

# RECLAIM YOUR CHILDREN

Lawrence Willis, Guest Pastor  
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If you will turn with me to Second Timothy, first chapter, I'm sorry, the second chapter, and reading verses one through seven. And as I ask our congregation at Carver, since I was told to do as I normally do, I'm going to ask you when you have found it to say "Amen". And if you haven't found it, would you say "wait a minute". Amen. And if you notice that your neighbor is struggling to find it, share your Bible with your neighbor. Amen. Certainly that's a beginning taste of hospitality. In this text, we find that it is written at a time when Paul and Luke were presumably were in prison. Paul is writing this letter to Timothy to give him words of encouragement and instruction. So let us open our hearts to receive what Paul penned to Timothy beginning with verse one, chapter two of Second Timothy.

*Oh, Timothy, my son be strong with the strength that Christ Jesus gives you. For you must teach others those things you and many others have heard me speak about. Teach these great truths to trustworthy men (and I will add women,) who will in turn pass them on to others. Take your share of suffering as a good soldier of Jesus Christ, just as I do. And as Christ's soldier, do not let yourselves become tied up in worldly affairs, for then you cannot satisfy the one who has enlisted you in his army. Follow the Lord's rules for doing his work, just as an athlete either follows the rules or is disqualified, and wins no prize. Work hard like a farmer who gets paid if he raises a large crop. Think over these three illustrations and may the Lord help you to understand how they apply to you. The Word inspired by our Lord is already blessed.*

COURTNEY CROMIE: Rev. Willis has asked me to read our Bible passage this morning from the gospel of Luke, Chapter fifteen, verses one through three, and then again verses eleven through thirty two. Listen now to the word of our Lord.

*Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to Him, and the Pharisees and Scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." So he told them this parable. Then Jesus said there was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me. So he divided his property between them. And a few days later, the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distance country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to the one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would have gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating, and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself, he said "How many of my father's hired hands*

*have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger. I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me like one of your hired hands.'” So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion. And he ran and put his arms around him, and he kissed him. And then the son said to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” But the father said to his slaves, “Quickly, bring out a robe, the best one, and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet, and get the fatted calf and kill it and let us eat and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found.” And they began to celebrate. Now his elder son was in the fields, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the slaves and asked him what was going on. And he replied, “Your brother has come and your father has killed the fatted calf because he has got him back safe and sound.” Then he became angry and refused to go in. And his father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father with “Listen, for all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command. Yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him. And then the father said to him, “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life. He was lost and has been found.”*

May the Lord bless to our understanding the reading of his Holy Word.

REV. WILLIS:

On behalf of the Carver church family, I bring you greetings. And I know your pastor is having a Holy Ghost time at Carver. What did you say? Amen? My Lord! I thought I was in the house of the frozen chosen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Certainly the three things I share at Carver, and I wish to share them with you very quickly. And that is, when we come to worship I ask that you be open to hear the Word, open to allow the Holy Spirit to move. Secondly, I ask that you get physical. Physical in the presence of the Lord means that you stand up, that you shout, that you wave your hands, that you sing the songs of Zion in full voice. And thirdly, that you flat out have fun. Amen? Because we are in the presence in God, and God wants his people to have fun. All kinds of things are going on in our world, and we seemed to be so consumed with, “Oh, how bad it is. There is a storm out on the ocean, and it’s moving thisa way.” And yet the song writer will say, “If my soul is not anchored in Jesus, all of us will surely slip away”. So there is a time in which we need to have fun. So I encourage us while we are together to let’s have fun. Let’s just sit back and

just praise God, because God is the one who purposed us being together on this day. Amen? We say “Amen” a lot at Carver.

One of the things I found out having spent some time with our sister congregation, Kingasani II in the Congo, and yes you have a brochure, a little folder, talking about the Congo mission trip. We thank you for your prayers. We had a very good time doing some things that are a little different. Now these folk are true Presbyterians. But as I shared with our folks at Carver, they do something a little different in their worship. They have a moment of adoration. And in that moment of adoration, they are praying to God. And everyone in the sanctuary is praying together out loud. And you could just feel the presence of God being ushered in. It was not the kind of Presbyterian church that I was accustomed to, but it was something that was just beautiful, having people praise God. So we encourage you to do that.

I also want to thank my wife, Barbara. Will you stand please? God did something very special to me. And He has done it for many of you, but I realize what He did. It was just like He did to Adam. He took that rib from Adam, and it was the closest thing to Adam’s heart. And then He created a woman, a helpmate. And Barbara has been my helpmate, and I just love you for that. Thank you very much. Amen? Amen.

You know it’s not wrong to tell your spouse that you love them. It’s not wrong to tell someone that is in your family, or even in your congregation, that you love them. It’s good because when you tell one of God’s creations that you love them, you are really telling God that you love God. Amen? Because God created us in His image. Is that not what the Word says? You think so. Good, I’m glad that you think so. I’m glad you think so, because I think, since we’re talking about what we think, I think when He created things in His image, He created them good. Is that right? I think so? I think so too. I think so too.

So this is what I want you to do. I want you to turn to your neighbor, and I want you to tell you neighbor, “God loves you, and so do I”. AMEN. AMEN.

As we stretch, there are three things I want to point out very quickly that God really wants. Let me make this one statement. God want us to be in a relationship with Him. Period. Flat out. End of discussion. He wants us to be in a relationship with Him. And when we are in a relationship with Him, then I think there are three things I think we can observe very quickly.

When we are in a relationship with Him, God knows what you are going through. He knows your financial matters. He knows your family matters. He knows your job matters. He knows your church matters. He sees and He knows and there is nothing you can do to hide from God.

The second thing is that God knows your every circumstance. The things you are facing, He knows. And if you will turn to Hebrews, the thirteenth chapter, and the fifth verse, you will find words similar to this: “He never leaves us nor does he forsake us”. You see you can trust God to deliver you from evil. You can trust God to lead you in making the right

decisions. You can trust God in face of troubling situations. You can trust that He will heal you. You can trust that he will deliver you as long as you have faith in Him.

The third thing is that it is very plain to me that God's will will be accomplished in your life, irrespective of what you do or think. You see God's methods frankly are very hard to understand. And I am convinced that the longer I live the less I understand, until I go to the Word. And when I go to the Word, then I begin to see. And I can then ask the Holy Spirit to move, and to give me the understanding of what the Word of God is saying to us today. So often we read the Word, we study the Word, and then we forget that which we say we believe in, and that is the Holy Spirit. Because Jesus said, "I go, but yet I will send the Comforter to you, the Holy Spirit.

I know that many of you have been comforted by the Comforter. And one of the things that God tells us in His Word is "I want you to testify on these things that I have done for you". In other words, we should not be privatizing our relationship with God. We should not be privatizing our Christian experience and our Christian witness. So it is very important that as we study and we reflect upon the Word of God, then we look at ourselves, and we say, "Lord, are you talking to me? Is it I, Lord? Is it I, Lord? Is it I, Lord, that you want to lift? Is it I, Lord, that you want to change? Is it I, Lord, that you love? Is it I, Lord, that you are calling to be compassionate to our neighbors? Is it I, Lord?"

This morning I just want us to reflect upon these words from our text in the fifteenth chapter of Luke, and the twenty-fourth verse. And these words, I want to just take a few moments and think about. "For this son of mine was dead, but now he is alive. He was lost, but now he has been found. So the feasting began." And as you think about this text, I want you to think about this title, this theme for this morning, "Reclaiming Our Children". Let us pray.

Holy Spirit, come now and descend upon us, opening our hearts and minds to receive your Word, allowing us to be changed, transformed, as you said in your Word, we will do when we rely and depend upon your Word, Lord. Don't hold back your power. Don't hold your presence. Do not hold back your love. In Jesus's name. Amen

I think as we look around, and certainly it is a blessing to have so many young people in the church on this day, because there are a lot of things, young folk, that you could be doing. And you possibly know some of your friends are doing some of those things that you would like to do. But because you are guided by your parents to be in the presence of God, we welcome you, and we just think it's blessing. And we pray that today there will be a word for you.

But I want to very honest with you. I'm going to be talking to your parents, but I'm going to be talking to your parents about your friends. Not about you, but about your friends, because I don't think any of you are like this person who we will be talking about, who is the Prodigal Son, maybe, maybe not. You see this text is probably one of those gospels within a gospel. It is vivid portrayal of the truth. The truth? What is the truth? The truth is in the Word. Jesus Christ is so often referred to as "the Truth".

It is told in a situation where Jesus is before the elders and the scribes. In other words, young people, he is in front of the trustees and the elders of the church, and they are beginning to grumble about some of the things He is talking about. And Jesus is talking about this custom that seemed to be pervasive in Jewish tradition. And that is, there is a way that, how should I say this, there is a way that inheritance is distributed. And Jesus is talking about that, and as you have possibly read in various lectionary text in Luke, Jesus is constantly teaching. He's healing and He's doing all kinds of wonderful things, but people are little concerned about Him. "Jesus, you are not doing it the way that the tradition is saying that you should do this. You are healing people on the sabbath day. How horrible!

Some of you may remember in the text where Jesus said, "Now wouldn't you give your donkey some water on the sabbath if your donkey was hungry. So why couldn't I release the pain from this person who came to me". Sometime we make so many mistakes out of our own piety that we kinda get into trouble. Amen? No, don't say amen to that one.

But anyway, Jesus tells about a parent who had two boys. They were raised in the same house, under the same roof. They were not treated, at least from the text, we don't see that they were treated any differently. Yes, the youngest son, the youngest son had an obvious rebellious spirit. Again, young people, you know of some people who have rebellious spirits. And they wanted to violate the rules and regulations of their father's house. And I understand that we parents no matter how much we teach our children to live the right way, there is going to come a time when they will feel that they want to do it their way. They want to move out on their own. They want to find life as it makes sense for them.

The son in this parable was apparently at the age when he was developing into his manhood. Now we can interchange this boy to a girl, because sometimes girls move into their womanhood before it is appropriate, let's put it that way. Amen? And here we find

that this young man wanted to hang out with the fellows. He wanted a girlfriend. He wanted to do what he saw grown folk were doing. It may not necessarily be a physical location or a place here or a place there. A far off country might be a some place where you find yourself totally out of your mind. You know, where you've turned your back on God, and you've moved away from your teachings. You've moved away from what your parents have shared with you, because no parent wants to see his or her children living in a world not embraced or blessed by their teachings. So the father in our parable had to let his son go, so his son could find out the grass ain't greener on the other side. Amen.

Now, Courtney, now there is something I want all of us to understand and recognize about this father, because I really believe that this father was very steeped in Jewish tradition. He understood what we would refer to as the Old Testament. He understood the Torah. He understood what was required of a good Jewish man and a good Jewish girl. I am sure that when he sent his son off and let his son go, I am sure that some of the scriptures, even those scriptures that you have read, came back to his remembrance as he was growing up. The one scripture that I think he reflected on was found in Deuteronomy, the first chapter, verse

twenty-nine. He said, “Don’t be afraid, the Lord your God is going before you. He will fight for you, just as you saw Him do in Egypt. And you saw how the Lord your God cared for you again here in the wilderness, just as a father cares for his child”.

You see, I believe because he was a religious person, because he understood what God was doing, he just reflected on the word of God. I believe that this man, this father, was a friend. And this father prayed for his son even though his son made a bad choice.

Now with the problems we are facing with out immediate and extended families, I say and submit to you that Jesus gives us an answer to this haunting question that we often have. You might say, well, preacher, what is that question? Well, that question is when things seem to be happening in our world, we ask the question, “Lord, what shall I do? Lord, can you help me make sense of this situation? Lord, why? Lord, how can I change this?”

Well, beloved, as we share at Carver, there are three things we want our members at Carver to do. And that is, one, to learn the Word. Secondly, to live the Word. And you can’t live the Word unless you learn the Word. And the third thing is, we want you to share the Word. Because you cannot share the Word unless you learn it and live it, right? So I believe when we are confronted with these problems, don’t pick up the phone and call your neighbor. Pick up the Bible and ask God. Read the Word of God. And God says something very interesting in the book of Mark in the eleventh chapter about being confronted with things that just seem to be falling all apart in our world.

He says, “Have faith in God. Truly I tell you if you say to this mountain ‘be taken up and thrown into the sea, and if you do not doubt in your heart (and many of us doubt very quickly), but believe that what you say will come to pass, then it will be done.” So I tell you whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. In other words our children who have been lost, our children who have strayed away, our finances that have been out of place, our employment situation that has been lost, if we just call on God first, the Lord said, “I will just move those mountains that seem to be in our way”.

Now let me get back to this parable because I have a tendency to stray, and I don’t want to do that. I want to do everything decently and in order. Amen? You see the son had spent all that he had received all that he had received from the father. He had wasted his seed. He has lost his friends. Quite frankly, we find that when you are in one of those far-off countries, young people you will lose your youthfulness. You want look young anymore. You will come back tired and haggard. You will not look the same. But thanks be to God, however, this father continued to pray, to pray that God would bring his son back from this faraway place, that he would bring his son back to his senses. I think the text said he had lost his mind, actually it says he lost his senses, but we can interpret that as he lost his mind. The boy is plumb dumb and crazy.

One of the things we find that the father taught, I am sure, this Old Testament scholar, I believe he was, is that this book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth. You shall meditate on his day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written on it, because then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful. I hereby command you, "Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, because the Lord your God is with you wherever you go". I believe that this father understood what Joshua said in the first chapter, verses eight and nine. That wherever his son would go, God would be with him.

And thus as Courtney read, the son came home. And the father's prayers were answered. But he did something upon seeing his son that is most problematic for the church today. It is problematic for the world today, quite frankly. It is problematic for many of us. Sometimes the body of Christ needs help with this thing called love and forgiveness. I share with Carver the problem that's here, Jenny, I share that some folk really hold on to anger too long. Some folk hold on to frustration too long. They choose not to extend forgiveness. They choose not to extend love. But when you think about that, God has constantly over and over and over again forgiven us of the things that we have done. He has allowed us to enter into His presence with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise, because He knows that a longtime ago we said something and we did something that did not please Him, but nevertheless when He looked down upon us, and when we said, "Lord, forgive me". Immediately, we were forgiven.

You see that it was by the grace of God that this son's life was spared. And it has been by the grace of God that we are all here today. The formula for bringing our children home, the formula for bringing this young man home, the sure hard formula is prayer.

Prayer. Prayer. God answers prayers. Please understand God is in control God is sovereign. We as Presbyterians believe in the sovereignty of God, that God is over all things; that He is sovereign over all things. But, yet, God is constantly calling us back into a relationship with Him, so that He can do what He does. We must as children of God believe, believe that God will do all things.

And so I ask you today as the body of Christ, please turn up our prayer intensity. Turn up our prayer intensity for the young men and young women who are out in York County, who do not know the word of God. Turn up the intensity so that God will move and bring them into this loving and caring and compassionate congregation. Turn up the intensity of prayer so that their children can come home. But if we have a child that has been lost and has been claimed by the world, our prayer intensity will be turned up so loud and so strong and so powerful that they will come leaping and running through that door, just like the man who was sitting at the gate called beautiful. Peter spoke to him, and he ran leaping and running into the presence of God, because God moved in a powerful way.

When I look back over my life, and I think how I got over, how God brought me through, I can only come to the conclusion that He did because somebody prayed for me. They got down on their knees, and they prayed for me. And every now and then at Carver, we sing this song to remind us, "I'm so glad they prayed. I'm so glad they prayed. I'm so glad they

prayed for me”. And then we sing, “The preacher prayed for me, got down on their knees and prayed for me. I’m so glad they prayed. I’m so glad they prayed. I’m so glad they prayed. I’m so glad they prayed for me”. Then the elders and the deacons and the mothers and the fathers, they all prayed. Now for me to be here today, and if the truth be told, they prayed for each and every one of you. And some of the responsibility that you have been given is to pray for your neighbor, your family members, the person who has lost their mind and are off in a far-off country, that’s what God is calling the church to do.

So on this day, my only word for you is to reach out and reclaim your children. For as this text concludes in the twenty-fourth verse, “for this son of mine was dead, but now he is alive. He is alive. He was lost, but now he has been found. So, let’s begin the feasting.” In Jesus’s name, Amen.

This sermon was presented by the pastor from a brief outline and not from a written manuscript. It was transcribed from audiotape and edited by individuals other than the pastor who claims authorship. Said pastor did not necessarily read this transcript before publication.