



**SERMON SERIES BY PASTOR SANDY ADAMS**  
**SCARY FAMILIES: PART THREE**  
**PLAYING FAVORITES**  
**TEXT: GENESIS 25:28**

*This morning we're continuing a series of Bible Studies I've entitled, "Scary Families - Taking The Fright Out of Family Life." Families can get scary! Of course, when a baby boomer from America hears the expression "scary families" he or she probably thinks of two television shows that aired together in the 1960s... "The Addams Family" and "The Munsters." Both shows were satires of two entertainment genres popular at the time - "family sitcoms" and "horror flicks." Think "Leave It To Beaver" meets "Frankenstein."*

"The Munsters" were a family of monsters... Blue collar monsters who worked regular jobs, and lived semi-normal lives. With the exception of Grandpa's dungeon in the basement - and young son, Eddie, the werewolf - they were an All-American family. It's interesting "The Munsters" lasted just 70 episodes, but their house - "Munster Mansion" - at [1313 Mockingbird Lane](#) - lives on. Episodes of "Murder, She Wrote," and "Desperate Housewives," and the movie, "The Burbs" were filmed with the house. Today, it's on exhibit at Universal Studios in CA. On the other hand, "The Addams Family" contained a cast of more eccentric characters... the Mr. and the Mrs. - Gomez and Morticia... Crazy Uncle Fester who illuminated light bulbs by sticking them in his mouth... And of course, the Frankenstein-like butler, named Lurch, who answered with a deep, creepy, "You rang?"

*Tell you a funny story...* It's one of my earliest childhood memories. "The Addams Family" made its television debut in 1964. I was just six years old. Being "The Adams Family" ourselves - we were inclined to watch. We named our dog, "Uncle Fester." Since we were listed in the phone book as "Adams," for several weeks after the show's debut we were bombarded with crank calls. Smart elects would ask to speak to Gomez... or they'd ask, "Is Morticia home?"...

I'll never forget one night when the phone rang, my dad answered in his best Lurch-like voice, "You rang?" It must've sounded authentic - *and scary enough* - because from that point onward the calls stopped.

Actually, "The Addams Family" began in 1938 as a comic strip authored by cartoonist "Charles Addams." He even styled [the Addams Family mansion](#) after the Victorian houses of his hometown of [Westfield, NJ](#). How appropriate, Charles named his ghoulish characters, "The Addams," and located them in his own hometown in honor of his family. *And for good reason...* For as we've been learning, there are times in everybody's family when life can get frightening...

Whether your family is a nice, blue-collar, all-American family of monsters like [the Munsters](#)... Or a little more eccentric like [the Addams](#)... family life can still get eery and spooky. We learned in [week one](#) that when people - *namely dads* - fail to step up and take responsibility... when they succumb to fear and [throw their family under the bus](#)... the family is in danger, and life gets very scary. In [week two](#) we saw when leaders - *namely husbands and parents* - get paralyzed by guilt... or prefer keeping the peace to standing on principle... or just prove weak and

wimpish... [the patients take over the asylum](#), and again family life gets very, very scary. Now this morning we're going to examine how the sin of [favoritism](#) can wreck and ruin family life. A family that [plays favorites](#) will also turn into a scary family.

As we've done each week in our series, I want to whet your appetite by showing a few photos of scary families. I'm sure most of you have never seen a scary family - *you live in such normal, peaceful families...* So to get you in the mood, here's a few examples...

*"Hey, let's take a photograph with [the family snake](#) wrapped around our necks."* What a precious family?... Here's a nice [protective dad-2-be](#). I know fatherhood stresses - it's serious business - but this guy needs to lighten up a bit! His daughter hasn't even been born, let alone started to date... This is scary! Hey, all parents can be a little over-protective and put the [squeeze on a kid](#). This is another scary family. And finally, you wonder what this older boy is doing to [torture his twin brothers](#). This looks scary... *And today, we'll be discussing the danger of family rivalries.*

Turn in your Bible to Genesis 25:28. We'll read one verse, but talk about the bulk of the book of Genesis. Genesis 25:28, ["And Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob."](#) And that single verse is all you need to know about *the family of Jacob* to see the storm clouds brewing on the horizon! This is a family headed for problems...

Favoritism is such an ugly sin. It's probably life's most unconfessed sin. Most folks are guilty in one way or the other, yet none of us like to admit our prejudice. Check out the cover of the 10/3/11 Time Magazine... It illustrates my point. The headline reads, ["Why Mom Liked You Best - The Science of Favoritism"](#)

There's a photo of three siblings with a piece of cake, but the girl in the middle has been served a far bigger slice. She's obviously her mom's favorite. But notice the asterisk after the headline, and the words to which it refers... Time editors hit the nail on the head. ["Why Mom Liked You Best"](#) - then the small print at the bottom, ["Of course, she would never admit it."](#) This is the parent's unspoken code. Even if a mom or dad has a favorite, hopefully they'll never confess.

My parents did a great job at avoiding partiality. When mom bought Christmas presents she kept track of her receipts. She made certain that what she spent on me and my brother balanced to the penny. She never wanted to give us a reason to accuse her of favoritism. This should be the goal of every parent.

When my kids were growing up my wife always accused me of favoring my sweet, adorable, precious, can-do-no-wrong princess over my three gnarly, nappy, always-in-trouble little boys - but I never saw what she was talking about... *Favoritism? Who? Me?* No way! Well, admit it or not, one of the most lethal enemies a family faces is prejudice. Families that show favoritism set in motion dynamics that make for scary families.

From the moment children are born they compete with other siblings for their parent's limited attention. The child who wins his parent's favor, often becomes arrogant and assumes a sense of entitlement. The less-favored child grows up wondering why they're unworthy of the love that was shed on the golden boy. And this unleashes all kinds of detrimental forces between siblings... *jealousy, anger, resentment, hatred*. No one wins when a family plays favorites.

A recent Newsweek magazine referenced a 2010 survey. The author concluded, “In all elements of the workplace, from hiring to politics to promotions... looks matter, and they matter hard.” According to the article... 57% of hiring managers believed an unattractive (yet qualified) job applicant would find it harder to get a job. 68% said once hired, looks definitely affect the way managers will rate their employee’s work performance. 66% of hiring managers wouldn’t hire a significantly overweight person. 84% wouldn’t hire an elderly adult. To sum it up, we all have our prejudices, and as ugly as they are when they arise in the workplace, they’re far more damaging when they occur in a family.

That’s why when you read Genesis 25:28 again, and it sounds even scarier. “And Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.” Here’s two speeding objects heading for a collision.

Esau was a daddy’s boy. When he was born he looked like a bear cub. Verse 25 tells us he was red as a beet, and covered with hair. That’s why they named him, “*Esau*.” It means “*hairy*.” He looked like a fur coat. Whereas, Jacob was a mama’s boy. Esau liked to hunt with dad, while Jake hung out in the kitchen with mom. Esau was a *wild man*. Jacob was a *mild child*.

And the partiality of these parents sets off a chain reaction of heartache and disintegration in their family. With the help of his mother, one day Jacob steals his older brother’s birthright. He pretends to be Esau... By this point in his life, Jacob’s old man, Isaac, was as blind as a bat. Jake covers his arms and neck with fur, so when his dad greets him, he thinks it’s Esau. Isaac ends up giving Jacob the coveted blessing.

*And what does this intrigue do to the family?* Esau gets angry. He vows to kill Jacob. Rebekah hears the threat, and sends away her favored son to escape his brother’s vengeance. Jacob is suppose to lay low for a few days. He ends up gone for 20 years. Two decades of separation caused by favoritism.

When you study through Genesis you see a trend. One generation’s mistakes get repeated by the next. It’s been said, “Ignore the mistakes of history, and you’re destined to repeat them.” It was true of Jacob.

He learned nothing from the devastating effects favoritism had on he and his brother. As soon as he’s out on his own, *Jacob takes partiality to new heights*. He starts a family by marrying two women, *and what does he do? He loves Rachel more than Leah*. He’s not only a *polygamist* - he’s a *prejudiced polygamist*.

Through his multiple wives he sires twelve sons. And what does he do? It’s Isaac and Rebekah *deja-vu*. He favors one son over his eleven other siblings. Every time Joseph slips on the kaleidoscope-colored jacket his daddy made him - it reminds the other boys he’s the old man’s favorite. And jealousy eats at them.

Until one day they run across a caravan to Egypt. The brothers sell *daddy’s boy* to slave-traders - then feign Joseph’s death. They stain the coat in goat’s blood, and say Joseph *was mauled by a wild beast*. It breaks the daddy’s heart. But it was his own fault. It was ultimately caused by his parental favoritism. And Jacob’s not done. *He’s a really slow learner*. When he thinks Joseph is dead, what does he do? He exalts Benjamin above the other brothers, and makes him the object of his affections. He plays favorites again. *When will the old man learn a lesson?*

This kind of sin becomes a poison in a family. It gets into the roots, and spreads to every limb of the tree. Don't underestimate the damage favoritism can do! *A father is deceived... a son is threatened... a family gets busted up for twenty years... two wives at each other's throat... a brother is betrayed... he's sold into slavery... another dad gets deceived... and on and on.* It's true, a family that plays favorites drives each other apart. Such a family becomes a scary family. .

I referenced earlier the Time Magazine article, "[Why Mom Liked You Best.](#)" But the author draws the conclusion that it's no big deal. All parents are prejudiced. It's impossible not to have a favorite child. Parents might as well *admit it...* And the rest of us need to put on our big boy britches and *accept it...*

They compare our tendency to favoritism to an animal instinct. A leftover from our evolutionary past. The writers reveal how animals also show favoritism. A penguin will kick the smaller of her two eggs out of the nest, so she can focus all her attention on the "*good egg*" - the one with the best potential for survival. A mama black-eagle will stand idly by and watch the bigger of her chicks eliminate his competition. He'll draw his claws, and shred to ribbons his little brother.

Apparently, the author of the Time story sees himself as an animal. A nicer, more polite, more loving animal, but an animal nonetheless. *Prejudice is inevitable.* Well, I disagree. The Bible teaches us that humans were made in the image and likeness of their Creator. Our purpose is to reflect the nature of God.

And here's one truth we know about God... *He's a God of fairness.* Paul said in Romans 2:11, "[There is no partiality with God.](#)" He's void of any prejudice. God *treats us equally* and *loves us unconditionally.* And this is how we should behave in family life. We might prefer certain traits within a certain child, but a parent should never allow that preference to dictate how he or she treats their kids. *God is a God of fairness.* [Christians need to love without partiality.](#)

It reminds me of how Jesus treated Judas. I'm sure, the Son of God knew from the start who His betrayer would be - *Judas was the scoundrel.* But on the night before His crucifixion, at the Last Supper, when He broke bread with His disciples, Jesus announced the news... One of them was a betrayer... *And guess what they didn't do?...* No one pointed their finger at Judas to say, "[Yea, I knew it was him all along. I told you so.](#)" No, they all asked Jesus, "[Is it I?](#)"

This always amazes me. For 3-1/2 years Jesus lived with the knowledge that Judas would betray Him, but never once tipped His hand. Jesus never did anything to reveal His displeasure or disappointment with Judas. If it'd been me... by the time we got to the Last Supper it wouldn't be difficult to identify my betrayer... *It's got to be Judas!* Sandy always has him pulling weeds, and taking out the trash. Did you ever wonder why Judas got assigned to permanent latrine duty?

But Jesus did just the opposite. He made Judas the treasurer. He treated Judas better than he deserved. Even though Jesus knew Judas would steal from the coffers - He still made *the weasel* His treasurer. Jesus treated even His betrayer with *no partiality.* He refused to undermine any faith that might be budding in Judas' heart... He didn't want to sabotage his opportunities to repent... Jesus treated Judas no different than Peter, or John, or the other disciples.

Sometimes favoritism in a family is based on physical factors - *like looks, or intelligence, or athletic skill*. A parent might be drawn to a child because they resemble each other in appearance - or have similar personalities - or prefer the same kinds of activities. But as the years drag on another source of favoritism rises - **behavior**. Parents like the “*good kid*” over the “*bad kid*.” They resent the extra effort they had to put into the trouble-maker. The sleepless nights - the court appearances - all the complications he or she caused. It’s hard for a parent to keep a level playing field when one child does so much to upset the balance.

Yet I’m inspired by how Jesus treated Judas. Our Lord Jesus knew Judas was the black sheep of His family, but He loved His betrayer anyway. He refused to treat Judas differently than the others.

Remember when the prodigal son returned home, rather than hold his rebellious years against him, the father of the family threw a party to welcome him back. At least, that day, the father showed favor on the run-away. *How’s that for refusing to harbor a prejudice?* Good parents are like Jesus. They refuse to play favorites. They find ways to reward the noble child, without blackballing and ostracizing the wayward one.

There’s another source of favoritism in a family. *What happens in a blended family when you have to parent someone else’s kids?* Not playing favorites becomes an even greater challenge. Preferring your own flesh and blood to a step-child is a big temptation. It reminds me of the polygamy that runs rampant in the book of Genesis. They ended up with blended families. *Kids in the same tent, but with different moms*. In fact, Jacob’s family included twelve sons - but from four moms - two wives, two concubines. That’s more blending than most of today’s blended families!

While I’m on the subject, let me say a word about the strange family arrangements we find in Genesis. You read about all the polygamy - and squabbling over the rights of the firstborn - and wonder how any of this can be relevant to Christians today. How do you reconcile the polygamous lifestyles of the Patriarchs with our Lord Jesus’ teachings on marriage and family?

Understand, in ancient times and in Oriental places, society was structured differently. Two enormous social institutions dominated human affairs in the world of the Hebrew Patriarchs... **polygamy** and **primogeniture**. Both institutions seem odd and immoral to us today. You know about **polygamy** - it’s the keeping of a harem. A man multiplied wives and concubines. A “**concubine**” was “**a servant with benefits**” - a mistress. **Primogeniture** was the exaltation of the firstborn son. The first male sibling out of the womb ruled the roost and received a double share of the family’s inheritance.

When we first read Genesis it troubles us that Abraham takes a concubine - Jacob marries two women - Isaac and Rebekah squabble over the rights of the first born... *until you keep noticing the outcome...* It’s always negative and destructive. And the families are forced to live out their faith in imperfect situations.

You could say, the havoc caused by polygamy in the ancient world - *is what divorce has done to us today*. It’s effect is also negative and destructive. And we see families struggling with the same dynamics. Kids from different parents end up under the same tent. *And it ramps up the potential for favoritism.*

One of the reasons Jacob favored Joseph... and bought him that psychedelic leather jacket, which led to his other brother's jealousy - *was his mother*. Joseph was the son of Jacob's favorite wife, Rachel. Life in Jacob's tent was really complicated. It was like a blended family today. There's often no easy answers. You have to tip-toe around the land mines.

Jacob didn't realize that unsettledness and friction in his married life had a trickle down effect on his kids. Joseph was *the favored son of the favored mom*. There's one certainty, rather than contradict Jesus' teachings on marriage, and family, and divorce, the scary families we see in the book of Genesis only reinforce the wisdom of **one man and one woman for a lifetime**. That's the simplest, easiest arrangement. And it's the best way to avoid favoritism in a family.

It's interesting to me that throughout Genesis God not only exposes the evil of polygamy, but He attacks the rule of **primogeniture and the favoritism it fostered**. In a sense, **the rights of the firstborn were the sanctioning of favoritism**. More value and worth were placed on one child over the other kids in the family. Did you know a placid practice of **primogeniture** exists in the world to this very day? The University of California at Davis did a study that showed 65% of moms and 70% of dads favored one child over the other - *and the favored child was usually the firstborn*. Firstborn favoritism is still alive and well.

But here's what happens in Genesis... It's deliberate! **Cain** is born first, but his younger brother, **Abel**, ends up pleasing God... **Ishmael** is born before **Isaac** on the timeline, but God's covenants go to the younger.

**Jacob** is the baby. **Esau** is the **primogenitor**. Jacob is a crook. His older brother, Esau, hunts, and works and brings home food for the family. He's more noble. But Jacob tricks his Pa into blessing him instead of his elder brother. And when he does, Esau begs his father to reverse the blessing. **Yet Isaac refuses!** It's as if he senses God is changing the way families should be ordered. God is revoking man's favoritism.

In fact, the New Testament places Isaac in the Hall of Faith, Hebrews 11, because he let his blessing stand. Even though it was obtained in a devious way - it still represented the purpose God wanted to accomplish. Jacob rewarded the younger over the older for no other reason than *faith in God's providence, and belief in God's grace!* The old rules of prejudice were fading.

In Genesis God did everything within His power to undermine society's endorsement of favoritism. He wants families to be a place where everybody is loved unconditionally and respected for who they are. Family life needs to be free from favoritism and void of prejudice. Every family needs to be *a grace place!*

Understand, all kinds of partiality threaten a family - not just a parent preferring one child over another. Families can fall victim to all sorts of favoritism. Often, the busy mom will spend all her time meeting her children's need, and end up neglecting their dad. I've seen doting dads delight in their kid-os - favor them with their energy - then have nothing left for the wife... **Wise parents save something for their spouse.**

Here's another type of favoritism... Has there ever been a wife who felt her husband loved *his job* more than his family?... Or *his fishing*? Or *his golf game*? Has a teenager ever felt that her parents were too caught up in their own world, to care about hers?... **Favoritism happens more than you think.**

What about a young wife, who sees her husband go to greater efforts to take care of his mom's house than he does their own house... Or a hubby who wishes his wife was as excited about getting away for a weekend with him, as she is about going off with her girlfriends... It's all *favoritism* and it puts a strain on a family.

As a matter of fact, favoritism even comes to church. Not only does God want your family to be a *grace place* - He wants you to bring that attitude to church. There should be no partiality among God's family.

Recall James 2 "My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, *the Lord of glory*, with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool," have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?" Indeed you have... Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?... If you really fulfill *the* royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin."

Notice, James calls partiality a "*sin*" - and when it invades a church *God's family* becomes a *scary family*. The opposite of *man's partiality* is *God's grace*. When you come to Jesus, He takes you *just as you are*, and *right where you're at*. He's love for you is unconditional... That's how we should treat each other.

I'm sure you've heard it said, "There are two ways to look at a glass. You can see it half empty or half full." But there's actually a third way... "You can just see a glass" - without having to analyze it's contents. Accept it "as is" without putting your measuring stick next to it. Hey, this is the cure for partiality - **eyes of grace**.

During WWII Winston Churchill summoned the courage of the British with these immortal words, "**We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields, and in the streets.**" Years later someone was reading his speech, and commented, "Sounds exactly like our family vacation."

Well, if you want to insure a lot of family feuding - **just play favorites. Prefer one child over another... or give to your own child what goes to a step-child... Love your job more than your wife and kids. Give to the kids, but withhold from your husband. Live for your children, while ignoring your wife. Show another family more love than your own.** It's the sin of favoritism. And when you turn it loose in a family it creates a real horror show... Partiality and prejudice are able to turn *any family* into a *scary family*.

So *what's the cure for favoritism?* Well, it's two-fold... If you're the one playing favorites you need to stop, *and remember God's grace*. His love is full and free. God never plays favorites. It's been said, "**God loves each one of us as if there were only one of us to love.**"

I suppose you could say, we're all God's favorites. Regardless of our looks, or smarts, or sense of humor - each one of us is special and "*holy*" to God. And this is how we should treat *one another* - even "*the one anothers*" who make up our own family.

Right after the disaster of 9/11 New York Mayor, Rudy Giuliani, spoke at the Brooklyn Tabernacle... He told his audience, "I've learned something through all this. When everybody was fleeing that building - and the cops, and firefighters, and EMS folks were heading into it, do you think any of them said... 'I wonder how many blacks are up there? What percentage are white? How many Jews? Let's see, are these people making \$400,000 a year, or \$24,000...' No, when you're saving lives, they're all precious. And that's how we're suppose to live all the time..." I agree... and we should start in our own family! Love with God's heart. It's big enough for everyone.

*And if you're the victim of favoritism...* If you're the sibling that always got the smaller bowl of ice cream... Or mom and dad were out of money when it was your turn to go to college... Or the big church wedding went to your sister, while you got married at the JP... Or you're the spouse who's been neglected for the child... or the job... or your splitting time right now with his elderly folks who he's trying to take care of too... Then here's the cure for you... **forgiveness!**

Life is too short to harbor a grudge. There's no guarantee your family will be with you tomorrow. *Don't you think now is the time to forgive... Remember Joseph...* it wasn't his fault his dad gave him a psychedelic leather jacket for Christmas. He didn't ask to be the brunt of his brother's anger, and jealousy, and vindictiveness. Yet God oversaw his journey from the pit his brother's dug for him - to the palace in Egypt to which he was ultimately promoted. And through eyes of faith he realized that it all had been orchestrated by God - every step of the way.

So when the day came and his hungry brothers showed up in the court of Egypt asking for bread, Joseph was ready. Yes, he had to gather himself a bit, but he knew what he would do. *It was time to forgive!* The brothers thought their Joseph was dead, but he was alive, and he was offering them forgiveness. Recall what Joseph said to his astonished siblings... Genesis 50:20 records *his* immortal words, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good..."

Here's how you deal with a slight - or a neglect - or a bias - or an injustice - or a prejudice - *you just forgive!* Though God doesn't author the harm done to us, He allows it for a reason. **What man meant for evil, God uses for good.** And that's true even in *scary families!*

Jesus is our Joseph. Once, we lived as if He were dead, but He appeared to us in the court of our hearts. Now we realize He's alive, and He comes to us with forgiveness in His hand. *Receive it and extend it...*