacrifice... How do you toss aside a person you've cried with, laughed with, overcome challenges together, shouldered shared trials - *how do you just chunk it all away?* How do you get so hard-hearted that you're willing to turn your back on a person who was your best friend?

Whenever I'm tempted to think an unfaithful thought I remember what Kathy and I have built together. For 31 years we've loved, and fought, and cried, and argued, and laughed, and forgiven, and loved again, and raised kids, and made it through teenage-hood, and been patient with each other - *and now we fit*. Like a favorite pair of shoes - we feel snug - we fit. If we had to get new shoes we'd end up with a blister. I've built *a life with a wife*. If I'm the King of my Castle; then Kathy is my *Princess*. In a lot of ways it's taken 31 years for us to work out the kinks. It's finally gone from good to really good... How can you throw a **Princess** under the bus? *Yet that's what Abram did...*

And sadly, that's what a lot of men in our society do every day through infidelity or pornography. Like Abram all they think about is themselves - what pleases and satisfies them - even at the expense of their families. They want the thrill and release of sex without being bothered with a wife, and kids, and the responsibility that makes sexuality *meaningful* - not just *hormonal*. They throw their Princess under the bus - and most of the men I talk to, regret it terribly after they do.

Actually, a man can throw his wife under the bus in a lot of little ways... *not appreciating what she does for you and the kids - saddling her with unpleasant duties - blaming her for failing at what you should've done - putting your wants ahead of her needs* - etc. etc. etc. Rather than build into your wife, some guys take short-cuts. They desire intimacy without the sacrifice and diligence that goes into *working* on a marriage.

Wow, Abram's selfishness heaved a lot under the bus - **promises, prestige, a Princess** - even **posterity**. Your **posterity** are your descendants. It's the legacy and heritage you intend to leave to future generations. The older I get the more I think about my **posterity**. I care

about what happens to this church after I'm gone. I've spent 31 years as its pastor. But I realize I won't be its pastor forever. I care about CC's future. *Has a steady course been set - strong enough to survive the future storms that'll try to rock the boat?* I'm only 54 years old, but I think about this stuff... I certainly think about the mistake I could make that would nullify a lot of the good I've done, and disqualify me from ministry. *I realize it's happened to better men than me.* I just want to bring God glory - not shame.

Posterity is also why I'm concerned over what my kids will say about me one day... And why I try to be a godly example to my daughter-in-laws and son-in-law... And why I'm now so zealous about finding ways to influence my grandkids... Especially when it hits me that "*granddad*" is a more distant position than "*dad*." Most of all I pray that the passion I have for the grace and truth of Jesus Christ will go on beating in the hearts of the people I love even after I'm gone.

I suppose if Abram's life had ended in Genesis 12 he would've left a legacy alright. But instead of "*the father of our faith*" he would've been known for his cowardice. Later God will take Abram out under the night sky, and show him the stars. This was before the days of city lights, parking lot lights - all the ambient light that reduces our night vision. God told Abraham, "*Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them... So shall your descendants be...*" God made sure Abraham knew he would have a posterity. Millions of people will lean on his legacy. Still today, Jews, Christians, even Arabs trace their heritage to Abraham. It's *really scary* to me that there was a time in his life when Abraham was so consumed with himself he was willing to throw it all under the bus.

Sadly, it can happen... Jim Lo Scalzo is a photo-journalist who worked 16 years for US News and World Report. He covered vital stories in over 60 countries. He loved his job - won countless awards - said he couldn't stop moving... He admitted, "*I'm a travel addict.*" But his relentless pace took a toll on his family. He was in Iraq during his wife's second miscarriage. Finally, Lo Scalzo decided to give it up. Put his family first. He writes in his memoirs, "*How to stop moving? It was about accepting a simple truth: In the world of photojournalism I would always be a man of minor accomplishments. But in the field of fatherhood - to one little boy, at least, I had a chance to become a legend.*" Dad, I don't know what drives you, but whatever tempts you to throw your family under the bus, it's not worth it. Your legacy is more important than you think. Think about *God's promises... the prestige of a good reputation... your Princess... your impact on posterity...* It gets spooky when a man gets so immersed in his own stuff that he's willing to throw it all under the bus.

It's interesting what happens in the rest of Genesis 12. Here's hope for all wives... We're told in verse 17, "*But the Lord plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife.*" Even though Abram failed his wife, God didn't. He honored her submissive attitude and rescued Sarai. God plagued Pharaoh's household. We're not sure what it was... *barrenness, boils, blisters, battles...* The Bible doesn't say, but it was enough to pull Sarai out from underneath the bus, and insure her safety!

The Lord even used the evil, idolatrous Pharaoh to rebuke the "*friend of God.*" "*And Pharaoh called Abram and said, 'What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say, 'She is my sister'? I might have taken her as my wife. Now therefore, here is your wife; take her and go your way.'*" So Pharaoh commanded his men concerning him; and they sent him away, with his wife and all that he had."

Now I wish I could say Abraham was a quick learner, but he wasn't. It'll surprise you to know, this whole story gets repeated in Genesis 20. This time Abraham and Sarah travel into Philistine country. Sarah is near 90, yet still a hottie. *And Abraham has the same fear...* He's worried,

Abimelech, king of the Philistines, will end *his life* in order to snatch *his wife*. And again, Abe throws his family under the bus to save his own skin. It makes for a scary family when this happens over and over... No one trusts each other. Everyone is leery. The wife and kids are always waiting for the next shoe to fall. *When will dad sell us out for a better offer?* After a while a family develops a fear of buses.

When Dad doesn't stand up - and lead with integrity - and protect sacrificially - a family learns to live without him. Trust me, the leadership vacuum doesn't last long! Mom takes over. Or worse, the kids take over. And if Dad is still around he becomes irrelevant. He's reduced to a sperm donor, or bill payer, or handy-man.

I wish we had time to canvass Abraham's life for the moments when he turned it around... *and he surely did*. If God had just been the God of the second chance Abraham would've struck out. But He's the God of the third, fourth, fifth, and *the one more chance*... **Abraham eventually overcame his fear by growing in his faith.**

Here's the lesson for week one of **Scary Families**... **Faith** causes men to *stand up*, and *do right*, and *take responsibility*, and *fight for their families*. It also causes women to trust God to keep working on their man. **Fear** causes families to get thrown under the bus.

A 2011 study of single adults in America interviewed 122 unmarried couples - folks ages 18-36 who lived together. **Over two-thirds feared their own inability to form enduring marriages.** They desired to marry for life, to *"do it right" as they said* - but doubted they could. Most of these singles were products of divorce. They'd tasted the consequences of their parent's failed marriage - *the emotional pain, the social embarrassment, child custody disputes, financial and legal problems*. They feared repeating their parents' mistakes. *Talk about leaving the wrong kind of legacy*... And fear is what causes dads to throw their families under the bus... *fear they can't provide... fear they won't live up... fear they'll never be enough... fear their own needs will go unmet... fear they'll be rejected*... Men rarely admit to these fears, but they're real.

The transformation in Abraham was dramatic. In Genesis 20 *he throws his wife under the bus*, then two chapter later, Genesis 22, *he lays his son on the altar*. It was an **act of fear** followed by an **act of faith**. *How did Abraham change?* Well, in the aftermath of his failure he learned God was still faithful. When he lays his son, Isaac, on the altar he prays, "**Jehovah-Jireh**" or "**God, My Provider**." In Egypt, and among the Philistines, Abraham saw God's devotion to his family. And he finally mimics God. A dad stops throwing his family under the bus, when he realizes God hasn't thrown him under the bus!

Here's hope... *A family can change!* **God is bigger than our fears and hurts.** This gives great hope to dads who've failed... and hope to families who hurt... And this is why both should stick it out. Husbands and wives should fight for their family. **A family - any family - even a scary family - is a family worth saving.** Don't throw away your family. Dedicate it to God. The scariest family of all is the family that's given up. Remember God's **promises**... the potential **prestige**... the **Princess**... and the **posterity** that needs a legacy... Much is at stake! Don't succumb to fear, for *God is able!* Rather than *throw your family under the bus*, why not *lay it on the altar*, and re-commit yourself to God...