



SERMON SERIES BY PASTOR SANDY ADAMS
SCARY FAMILIES: PART SEVEN
TWO PRODIGALS
TEXT: LUKE 15:11-32

This morning we're wrapping up a series of studies we've entitled, "Scary Families... Taking The Fright Out Of Family Life." And we'll begin where we've started the last six weeks, with a few scary family photos... By now, we've taken just about all the fright out of your family life... Dad is taking responsibility... Parents are in control... No more playing favorites, grace reigns in your house... Everyone is real and up-front with God and each other... Family members are loving each other, rather than using each other... And both husbands and wives are guarding against infidelity... Since you're applying these lessons, and making such progress, you've probably forgotten what a scary family is like... so I've got a few photos as a reminder..

Photo #1 is **a blended family**. And one look at this family and you realize more blending needs to occur. The *bow ties* and the *biker* are headed for a conflict. Photo #2 is **a family that's into sports**. A child has a football, another has a soccer ball, *but they should've given more thought to who took the baseball bat*. The daughter on the back row has a scary look in her eyes.

These next two photos are in honor of Father's Day... Photo #3 is of **a dad diapering his child**. It's great that this is an involved dad - but is it just me, or is it a little scary to put the changing table under a gun rack? And photo #4 - *the last of the scary family series photos...* it's time for **the boys to get a trim**. Dad's summertime haircuts is a rite of passage in most families, but with three brothers already bald, the young man in the chair has every right to be scared.

By now you know the Bible is packed with *scary families*. The *scary families* outnumber *model families*. I want to wrap up our series by focusing on *one family* that's a microcosm of *the human family*. In Luke 15 Jesus tells the story of a Father with two sons. This story is often called "**The Parable of the Prodigal Son**," but it would better be titled, "**The Parable of the Prodigal Sons**" - **plural...** Both sons were prodigals. And whether a prodigal lives an *unrighteous life*, or a *self-righteous life* - either create some scary dynamics.

In verse 11, Jesus begins His story, "**A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.'** So he divided to them his livelihood. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country..." Apparently, baby brother felt stifled living under his father's roof. He decides to fly the coup - spread his wings and declare his independence. So he asks his dad for his share of the family fortune, and strikes out on his own. Commentator Warren Wiersbe provides us an insight, "**It was perfectly legal for the younger son to ask for his share of the estate and even to sell it, but it was certainly not a very loving thing on his part. It was as though he were saying to his father, 'I wish you were dead.'**" How rude, and crude, and self-serving... By their very nature, families are social units. Families require unselfish interaction - *giving, and sharing, and waiting, and listening, and helping...* A family's health rests on each member's willingness to sacrifice their individual rights for the good of the whole. In the words of the Three Musketeers, a family needs to be, "**All for one, and one for all.**"

But here a family gets scary. The father's younger son isn't thinking about his dad, or brother, or family - all he's concerned about is *numero uno*. He wants what's coming to him *right now*. Don't forget, his inheritance was earmarked for him. *He was in the will*. It's going to be the younger son's in time. But rather than respect his father's hard work, and generosity - and patiently wait on a gift given. He *disses dad*. He feels entitled. He thinks *dad owes him*. Notice, Jesus said, "(he) gathered (it) all together." Apparently, the boy wasn't planning to return. In his mind, he was packing up for good. He's out of here!

And he "journeyed to a far country..." The Jews who listened that day, probably thought of Antioch in Syria. Antioch was a city known for its lax moral climate and it's sensual attractions - *think ancient Las Vegas*. "What happened in Antioch, stayed in Antioch." This son left a *loving home for sin city*.

Verse 13, "and there (he) wasted his possessions with prodigal living." The word "*prodigal*" means "*wasteful*." The boy wasted his father's vast riches. He hit the streets in Antioch, and joined the party scene. He snorts, and drinks, and smokes it all away. He uses the money to *win favor* and *buy affection*.

This younger son hocked his daddy's hard earned wealth and traded it in on cheap thrills. His older brother will later speak to his dad of his younger sibling, "(he) devoured your livelihood with harlots." The boy adopted an X-rated appetite. He spent his time in peep shows, and massage parlors, and strip clubs. He lived a life that would make a sailor blush.

Thomas Huxley wrote, "A man's worst difficulties begin when he is able to do just as he pleases." The true test of person's character begins when the restraints are lifted and there's no one to tell him what to do... aka *the college student...* or *the rookie recruit...* Here's a definition of the word "*character*" - "*it's what you are when no one else is looking*." And this father's younger boy proved to have very little moral character.

And your heart goes out to this dad! Nothing is as scary and painful as knowing your son is running wild. He's thrown off all discretion. He's living a suicidal life that ignores God and mocks His Word. My heart bleeds for families forced to watch an adult child waste his or her life. You can't imagine the heartbreak if you've not been there. The Black College Fund has a motto, "*A mind is a terrible thing to waste*." This younger son not only wasted a *good mind*, he spoiled a *clear conscience*, a *healthy body*, a *tender spirit*, a *noble reputation*, a *likable personality...* all on vain pleasures! He threw away his dignity and integrity.

Verse 14 tells us, "But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into fields to feed swine." When this kid first hit town, and had money to burn, everybody was his pal - but now *all his rowdy friends* have abandoned him. The *party animal* is *all alone*. Unable to reciprocate a favor he receives none... The only job he can get is feeding peas to swine. It was a miserable, embarrassing, humiliating task for anyone... but especially to a pork-hating Jew.

Verse 16 informs us of his desperation, "And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate..." When your diet has been diminished to raw pig feed - trust me, you've hit rock bottom. This boy had walked away from buffet dinners at his father's table. Now he finds himself *pigging out with the swine*. Hey, he's no longer *bringing home the bacon*. And we're told "*no one gave him anything...*" The only

person who'd ever given him anything was his father. It was his dad who really loved him.

Verse 17 let's us eavesdrop in on the young man's thoughts, "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!' Notice the marvelous phrase Jesus uses, "*but when he came to himself.*" *The boy returned to his senses.* Now that his pride was shattered, for the first time in years, he could see his situation clearly. He remembers the kindness and generosity of his father. His dad treated the hired help better than how his son was living. Just the scraps from his father's table were a feast fit for a king compared to cheap peas.

This is why the younger son concludes in verse 18, "I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.'" Notice the transformation in this boy's attitude... When he left home, he said, "Father, *give me* the portion of goods that falls to me." Now when he returns home it's, "*Make me* like one of your hired servants." He goes from "*give me*" to "*make me.*" It's a sign of a person's sanity when he's more concerned with *who he is*, than *what he has*. He cares about his character. This is what you learn in the pig pen... *Happiness isn't found in wanting more - but in needing less.*

The son is living in a "*far country.*" But verse 20 tells us what he did, "And he arose and came to his father." Abraham Piper is the son of popular pastor, John Piper. For years Abraham renounced his faith, and lived his life on the wild side. He tortured his parents. Finally he returned, repented, and renewed his faith. Recently, Abraham Piper gave some advice for parents with a prodigal son or daughter. He writes this... "*If he or she has any inkling to be with you, don't make it hard for him... There are instances when parents must give ultimatums... but these will be rare...*

He gets more specific with his advice... *If your daughter stinks like weed or like an ashtray, then spray her jacket down with Febreze and change the sheets on the bed after she leaves, but let her come home. If you find out your daughter is pregnant, take her to her 20-week ultrasound, and protect her from Planned Parenthood, but by all means let her come home. If your son is broke because he spent all the money you lent him on loose women and ritzy liquor, then forgive his debt as you've been forgiven - don't give him any more money - but let him come home. If he hasn't been around for a while, because he's been staying at his girlfriend's apartment, urge him not to go back, but let him come home.*" Here's the point, if at all possible, let the prodigal child come home. Who knows if this trip home won't be the time when he repents of his sin, and recommits himself to Jesus?

This was obviously the attitude of the father in Jesus' story. *He was so eager to welcome home his son... "When he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him."* The dad let the prodigal come home. Even after the boy had wished his father was dead, and wasted away his riches - like our Father in heaven, the dad in this story showed grace. He poured out love on his son. Love that this boy certainly didn't deserve.

Understand, Jesus told this story up against the backdrop of a stern, harsh Middle Eastern patriarchy. The father reigned supreme in Jewish society. Respect was mandatory and enforced. Deuteronomy 21 said that an rebellious son could be taken before the elders, judged incorrigible, and stoned to death. That's what makes the love this Father shows so breathtaking. This is a break with the cultural norm. This story injects grace into an world full of un-grace.

Here's a dad who's been waiting and watching every evening. You'll find him on the front porch with that far-away look in his eye. He's longing to see his wayward son turn the bend and head down the home-stretch. In the Middle East elderly men never, ever ran. That's what makes this father's actions so stunning. One day he sees his son off in the distance. He's so overcome with emotion he jumps off the porch and sprints down the long driveway to welcome him home.

Notice, he doesn't yet know the kid is coming home with a change of heart. He can't see the tears in the boy's eyes, or the humility etched on his face - he's still at a distance. This dad can barely make out his figure. All he knows for sure is that it's his son! This father doesn't care that the boy smells like swine. It doesn't bother him that the kid was grimy and dirty. He still falls on his neck and kisses him. The original language implies *he covered him with kisses*.

It's been said of God, *He catches His fish; then He cleans them*. God doesn't wait on us to clean up our act before He loves us. He's takes us *"as is"*... *And this is the love we need for our prodigals*... Your kid might smell like slop... He or she is a real stinker... But don't let it stop you from throwing your arms around him and covering his sins with your kisses. Be hopeful that he's home. *Hey, don't give them any more money, until they repent - but let them come home!*

Here's the truth about *sin*... **Sin not only breaks a law, it breaks a heart**. And if your heart has ever been broken by a prodigal child, you know this to be true. But if you want to represent God to your child you have to fight the urge to get bitter, and grow calloused. Be willing to extend the grace you've received. With Jesus' help even a wounded heart can forgive one more time. *Welcome the prodigal back home*.

In the 1980s Mel White was a ghost rider for several leading evangelical Christians. It was a shock when he came out of the closet and revealed his homosexuality. Once, his parents were interviewed. The reporter asked, *"Do you consider your son an abomination?"* His devout, conservative Christian mom replied, *"He may be an abomination, but he's still my pride and joy!"* What a blend of grace and truth! She didn't deny Mel's sin, but *his sin* didn't stop *her love* for her son.

Again, former prodigal Abraham Piper adds a thought... *"Point them to Christ. Your rebellious child's real problem is not drugs, or sex, or cigarettes, or porn, or laziness, or crime, or cussing, or slovenliness, or homosexuality, or being in a punk band. The real problem is that your child doesn't see Jesus clearly... Jesus will replace whatever they're staking their eternities on right now. Only His grace can draw them from perilous pursuits to bind them safe and satisfied."* *Let them come home - then point them to Jesus*.

It's not until verse 21 that the younger son opens his mouth. Jesus tells us, *"And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.'" Remember, back in "the far country," the son had composed an apology. He thought it out what he would say. He probably wrote it down, and rehearsed it over and over on his journey home. Now he launches into it hoping his father will accept him back as a hired hand.*

But the father doesn't even let him finish. In verse 22 the dad interrupts, *"But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry."* Before the kid can finish his apology, his father

orders his servants to fetch the vestments of sonship... Not "a robe," but "the best robe." - And don't just "bring it to him"... "put it on him." - The father even tells his servants, "put a ring on his hand." Entrust him with the seal of the family business. - And "put sandals on his feet" - servants went barefoot, only sons wore sandals. - "And bring the fatted calf" - for this father the son's salvation was a cause for a family celebration.

Obviously, there's no thought in this father's mind of his son doing a penance, or serving a probationary period, or spending a few years proving his sincerity. He's instantly restored to his place in the family. I'm sure the father could see the change of heart that had occurred in his son. When the kid left home... he was into himself. Now he's back signing up to serve.

I'm sure this father would've taken a different tack if the kid had come home with hostility still in his heart. It's not love to enable a prodigal to be more wasteful. But this dad shows how fully and freely forgiveness should flow when it's greeted with real repentance.

Ironically, everything this younger son hoped to find in "the far country" he finds back in his father's house. He went out looking for a party - he found the best party only after he came back under his father's roof. *If you have a prodigal... make this your hope and prayer... mercy, and forgiveness, and restoration.*

I'm sure you realize Jesus' story is called a *parable*. It's a literary device that *parallels* a deeper truth. In this story Jesus is illustrating God's love for sinners. The beautiful love this dad had toward his wayward son, is a picture of the Heavenly Father's love for us.

A story comes out of Spain about an estranged relationship between a father and a son. The son had rebelled and fled from home. The father had searched the countryside for his run-away boy, but to no avail. Finally, his journey led to the crowded capitol of Madrid - *but how would he find his son in the midst of such a vast throng of people?* The father had an idea... He placed an ad in the newspaper which read, "Dear Paco, meet me in front of the newspaper office at noon tomorrow. All is forgiven. I love you... Your father." The next day, at noon... 800 men named "Paco" gathered at the newspaper office. The father's plea struck a cord in the hearts of estranged sons all over the city. It stirred up a desire that's common to every single human being - *the need for forgiveness!*

A secular commentator once wrote of our modern age, "It's amazing that in an irreligious culture like ours, the sense of guilt is so widespread and deep-rooted." We've been told that there's no such thing as sin. *Guilt is unnecessary. Yet we still feel guilty.* Deep down inside prodigal people still long for forgiveness. But what's scarier than a prodigal, is for him or her to come home to a family and there be no forgiveness. If the Savior lives in us, how can we not love and forgive.

This is why the scariest scenario isn't the prodigal who wakes up in the pigpen, and wonders "*what in the world have I done!*" He realizes how far he's fallen... The scarier attitude is the self-righteous brother living at home, unwilling to forgive - oblivious to his own sin.

Once a Sunday School teacher had just finished a lesson on Luke 15. She reviewed it with the class... The teacher asked, "Who was sad when the younger son returned?" The answer she expected was "*the elder brother.*" But that's not how little Billy saw it... He answered, "*the fatted calf.*" Well, two characters become sad when the younger son returns... *the fatted calf* and *the older brother.* The younger son is not the only prodigal in Jesus' story...

The other prodigal appears in verse 25, “Now his older son was in the field.” He’d been hard at work. Doing his duty! “And as he came and drew near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant.” And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.’ But he was angry and would not go in...” He’s pouting out on the porch...

Two brothers grew up on the seedy side of New Orleans. A life of crime earned them a notorious reputation. One of the brothers was stabbed to death. The surviving brother asked the local pastor if he could do the funeral... "Pastor, everybody knows my brother lived a rough life, but for my mom's sake, will you to stretch the truth a bit, and say he was a saint." The pastor couldn't believe he was being asked to lie... "I could never do that. I'm a man of conviction."

That's when the brother reached into his pocket and pulled out a roll of \$100 bills. "Pastor, it's obvious this church building needs a face lift, and I can help. Are you sure there's no way I can convince you to find a way to say that my brother was a saint?" Well, the pastor sheepishly took the wad of money, and said to the brother that he'd try... On the day of the funeral the pastor stood in the pulpit, and began his eulogy, "We're gathered here today to say good riddance to one of the most selfish, and evil, and corrupt, and dishonest men this city of has ever seen - but compared to his brother, the man was a saint!"

And the same could be said of the elder brother in our story - based on all outward appearances, and compared to his wayward brother - *he was a saint!* The older brother respected his father. He worked hard and was frugal with his dad's money. The older brother had lots of friends. He was just a good all-round boy - the kind of man that makes a parent proud.

Here was a fellow who obeyed his father *outwardly*, but none of his father's kindness, and mercy, and compassion had ever rubbed off on him *inwardly*. Sadly, this older brother had lived for years under *his father's roof*, but never understood *his father's heart*. The elder brother served his father, but it was never *a labor of love*. All He was doing was racking up pride points - inflating his ego - building his case for a bigger piece of the pie once his old man bit the dust. It wasn't as obvious but he too had a scary attitude.

And the elder boy resented the fuss over his younger brother's return... All the years his brother had *been down*, it had *lifted him up*. In verse 29, it's from his lips that we learn the younger son consorted with harlots. Apparently, he'd kept tabs... even from a distance. This elder brother was self-righteous, arrogant, and uncaring - and to top it off, he was oblivious to his own sin. He could innumerate his brother's sins, but he was blind to his own. The father, his family and friends, all *bubbled over with joy*, while he *boiled with resentment*. His father *partied inside*, while he *pouted outside*.

I once talked to a man who told me he was glad he was going to hell. I tried to share Jesus with him, but he mocked me... "Man, hell is where all the babes and booze are going to be. I'm going to hell so I can party." Understand, this fellow had it backwards. There're no parties in hell. The party takes place in the father's house. *Heaven is a party*. The shouts, and laughter, and making merry is coming from *inside* the father's house. *Outside*... the elder brother just pouts! And this is what you need to know about hell - *it's full of pouters*.... Hell is full of sulking, resentful, angry folks - mad at the world. Nobody in hell is in the mood to party. They all burn with envy. Everybody in hell thinks they deserve better. Hell is full of self-righteous people who can see everybody's sin but their own.

Hell won't be a party. It'll be a feud. People will spit in each other's face and stab each other in the back. Gossip and envy - resentment and bitterness - put downs and personal attacks - will be commonplace in hell. Hell will be constant in-fighting and perpetual turmoil... *and nobody will be there to break up the fight!* Trust me, nobody wants to go to hell!

Notice verse 28, **"Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him."** Here's a father with no bias. It's amazing, He's willing to run down the road to greet his wayward son - but He's just as willing to leave the party for the porch to reason with his elder son.

Here's what I hope you see this morning, the world we live in is one big scary family. It's full of prodigals... And prodigals come in two varieties... *the unrighteous* and *the self-righteous* - *the heathen* and *the hypocrite* - *the lustful* and *the legalistic*... One prodigal wastes his father's riches. The other prodigal wastes his father's grace.

Verse 29 records the older boy's beef with his dad... **"So he answered and said to his father, 'Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this son of yours came...'"** Notice it's NOT "my brother," it's *"this son of yours."* In his mind he is justifiable angry... It's unfair! Listen to his rationale... **"who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him."** *How does this work? A dad who rewards perversity?* In essence he's saying, *"What kind of father are you?"*

In verse 31 the father explains his heart to his older son. **"And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.'"** The older brother had made a tragic mistake... He never properly interpreted his relationship with his dad. He'd always been loved by his father - as much as his kid-brother. Every act of kindness showed the younger, had or would eventually be shown to him. This father's love had never been conditioned on either boy's behavior, or obedience. The father in the story had always loved them both freely and fully.

Understand, in a healthy family everybody gets loved the same. Grace reigns. You don't have to vie for favor, or earn the family's acceptance. Love is unconditional. Certainly, a child's behavior will dictate whether or not he can be trusted with specific responsibilities - *but the privilege to be loved is a free gift. It springs from a parent's heart. It should be extended with no strings attached. Divine love is never earned, only received.* The older brother tried to turn **a family of grace** into **a scary family** by creating a sliding scale based on his own performance... rather than trusting and receiving.

Once, a painter was commissioned to do a portrait of the prodigal son, but he needed a model. He went into the slums and found a man filthy from head to toe. This man's eyes were bloodshot - hair disheveled - his clothes were tattered. He was the perfect specimen. The painter asked him to report to his studio at 10:00 the next morning. Well, at 10 AM the artist walked into the lobby and found a gentleman - *clean cut, well groomed, nicely dressed.* He asked if he could be of service... The man replied, **"You said be here at 10:00."** The painter peered into the fellow's face and recognized the features of the bum he'd found on the street the day before... But the man's efforts to clean himself up caused the painter to send him away. And this was the moral of Jesus' parable...

Though the elder brother hadn't lived his life on the wild side - *and this was a good thing. He was spared many painful consequences,*

which is no small blessing. Nevertheless in the man's heart he was as corrupt as his brother. All human nature is prideful and selfish. The elder brother just dressed himself up in a facade of respectability, and pretended to be worthy of his dad's love. This is scarier than outright rebellion.

The father put a robe on the boy who was honest - but he stripped his prideful son of his selfish conceit. Somewhere along the line the older brother got the false notion he deserved his father's blessing, and his younger brother didn't. In truth, neither of the brothers deserved their Father's wealth. His favor and blessing had always been a free gift initiated by his grace. And this is the way it works in God's family...

I'm sure there's some prodigals here today... Even though you've wasted God's gifts and blessing He still loves you. And He'll run to welcome you home. But there're also some elder brothers here today... You were raised in church... saved at an early age... you've been married to the same person your whole life... You've never lied on your taxes... or stuck a store item in your purse without paying for it at the checkout. Outwardly, you're moral, but you've lacked love... Secretly, you think of yourself as better than others - even other Christians... You know more. You've made sacrifices. You've cleaned up your life - *what's wrong with them?* You look down your nose, and resent it when God does for others what He doesn't do for you.

I hope we'll all check our heart! The world - even our own families - are made up of two prodigals... *And life is too short to be either one...* Don't be *the wasteful son*, and throw away the blessings and inheritance God has laid aside for you. And don't be *the bitter brother*, who harbored a selfish grudge, and failed to celebrate God's grace. Neither *our family* or *God's family* has to be *a scary family*. We'll take the fright out of family life when we *treasure God's blessings*, and *rejoice in God's grace*.