A Tale of Two Families

A Dramatic Sermon in Two Acts

By Rondi Aastrup

Setting: Living Room/Dining Room Combination. There is a stereo, TV, a piano, couch, chair, and coffee table in the living room. The dining room has a table with six chairs. The tablecloth is on cock-eyed and it is piled with books and coats, etc. Both rooms are generally cluttered – stuff on the floor and on the chairs.

Characters:
Mother – mid 30’s, frazzled housewife; taking classes at night to finish her college degree
Father – late 30’s, hard-nosed business man
Anne – oldest daughter, 14 years old; worries about her grades, studies hard
Bobby – oldest son, 12 years old; loves rock music
Susan – twin, 10 years old; doesn’t get along with her twin
Jimmy – twin, 10 years old; doesn’t get along with his twin
Brad – 7 years old; always in everyone’s way; ignored; doesn’t talk much

Act 1

Scene 1

(It is 5 p.m. The five children are in the living room. Jimmy and Susan are fighting over the remote control for the TV – which is blaring. Bobby is listening to the stereo with headphones on, head swaying, eating a candy bar and looking at a comic book. Anne is sitting with her feet hanging over the arm of the chair – trying to study. Brad is in a corner by himself. Suddenly, Mother rushes in.)

Mother: Come on kids! Clean this place up before your father gets home! You know how he takes a fit when he sees it looking like this!

(She rushes back out. Kids remain as they were before.)
Anne: Hey you guys! Can’t you be a little quieter? Can’t you see I’m trying to study? Brother! You’d think there was a war going on or something! (This last line, she mutters to herself.)

(The noise lessens only a little. Bobby gets more violent in his listening. Suddenly he goes over to the piano and tries to pick out the tune he has been listening to. He adds his “out of tune” voice to the din. Mother rushes in a second time.)

Mother: Kids! I SAID to clean this place up! Your father is going to be home any minute and I need the table set and THIS MESS CLEANED UP NOW! (She goes over to the TV and shuts it off.)

Susan and Jimmy: (groaning loudly) Aw, Mom! We’re in the middle of our favorite cartoon!

Mother: I don’t care. It’s time for supper. Go wash your hands and set the table. Now, MARCH! (The kids go – reluctantly – the twins mimicking a marching style walk. Mother swats the two as they go out, then she goes to the radio and shuts it off, removes the headphones and says to Bobby,) That goes for you, too.

Bobby: Huh? (He looks at her with a mixture of bewilderment and resentment.)

Mother: Get your hands washed for dinner. And then peel some potatoes for me.

Bobby: (In a whining voice) Aw, Mom! That was my favorite song! I’ve been trying to hear it all day long! Wadja have to go and do that for!

Mother: I need some help finishing up supper before your father gets home!

Bobby: That’s women’s work! I don’t want to help. Besides, I hate potatoes.

Mother: I SAID I want you to help me. Now get going!

Anne: What are we having for dinner anyway?

Mother: Mashed potatoes, lima beans, special K loaf and salad.

Anne: Yuk! I HATE lima beans! And if you put onions in the loaf, I won’t eat it either. Oh – I wish I’d gone over to Sandy’s for supper. Her mom makes the best food in the world.

Mother: (sighs heavily) Well, if you’d been in the kitchen helping me like a good daughter, you could have picked something you liked.

Anne: But I have this big hideous science test tomorrow. I HAVE to study!

Mother: Put that book away now and pick up all these papers. Your father is driving up the driveway. He’s going to be upset . . . (she rushes out and Anne lethargically picks up papers and books and shuffles out.)
Scene 2

(All are at the dining room table. Susan and Jimmy are fighting each other continually – grabbing for the same saltshaker, tugging on the butter, etc. Brad still hasn’t said anything. He just looks mournfully around and pushes the food around his plate. He doesn’t eat much – if anything.)

Father: Bobby, would you say the blessing tonight?

Bobby: Do I HAVE to? I said it last night. Why can’t someone else do it for a change?

Father: Son, I asked you.

Bobby: No, Dad. Ask someone else.

Father: (perturbed) Jimmy, PRAY!

Jimmy: Thanks for the food. AMEN!

Mother: What kind of prayer is that? It’s not even a complete sentence! What’s happening in our schools these days? Kids don’t even speak in complete sentences. Why, back when I was in school, we never would have gotten away with something like that. I’m going to have to give your teacher a call.

(Meanwhile, Susan and Jimmy are fighting over the potato dish. Mother suddenly realizes this and directs her attention to them.)

Mother: Hey! Cut that out! This isn’t a free for all, you know! Pass the potatoes, Susan! You’ve more than enough food already.

(Throughout this discussing, Father is gobbling down his food. When he finishes, he grabs the nearby paper and begins to read – at the table. Anne, seeing this, gets up to get her science book.)

Mother: Where are you going?

Anne: To get my science book.

Mother: No you’re not. No studying at the table.

Anne: Dad’s reading the paper. What’s the difference?

Mother: This is supposed to be family time! It’s the only time we ever sit down together and look what happens. We might as well be strangers!

(No one has listened to her. Dad is still reading. Kids are hitting each other now. Anne is sulking. Brad is still pushing his food around.)
Mother: Now STOP that this minute! I’m talking to you! *(She stands up.)* I’m talking to all of you!

Father: *(Puts down paper first.)* Did you say something, dear?

*(Mother shrugs helplessly. Kids get up from the table and go back to TV, stereo and book. Dad settles down to this paper. Mother wearily begins to stack the dishes.)*

Mother: *(Muttering as she walks out of the room.)* Where did I go wrong?

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**Scene 3**

*(Kids are still in place. Father gets up and moves to the couch – still reading the paper. He stretches out. Mother drags into the room with a stack of books in her hands.)*

Mother: Could I interrupt your important business a few minutes to have worship before I go off to class?

*(No answer from anyone. She takes the paper out of her husband’s hands as he flails for it.)*

Father: What’s the idea here?

Mother: I want to have worship before I go to class. Would you mind getting your children’s attention? I’ll get the book for you to read.

Father: *(Sighs heavily)* All right. Kids – we’re going to have worship now. Pay attention.

*(Of course they don’t hear him. Now Father gets exasperated. He gets up and turns off the TV. The twins yell. He ignores them and goes to the stereo and turns it off. Bobby continues to weave his head until he realizes that there is no noise. He takes off the headphones and asks,)*

Bobby: What happened?

*(Father continues his rounds by taking the science book out of Anne’s hands.)*

Anne: Hey! Give that back! I have a science test tomorrow!

Father: ENOUGH! You ALL be quiet! Your mother asked to have worship, and by George, we’re going to have it! Now sit down and LISTEN! Give me that book.
(Mother hands it to him as she sits beside him on the couch. Father begins to read from the devotional book. The twins begin to shove each other – softly and quietly at first, but as time goes on, more obviously. Anne puts her head in her hands and is soon nodding off. Bobby is fiddling with the headphones. Brad is sitting next to his mother, trying to listen. Father continues to read – without expression, and without paying attention to his children around. When he finishes reading, he tosses the book down, grabs his paper and begins to read it again. Anne is awake all of a sudden and is soon studying. Bobby puts the headphones back on and turns the radio up. Mother picks up her books and slowly walks off stage, shaking her head dejectedly.)

Mother: Where did I go wrong? Where did WE go wrong?

Act II

Scene 1

Setting: Living Room/Dining Room Combination. There is a stereo, no TV, piano, couch, chair, and coffee table. Dining Room has a table with seven chairs around it. The tablecloth is neatly placed. There is a bouquet of flowers in the center. Everything is neat and clean. There are several Bibles visible – either on the table or in a bookcase.

Characters: Same names and ages as in Act 1. Mother is still going to school in the evening. The children are well mannered and get along well with each other. There is a spirit of mutual respect among all.

(It is 5 p.m. The five children are in the living room. Anne is helping the twins with their homework. They are reading out loud to her. She helps them periodically with a word. Bobby is practicing his scales on the piano – quietly. Brad is playing with some Lincoln Logs in a corner. Mother pokes her head in after a few minutes of this.)

Mother: Listen, children. It’s almost time for your father to come home. Can you put your work away and come help me get things ready for dinner?

Anne: Sure, Mommy. What can we do?

(The twins shut their books and begin to stack them. Bobby finishes his scale and then gets off the bench and goes to help Brad but away the Lincoln Logs.)

Mother: Susan, you and Jimmy can set the table. Make sure to put out an extra fork. I have a treat for you tonight. You’ve all been working so hard lately on your schoolwork and with your music lessons. Your father has been working hard lately, too. I thought we all deserved something special to celebrate.)
Susan: Oh goody, Mommy! Come on, Jimmy. Let’s set the table. *(The two run off to get the silverware and plates and then return to the dining room to set the table.)*

Mother: Anne, I’d like for you to peel the carrots. Six or seven ought to do it. Then you, Bobby, can cut them up.

Anne and Bobby: Yes, Mommy. *(They exit for the kitchen.)*

Mother: Brad, why don’t you run out and give the dogs their supper, too?

Brad: O.K. *(He, too, runs off.)*

*(Mother goes into the Dining Room where the twins are setting the table.)*

Mother: What did you two do in school today? Anything interesting?

Jimmy: Oh, Mommy! It was the neatest thing! Mrs. Ban’s grandmother came and spent an hour with us, telling us the nicest story. Mrs. Ban says she is going to come every Friday till School’s out. She said that when she was little she used to love to hear her Grandmother tell stories. We are so lucky!

Susan: Yes, Mommy! I am really looking forward to next week when she comes again.

Mother: That makes me think of when I was a little girl. I loved to have my grandmother tell me stories, too. I could listen for hours! Well, children, I am happy that you have someone nice to tell you stories. I wish your grandmother could be here to do it, though. She would have enjoyed spending time with you. You know, this is a good opportunity for you to really learn how to listen. That is one of the most important things you can learn. And too many people don’t spend enough time doing it. We so rarely listen to others. Then, when it comes time where listening really counts, we’re in trouble. Do you understand what I am saying?

Jimmy: A little, Mommy. You mean that by listening to Mrs. Ban’s grandmother we are learning things that will help us later on, right?

Susan: And that knowing how to listen is one of the most important things to know?

Mother: Yes, children. That is what I was trying to say! Now, go wash your hands. Daddy will be here any minute and we can sit down to eat.

*(She goes back to the kitchen. They run off to wash their hands.)*
Scene 2

(All are at the Dining Room table.)

Father: Bobby, would you say the blessing tonight?

Bobby: Dear Jesus. Thank you for this day and for the good things we learned in school. Thank you for Mommy and Daddy. And thank you for our home and for our good food. Amen.

(The family proceeds in an orderly fashion to dish up the food. As they do so, quiet conversation is carried out.)

Mother: Well, dear, have you finished that project yet?

Father: Yes. Finally! It’s taken me all these months, but I put the finished copy on the boss’s desk this afternoon before I left. Now I can relax at last!

Brad: Daddy, is that the project that has kept you up late every night and working every Sunday?

Father: Yes, Brad. I’m really sorry I haven’t had as much time to spend with you children lately, as I wanted. But if the boss likes my work, I will probably get a big raise. What should we do with the extra money?

Bobby: I would like to take longer piano lessons. I have been having such fun lately. And Miss Thompson said she had an extra fifteen minutes after my lesson. Could I, Daddy? Mommy?

(Mother and Father look at each other in wonder, but nod in agreement.)

Mother: I don’t see why not. Another fifteen minutes might help you out with your scales!

Susan and Jimmy: (laughing) Mommy – you should have heard him before you came in tonight. He was really trying, but . . . (they laugh again.)

Bobby: You would struggle too, if you were playing in 6 flats!

(Everyone laughs and Dad gives Bobby a slap on the back.)

Mother: I think it would be nice if we could find a little extra money to give to the church. There is so much that is needed there. You know, we are a small congregation. And most of us don’t have much to give anyway. But it will soon die out if we don’t start paying it a bit of attention.

Anne: Daddy – maybe we could give more than money! Maybe we could give our time. You know, our teacher was talking today about how we may not have much money, but we all have time. Most of us waste a lot of time. If we could each give an hour each week – think what could be done!
Father: Mother, I don’t know what we did to deserve such thoughtful children, but I say let’s not discourage them. Maybe we could make a family project of spending some time each week at the church.

Mother: Yes. They are wonderful. Let’s clear the table and talk about this more after worship. Come, boys. Help me with the dishes. Girls would you go get some more wood for the stove?

(They all get up to do their various tasks. Father goes to the living room to find an appropriate text for worship.)

Scene 3

(Everyone is seated. Mother and the two girls are on the couch. Father is in the chair. The boys are seated on the floor. The twins have given each their Bibles and all are waiting quietly for Father to begin.)

Father: While you all were getting ready for worship, I thought we might do a little Bible reading tonight instead of our usual devotional. I thought we would read the Parable of the Talents – since we have been talking about what we can give to our church. It’s found in Matthew 25 and begins with verse 14.

(Everyone looks the text up. Bobby helps Brad find the text.)

Mother: Why don’t we all take turns reading a couple of texts each?

Anne: That sounds good, Mommy.

(They read the story – Father indicating who should read next. Bobby helping Brad with any hard words he might have.)

Father: (when they finish) Now, this story has many things to say to us. But what I want you to understand tonight is this. Jesus has given us each a special ability when we were born. Every single one of us. And we have an obligation to take care of that talent. That means there is something we can – and must – do for Him. It may not be something big or expensive. It may not mean that we donate a lot of money or give a lot of Bible studies. It may mean that we give just an hour of our time each week, as Anne suggested. But there IS something we ALL can do. Why don’t we just go around the circle and share what we might have to offer to our church. Anne?

Anne: Well, I thought I would talk to the other kids in my class and see if we couldn’t get together on Sundays maybe once a month and work on the church grounds. It wouldn’t take long, and it would be fun, too. What about you, Bobby?
Bobby: Well, I thought maybe I could collect soda cans and bottles, take them to the Redemption Center, and give the money to my Sabbath School teacher to help fix up our room.

Susan: I don’t know just what I can do. Mommy? Do you have any ideas?

Mother: Well, maybe you and Jimmy could work extra here around the house helping Daddy and me. Perhaps we could have time, then, to help the church janitors with the cleaning each week. Things always go easier when there are more people to help out.

Jimmy: That sounds good, Mommy!

Brad: I would like to do something, too. But I can’t think. Daddy, can you help me think of something?

Father: How would you like to save pennies to give towards the church project? I’m sure your mother and I would be happy to help you in your collecting, wouldn’t we?

Mother: I know I would. Pennies always seem to be in my way, and yet I’m sure they would add up quickly for you, Brad. Why don’t we write these things down in our special book? That way we will have a record of the things we want to do for Jesus, and as time goes by, we can add to it. What do you think?

Father: I like that.

Susan: It’s fun to help Jesus, isn’t it?

Father: Susan, honey, not everyone thinks it’s fun. Some people look at us and wonder how we can sacrifice so much to put you in a Christian school. They see how we go to church on Sabbath and don’t do any work from sundown to sundown. They see all the things we don’t do and they often don’t understand. But when you love something so much – like Mommy and Daddy love you children, and like we all love Jesus, it isn’t a sacrifice anymore. It’s a part of our lives that we won’t give up.

Susan: I wish everyone had a family like ours! And I wish everyone loved Jesus, too!

Father: Let’s pray now. (As the family kneels, they all hold hands.) Our Heavenly Father. I thank you for this wonderful family. I thank you for the opportunities each of us have at work and at school to show others what you are like. I pray that as we are preparing ourselves for your soon coming that we will also be aware of the things that we need to be doing for others. Bless our school and our church. Each one plays an important part in our Spiritual growth and development. Help us each one to spend more time with you and help us to find more ways to share your love. Thank you for hearing and answering our prayers. Amen.