

# Garvin Adams

## Church Name

MESSAGE: "Father or Big Brother"

DATE:

**Bottom Line:** You can't live FOR God while living AGAINST those far from God.

**Object Lesson:** None

**Key Idea:** Jesus was the master of made-up stories that made important points. In one of his most famous stories, we often embrace the first point, but completely miss the second. That's unfortunate, as the second part of the parable concerns us as his church.

**CONNECTION** – Christians and churches are known more for what they are against than what they are for.

- A. **MY WALKING AWAY: I'm 15 years old.** I've grown up in church. We went basically every Sunday. I was a church kid. I put my faith in Jesus at the age of seven. I was baptized a few years later when I felt ready. I'm a part of "youth group." I mean, I'm in. We were members of a church (not Ike's church!). Standing outside of church after youth group on night...  
"I see how close you are standing beside that girl and I know what you are thinking..."  
That night, I left that church, and in my heart, I left church.  
Came home and told my parents. They were afraid and disappointed.  
I would have never gone back if not for my girlfriend...
- B. **THE CHURCH AGAINST:** If I had to describe my younger days of bad church experiences with just one word, I would have chosen:

Against

We were against so many things...

- a. **Dancing:** Don't dance, drink, chew, or hang around those who do.
- b. **Music:** Music is bad – Who burned their awesome Metallica CDs?
- c. **Pre-marital anything:** We were against pre-marital *anything*. My youth pastor refused to hold hands with any girl until they were married. Now that I have two daughters of my own, I'm a little more on board, but still!
- d. **Companies:** JC Penney, Lowes, Home Depot, UPS, PBS, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts.
- e. **Places:** Disney.
- f. **Things:** Oreos, Muppets, Cheerios.
- g. **Toys:** Cabbage patch dolls. Barbie.

**TRANSITION:** *I wish I could confidently say things have improved, but that is wishful thinking. I hate it, but more than ever before, the church is known more for what we are against than what we are for.*

The church is known more for what we are **against** than what we are **for**.

**TENSION** – As a Christian, we are tempted to be the world’s “big brother.”

- A. **WAKLING AWAY FROM CHURCH & FAITH:** Because church and church people seem to be aligned with “against,” I’ve had the pleasure to meet a lot of people who have walked away from the church. Many have walked away from their faith. Some of you are watching or listening (albeit reluctantly) right now. As a preacher, this might feel shocking (or potentially refreshing, I don’t know) to hear: I get it. I once walked away from the church myself.
- B. **BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT:** Not to say Christians shouldn’t be against *anything*. For instance, we should be against sin.

**Sin**

Anything that works **against** what God is working **for**.

Sin is something that we should be against, because God is against it. **Sin is a big deal! God allowed his Son to die in our place for our sin!** Sin separates us from God.

So when Christians see something that looks sinful (even if they are wrong), we feel compelled to say something. Do something. **I believe the church and its Christians mean well.**

- C. **BIG BROTHER:** It’s like we, as Christians and the church, have self-proclaimed ourselves the world’s “**BIG BROTHER**.”

**BIG BROTHER**

**TRANSITION:** *When Jesus entered our world, there were groups of people who were acting like the world’s **BIG BROTHER**, too. It was the Pharisees.*

**Pharisees**

The religious **big brothers** of the first century.

*Their life was dedicated to God, but through behavior and performance, which made Jesus’ message of grace really hard to embrace. And although Jesus loved them, he often confronted them!*

**TRUTH – God is for those far from him. As a Christian, we should be, too.**

- A. **SET UP PARABLES:** Jesus had several confrontational moments with the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law. Luke, a first century physician and journalist, personally interviewed people who saw and experienced Jesus and wrote it all down so we could learn from them. Here is one of the most famous moments he wrote about:

**Luke 15 (NIV)**

<sup>1</sup> Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus.

- PAUSE: This should cause us to stop and take note. Jesus was like a light to a sinful bug. Everywhere he went, the people who were nothing like him not only wanted to see him, they seemed to enjoy being with him.

Everywhere Jesus went, people who were not like him liked him.

- I think this is what the church is supposed to look like today – people of all types attracted to Jesus and his people. **If our church gatherings are full of people who might not be like us, we are attracted to us, we are acting like Jesus.**

<sup>2</sup> But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

- The Pharisees HATED how loving, kind, and non-confrontational Jesus was with sinners. To them, God had given the law to be followed, and anyone not following the law was against God (i.e., so God must be against them, as well).
- To help the Pharisees understand God’s true heat for everyone, he told them a few parables. Parable: An untrue story told to illustrate something that is true.

- B. PARABLES:

**TELL**

*The Parable of the Lost Sheep*

<sup>3</sup> Then Jesus told them this parable: <sup>4</sup> “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? <sup>5</sup> And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders <sup>6</sup> and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ <sup>7</sup> I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

**POINT:** God is FOR those far from him.

If there is someone far from God, God is going to go after that person and heaven will rejoice when they are found.

**TELL**

*The Parable of the Lost Coin*

<sup>8</sup>“Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn’t she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? <sup>9</sup>And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’ <sup>10</sup>In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

**POINT:** God is FOR those far from him.

If there is someone far from God, God is going to go after that person and heaven will rejoice when they are found.

- C. **PHARISEES NEEDED A LITTLE MORE SPECIFICS:** Jesus could tell that the Pharisees needed a bit more, so he told one more story. Possibly the most familiar of the parables: The Parable of the Prodigal Son

### *The Parable of the Prodigal Son*

This very well might be Jesus’ most famous parable. It might be the most famous bible story. Most people, even non-church/Jesus/God people have heard it, or at least the idea behind it...

TELL:

- There was a Father who had two sons. The younger says, “Give me my share of the estate.”
- So offensive!
- Father does. And the younger son leaves home, bad decisions, loses it all.
- Comes back begging for a place to stay.
- Prepares speech.

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

- The son recites his speech... He repents. He asks for forgiveness.
- The Father interrupts him and calls for his servants to bring the fattened calf and prepare a feast of celebration.
- This where we usually end the story!
- Just like the lost sheep and lost coin. The lost son is found.

**POINT:** God is FOR those far from him.

- **FOR NON-BELIEVERS:** This is a great place to stop the story...
- **FOR US CHRISTIANS:** But the story doesn’t end there. In this parable, God is the father. And at some point every single one of us was this younger son. Well, I know none of us are the father, and while some of you might be the younger son at the moment, I’m guessing most of us have been “found.” We are Christians. So where is our role in the parable? Unfortunately, we often look and act like the Pharisees...

- Jesus continues...

<sup>25</sup> “Meanwhile, the older son was in the field.

- Doing what first-born sons do – following the rules and working like he was supposed to do! This is important: The older son didn’t runaway from home. The older son didn’t wish his father dead so he could have he inheritance today. The older son’s behavior was in line with his father, but his heart was not.

<sup>25</sup> “Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup> So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on.

<sup>27</sup> ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’

<sup>28</sup> “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. <sup>29</sup> But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends.

- “Dad, I hate to tell you this, but...”

<sup>30</sup> But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’

- I just wanted a goat kabob!! And you are cooking up the filet for HIM!! We have been fattening up that calf for a long time – waiting for something really important! Like my wedding! Or my graduation!!

<sup>31</sup> “‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. <sup>32</sup> But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”

D. **SECOND POINT OF THE STORY:** The beginning of the parable was just like the first two:

**FIRST POINT:** God is FOR those far from him.

But Jesus wasn’t finished quite yet. He needed to make a second point. A lesson for the Pharisees. For the Teachers of the Law. For the “religious” people. And... for the people like you and me who are tempted to be the world’s “big brother.”

**SECOND POINT:** Don’t be AGAINST what God is FOR.

**TRANSITION:** It’s that second point that we keep getting wrong.

**APPLICATION – Christians represent God to those far from him.**

- A. **GETTING THE SECOND PART RIGHT:** Since we know the church isn't a place, it's a people. It's not the building, it's us, the body, how can we ensure we pay as much attention to the second part of that parable? **If we want to get the second part of the parable right, we need to be for what God is for.**

**Being FOR what God is FOR**  
**[build individually]**  
We can't get mad at lost things.  
We can't expect lost people to behave like found people.  
We won't be concerned with guilt by association.  
We will be concerned with inspiring people to follow Jesus.

Inspiring people to follow Jesus: How do we do that? Simply by being FOR them even if they aren't FOR God.

- B. **WHY IT MATTERS:** Can I tell you why so many people stay far from God and the church? This should cause you to pause:

We represent God to those far from Him.

People assume God's love for them looks like our love for them.

**It makes perfect sense. If we are FOR God, but AGAINST them, then God must be AGAINST them, too.**

Like a big brother. Arms crossed in judgement. Disappointment. Angry. Meanwhile, God is standing at the door, arms open wide preparing to embrace anyone and everyone who is willing to come home.

- C. **IT'S SINFUL:** But there's more, too. Remember how we defined sin earlier?

**Sin**  
Anything that works against what God is working for.

Well, it seems pretty clear: God is FOR everyone. So I guess, in a very real way, it's we sin when...

**Sin**  
We sin when we work against who God is working for.

**TRANSITION:** But all is not lost. Can I tell you what brought be back to church?

LOGO

**LANDING** – James White did this for me. Who needs you to be their James White?

- A. **WHAT BROUGHT ME BACK:** What brought me back to church? Girlfriend, kind of, but not really. **James White...** James taught me something important.
- I suspect there are thousands and thousands of people in our circles of influence who have had bad church experiences. People who have felt God is against them because of how God's people have treated them. And while we can't undo those previous experience, **we can ensure that their next experience aligns with the Father, not the big brother.**

**PRAYER**