

# 2001 Advent Week 2 - Prodigal's Sister

by John Piper

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*The sermon explores the themes of redemption, identity, and the power of love and faith to transform and restore individuals.*

**Duration:** 15:59

**Scripture:** Psalm 37:20, Psalm 50:3, Psalm 95:6, Isaiah 55:6, Amos 8:11, Matthew 6:33, Luke 15:11-32

**Topics:** "Gods Guidance", "Family Reunion"

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## Description

In this sermon transcript, a woman is depicted watching a beautiful sunset and reflecting on the heritage of her ancestors. She wonders where she should stay for the night and prays for guidance. As she looks up, she sees an old man walking towards her, singing a familiar song. The woman realizes that the man may be related to her and asks him for a place to stay. The old man reveals that he knows her father and has been keeping an eye on her brother, who is struggling to survive. The woman expresses her gratitude and decides to wait for her brother in a shed nearby. The old man shares that her father has been trying to bring her brother home for ten years, showing him that there is hope and joy in their family. The woman thanks the old man and asks about the length of the famine mentioned in the song she heard.

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## Transcript

In the retelling of the parable of the prodigal son, you will recall that I have imagined that there was not only a younger son named Nikva, and an older son named Mainan, but also a younger daughter named Hayanita. And she, today, will leave on her long-planned quest to find her brother in a town called Noash on the sea. The old man leaned against the beam beside his ramp and watched a dream unfold before his weakened eyes and prayed that Hayanita's prize would be her brother's life.

He raised his empty arm and smiled, amazed that ten years had not broken the resolve and hope in her that she would be the way her brother would come home. He waved once more and stood there on the porch and watched her take the final turn from sight and make her way toward Noash on the coast. He thought, Your mother's brawn and beauty mingle well in you, my child.

I know what she would do if she were here. She'd look at me and say, It's time to eat. Then she would go inside and spread the meal and wait for news that Haya's heel had crushed the serpent's head of lice and freed her son to be the prize of Hayanita's quest.

The old man lingered. Better than he told or wished to tell, he knew the way to Noash and the town. The day would not go down until some knave would hurl a slur against his brave and tender girl.

The road that leads to Noash has allure but breeds grief and anguish in the pure. Five days she walked and slept at night in synagogues or in the sight of one if rabbis were unsure that she was scrupulous. The poor would take her in and make a place and she would say at dawn, May grace abound to you and would you pray that very soon my brother may receive me in the way you did.

Then she ventured on and bid them all farewell until she came to Noash by the sea. The flame above the curving rim of blue and rolling waves fell blazing through the evening haze and boiled with blood-red spray, it seemed, and sent a flood of molten crimson flowing forth on the horizon to the north and south. She climbed a hill outside the town so she could watch and tried to put herself in Nikla's place and thought, I wonder if his face is ever set to climb this hill and watch the west and feel the thrill of what I see, an image of the heritage our father's love bequeaths to us in endless seas of golden grain that roll like these great waves and blaze with fire like them in beauty, but do not condemn the seamen who embark and fail, but only those who will not sail.

She wondered as the sun went down where she should stay the night in town or on a nearby farm and as she prayed she thought, my father has a lot of rooms and loves to share, perhaps there is a farm somewhere nearby with rooms and with a heart like his. She raised her head and partway up the hill along the road an old man with a crooked goad and scrawny goat walked slowly from the field and as he sang a song made his way home. His face was thin and on his neck there was more skin than there was meat to fill.

She knew the song. It made her tremble through the twilight and rejoice. The man must be some distant kin and clan to know this song and yet it did not bode well for her brother's bid to live if wealth had taken wing.

Just barely she could hear him sing. When the staff is broken and in judgment spoken, righteousness is heard, think not God is silent, though the famine violent, this is but his word, he stands not to give account, it is we who must be for him, come let us adore him. Excuse me sir, I'm looking for a place to stay, a simple floor or porch, I have a blanket of my own, perhaps a roof above my head, that's all.

The old man gazed a long time, then he said, amazed, I am amazed. He said I'd see and be amazed. Who said you'd be amazed? At what? Your father said I'd be amazed.

Well shake my head, I truly am amazed. You look just like them. Who? Her voice shook.

Your father and your brother. There the chin, the cheek, the nose, the hair, amazing. Sir, which brother do you mean? I mean the one you came to find, Nikva.

You know my brother's name, and yours, although you don't know me, your given name is Hayanita, and your fame has come before you. He told me for years that one day I would see you on the road to Noash. In your blood, he said, it's more than skin that knits you to your mother.

And I add, your father, Sir, I stand before a man I do not know, and yet who knows me well. Please, show me who you are and take me to my brother. Come, let's walk.

I knew your father years ago when he first came to seek his son and see if he could take him home. The lad refused, and so your father bade me keep an eye on him and gave me money, keeping from the grave, he said. And so for ten years, I have seen your father come and try time after time to show the boy that there is hope and far more joy at home than in this place.

I know your father very well. I owe you much, kind sir. Tell me, how long has famine reigned? I heard the song.

Does Nikva have enough to pay? The boy eats carob pods to stay alive. He steals them from the pigs and sometimes gathers flint and twigs to sell for pennies and a place to stay. Do you know where he is today? The old man pointed to a shed with three sides.

There, he makes his bed with bats and sleeps on gathered leaves. His daily rent? To keep the thieves away and feed the swine. I'll wait here if you like.

You've been a great help, sir. But you don't need to stay. I'll be all right.

Thank you. And may my father trouble you no more. Come visit us.

My father's door is always open. Fare thee well, young lass. It was no trouble.

Tell your father, I will come someday. She walked down toward the shed. He lay there on the leaves as still as death.

She wondered as she watched if breath still came. His eyes were closed. His cheek was dark and hollow and the reek was foul.

His fingernails were caked with dirt and streaks of black soil snaked across his rutted brow. His hair had not been washed for months. There were no shoes anywhere.

His feet were bare. His ragged cloak replete with eaten holes and in his sleep he gripped a pouch he used to keep the parchments that his father sent. She kneeled beside his head and bent down over him and kissed his cheek.

Incredibly, there was no shriek or sudden jerk. He stared into the face of Hayanita. Hayanita, who are you? he said and sat up in his leaves.

Hayanita, you've gotten thin. No one had called him Nick for years except his dad. He saw the tears pool in her eyes and then she said, your little girl can raise the dad.

His mouth fell open. Hayanita? Yes. I said I'd come.

No more, no less and bring you home alive. The last time I saw you, you hadn't passed four feet. You must be eighteen now.

He pushed the hair back from her brow. It's really you. Did you come by yourself? Yes.

Why? Do you want to die? Why? This city is a pit. It blinds the young with dazzling names then binds and swallows them alive. I'm here to bring you home, she said.

It's clear you don't belong. It's clear as mud. Look, Haya.

You don't know the crud inside. You don't know who I am. Hear this, my brother.

I do damn those words and call them lies. It's you who don't know who you are. It's true there is a mystery.

What makes you think the dazzled dupes and fakes of Noash can declare the true and wonderful design of who you are? One knows, and only one, who Nikla is. And when you're done with dabbling in the darkness here, all dazzling as it is, the clear, bright air of eastern skies will bring you home to him. And I will sing.

Awake, O sleeper from the grave. You are a son and not a slave. They sat in silence for a long, long time.

He was amazed how strong this little girl of eight had grown. And then she changed her look and tone. He built a porch just after you had left.

It faces west. We knew what it was for. He'll be there, Nik.

And will not quench a smoldering wick. Come home with me. Even tonight.

I have some bread. The moon is bright. It's cooler in the dark and we can sleep by day.

Please, come with me. And quietly, the fetters and the folly fell. She took his hand and where he had before said no a hundred times, he said, let's go.

Come, children, carry fire and make this candle blaze and may Christ take this second flame and with it burn up every hopeless word and turn the fatal dream of false despair into the bright and living air that blows down from the Father's farm. And may you feel the mighty arm of God lift you into the light of truth and put an end to night. We do not know ourselves aright until we have the Father's light.

We think we know ourselves and groan until we know as we are known.

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