**There’s a New Sheriff In Town**

**Prodigal Message 20**

**Weekly Scripture memory verse:**

**John 14:15** *If you love me you will obey what I have commanded*

*One night during a Prodigal ministry meeting, I visited a closed group, as I normally do. This night a couple was particularly frustrated and related to their group they were at their wits end. They proclaimed they had already done all of the things suggested by the Prodigal ministry principles and nothing had worked. As I listened to their story, they did indeed have a prodigal out of control. Their prodigal had actually had years of rebellion and now was 27 years old. They listed all of the consequences they had enforced including “kicking him out of the house”. I immediately asked the question where he lived presently. They responded, “Oh, he’s home now living with us.”*

*In last weeks lesson we discovered that most plans fail because they are not implemented. Once you do have a good plan in place, do not implement it until you are truly ready to be the “New Sheriff in Town.”*

**Introduction**

To many prodigal parents, this story rings all too familiar. You may have given similar ultimatums, only to give in when the going gets tough. All too often we are like the boy in the famous story who “cried wolf” too often and as a result was not taken seriously any longer. If you find yourself in a similar situation, your prodigal may be at the point where they don’t take your threats and boundaries seriously, and for good reason. They have been empowered by enablement. You can be assured that they will fight hard and long, ruthlessly powered by their addiction, whatever it may be. They love you, but you stand between them and the thing they love most at the moment, their idol.

This message is directed to those who are finally ready to deliver a plan obediently and faithfully. Let it also serve as a hopeful vision who are not yet ready to give their prodigal to God, faithfully. Once you finally have a solid Biblical plan that is developed and processed with wise counsel, you must deliver it in a way that that will get your prodigal’s attention. Your delivery must be meaningful, unemotional, powerful, and unwavering.

You must overcome your prodigals perception of you as the old sheriff, who lets things slide, who seems scared, and who relents under pressure. In order to be successful, you must become the *“New Sheriff In Town*”.

**Why Do We Need a “New” Sheriff?**

Let’s look a little closer at the reasons you need to become a sheriff who finally enforces consequences.

Let’s look at possible reasons that “sheriffs” struggle.

* Fear
  + If the sheriff is paralyzed by fear then it will be impossible to do a good job. There can be fear of prodigals, themselves, as they are a real threat at times both physically and emotionally to the sheriff. More commonly there is a fear that the consequences will result in pain that is too hard for the sheriff to bear. That pain can be in the form of lost opportunities, lost or damaged relationships, loss of education, felony arrest and incarceration. The greatest fear is death.
* Too close to the Prodigal
  + Parents often want to be friends rather than parents. Good Sheriffs cant allow friendships to interfere with enforcing consequences upon them. Our motives are pure. We love our prodigals so much that we hate to see them suffer in any way. We fear discipline will negatively impact the relationship. This is a lie from Satan, as he distorts our view of what love actually is. We have learned in previous lessons that prodigals benefit from boundaries and will, in the long run, respect and love those who care enough to discipline. (Hebrews 12:7-11)
* Lost our Sense of Purpose
  + We must remember that all Prodigals are not ours, but rather, God’s. We have a responsibility to them to establish healthy parenting, spousal, or sibling relationships that are guided by Biblical truth. Our prodigal children are gifts from God and *He wants them back!* Our prodigal spouses are to be matured by the marital relationship as we sharpen each other. (Ephesians 5)
  + A Sheriff can only do his or her job if there are clear laws in place.(A Plan) The more clear, objective and understandable the plan, the easier it is for the sheriff to do the job.

Therefore, we must realize that under the “old sheriff”, there was chaos. Everyone under the care of that sheriff was in jeopardy. No one felt safe. We need a New Sheriff that will overcome hollow excuses and restore order and peace, and instill hope.

**Motivation to Change and become the “Sheriff” you need to be**

Motivation to change is really no different for the parent or the prodigal. Pain is our greatest motivator. Chaos cries out for change. There are two great quotes that summarize this situation well. “If you like where you are, keep doing what you are doing. “ Also, “Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, expecting a different result”. Therefore, just like your Prodigal, you must hit your bottom to realize it is time for a change.

“*The reason why many are still troubled, still seeking, still making little forward progress is because they haven't yet come to the end of themselves. We're still trying to give orders, and interfering with God's work within us. ”*

A.W. Tozer

We must realize, however, God alone opens our eyes by His grace. Prayer is instrumental in our journey as we call on him to open our eyes.( Job 42:4-5) . Faith, Trust and Obedience are directed supernaturally by a heart change directed by the Holy Spirit. However, our response to that Holy call is how we are judged, as strange as that mystery is.

*And I will give them a singleness of heart and put a new spirit within them. I will take away their stony, stubborn heart and give them a tender, responsive heart, so they will obey my decrees and regulations.* **Ezekial 36:26**

*I had heard about you with my ears but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes***. Job 42:5-6**

**New Sheriff: Job Description**

If we were going to post for the job of New Sheriff, the ideal qualifications might look something like this:

* Knowledge of God
  + Knowledge of the Law(God’s Word)
    - The Law is simply the principles found in God’s word. He has given us every principle we need to both trust him and parent well.
  + Knowledge of God. John 15:5 *I am the vine and you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.* 
    - The more intimate we know God and His love for us, the more likely we will be able to enforce consequences entailed in our plan.
* History of exercising our Faith and Trust in Him
  + The more we step out in trust in God, the more we will see Him show up and see His love for us. We might not understand His ways and He might take longer that we like, but God promises he will deliver. (Nahum 1:7) There is nothing like seeing God show up to build faith in Him.
* Clear understanding that Sheriff’s are responsible for obedience, not outcomes.
  + A good sheriff will not get overly concerned with outcomes, realizing he or she can only enforce prudent, considered, consequences. Prov 18:1 describes our prodigals well in that they “quarrel against all sound wisdom.” Our “bottom” is different than our Prodigals bottom. The pain required to be broken and respond in humble obedience is different for every person. Such a response is a gift of God’s grace alone, and as a result, we are only responsible for doing our jobs as parents/sheriffs.
  + Fear of, or obsession with outcomes will paralyze parents/sheriffs

**When Do I Accept the New Sheriff’s position?**

We should have a written plan and be committed to every single step of that plan down to the nuclear consequence of allowing them to tackle life on their own without our support in any way. (“laying your Isaac down”) We should accept being the new sheriff only when we are certain that we are **totally committed**. However, if this seems overwhelming to you right now, then take heart. Abraham was not ready to sacrifice Isaac on his first introduction to God. He stumbled and sinned along the way, but he kept persevering and learning from his experiences. Over time, he grew into the man God wanted him to be. So if your fears and reservations are too much right now, then don’t despair and leave community or leave Prodigal. Just keep showing up. Be obedient to your daily spiritual disciplines and ask God to help you everyday. He has promised us this in Proverbs 8:17. *I love those who love me and those who seek me find me.*

Nahum 1:7 *The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who put their trust in Him.*

Simplistically, but powerfully stated, “ You are ready when you have the right view of God.” Possibly Tozer’s most famous quote says it best.

*“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us...Worship is pure or base as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God. For this reason the gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like.“*

How powerful and profound. Satan whispers in our ears every day the same lie he whispered to Eve in the garden. He whispers that God can’t be trusted. He tells us that God doesn’t truly have our best interest at heart and that we know what’s best for us. Its so easy for our sinful selfish nature to believe that lie when things don’t go as planned and/or take longer than we like.

Truth never changes. Satan is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. He whispered lies in Eve’s ears in the garden and he whispers the same lies today. However, if we believe in our heart that God is truly good, totally in control, loves us unconditionally and our identity and significance is found in His love for us alone, then we can trust Him fully. Only then, can we step out in obedience and be the new sheriff in the lives of our prodigal and in the lives of our family and friends.

**Announcement: There’s a New Sheriff In Town!**

As a reminder, we can only cry wolf so many times when our declarations become muted and discarded. You actually may be disregarded already. So if this time is different and you are really ready, how can you deliver this message in a meaningful way? The answer is *differently from the way you have done it in the past!* The principles are listed below:

* **Unemotional** – no anger, This can not be stressed enough. The prodigal needs to know that you are serious and resolute, not angry and emotional. You must be logical and committed.
* **Focused/Prepared** – You must be well prepared. You must have a written plan that has been processed by Biblical counsel, who are experienced in this prodigal journey. You must try to anticipate every Prodigal objection and have a reasoned logical and Biblical response.
* **Simple**. Your presentation must be simple and easy to understand.
* **Ask Forgiveness** from the start. Usually as a parent in your current situation, you have made some mistakes. So be honest and admit them and ask your prodigal for your forgiveness. This is usually the most powerful tool in your presentation and one in all likelihood, they have not seen. You ask forgiveness for your enabling, for not leading yourself well, and for not trusting God. You ask forgiveness for putting them above God in the past. You ask forgiveness for not applying the very Biblical truths in your own life that you have been pleading with them to follow in theirs.

In prodigal we give direction, not directions, so the example below might not apply directly to your specific situation but it might just give you a template to modify.

(*Son/Daughter/Spouse), I want to say once again how much I love you and every decision I make and action I take towards you is motivated by that love. I want the best for you in every way. Today, I have a plan that will allow me to lead myself well and lead our family well. It is a plan for me, first and foremost. It is a plan that I need to restore order and alleviate the chaos that is occurring in my life. I can not control your response to this plan, but I believe it will also provide you with the best opportunity to succeed. It is a wise plan, processed with other wise Biblical friends who experience this prodigal chaos themselves.*

*However, before we talk about the plan, I want to honestly and sincerely ask your forgiveness for the way I have parented you(enabled you?) so far. I have been angry at times. I have worried so much that I believe I may have given you the impression that I didn’t have faith that God was in control. If I were you, I wouldn’t blame you if you questioned whether my faith was real, as I have not followed God and trusted Him and His principles so far in our journey together. I have at times not followed the very principles of trust in Him and faith in Him that I have urged you to follow. I have forgotten that you are God’s child. You are a gift that I am simply here to protect and care for. I am responsible to teach you about God and his goodness. When I am done doing that, I am obligated to give you back to Him. I see that I have been holding on too tight. Because I love you so much, you have become an idol to me, as I have placed our relationship above my relationship with God. I have acted like God couldn’t protect you as well as I could. How silly and misguided. He made you!*

*Interestingly, I now clearly see that your struggle and rebellion has caused me the pain I needed to return to God more fully, to know Him better, and to be more closely the man/woman He wants me to be. His Word and my faithful wise community has helped me see that my actions have not been loving at all. I prevented you from fully experiencing the consequences of bad choices. I have tried to rescue you from the pain. However, the pain incurred from making bad choices is the very motivation we all need to learn from our mistakes.*

*So forgive me once again in the way I have parented/loved you. From this point forward, I will remember that my job is to raise a God fearing, responsible adult(sharpen you). That is more important than being your friend. Make no mistake, I want you and I to love one another deeply. However, if you fall in love with God above all others, follow Jesus in obedience out of a love for Him, then we will have the best relationship a father and son/daughter can have. So from this point forward I will set clear boundaries and I will enforce them strictly. I know that will be difficult for you to believe, because I have caved so often in the past. However, this time God is directing the program, not me. I believe you are about to see the difference when He is in charge.*

*Thanks for listening to my apology.* ***Will you forgive me?*** *(GET AN ANSWER!)*

*Thank you, now let’s go over this written plan so there are no questions….*

**Scriptural Encouragement and Warnings to Guide Us**

As you contemplate becoming the new sheriff let me remind you that you are at a Crossroads and Satan is coming to try to destroy your mission. These scriptures are worth looking up and meditating on. You will need the truth of God’s word in your journey.

* *Lamentations 2:14*
* *Prov 27:6*
* *Ezekial 2:4*
* *Jeremiah 1:17*
* *Matt. 10:37-38*
* *James 1:23-25*
* *II Timothy 3:1-7*

In summary, a good sheriff and a good parent is simply a good disciple of Jesus Christ. A good disciple prioritizes obedience and striving to be Christ-like in spite of circumstances and outcomes. (John 14:15 *If you love me you will obey what I have commanded*)

Traveling the Prodigal road is tough, but tough times are promised to us as we have discussed many times. (John 16:33). This ministry is dear to all who lead it as it is an opportunity to grow every person who walks through our doors. There will be only two kinds of people who enter.

1. People who don’t believe in Christ, doubt Him or have never even considered Him. This ministry will point out they are not in control and give them an opportunity determine if Jesus Christ is the answer. We can not control their response. We can only be obedient to the Truth as we believe it leads to peace and life. The gospel hope in Jesus Christ will be presented with passion and grace.
2. People who believe in Jesus Christ. “Believers” will be at various stages of their faith walk. For such people, this ministry is simply discipleship. Although painful, it is an amazing opportunity to grow believers in their faith and deepen their relationship and intimacy with and love for Christ. Many believers who find themselves in Prodigal chaos know the “playbook” of the Bible well and can even teach it’s precepts. However, when facing Prodigal crisis, God asks you to put down the playbook, walk on to the actual playing field and faithfully run His plays. That is faith in action. (I John 3:18) For those who meet this challenge they are rewarded with a relationship with God that is deeper and richer than anything they could have imagined and a relationship that allows them joy in any circumstance.

Being a good sheriff is being *submitted* rather than being *committed.* (idea taken from a sermon by Todd Wagner at Watermark Church) We can be confused by these terms, but the following comparisons will help explain the difference. **Committed** : tend to follow rules and act out of a motivation to perform and compete with others. They may be motivated by a “works based” faith.

* **Submitted** : maintain a posture of humility and dependence on Jesus; they abide in Him and walk in the Spirit because they love Him, not because they have to.

**Committed**

* Partner with God
* God co pilot
* Goal = consuming end
* God helps them “succeed”
* Work before worship
* Identity is works
* Desire secretly to share glory with God

**Submitted**

* God is boss
* God is pilot
* Goal = Process
* Success= God’s agenda
* Worship continual
* Identity in Christ
* God shares glory with no one

**Committed**

* Do good things
* Laugh less
* Judges/legalistic
* Time with God is another thing to do
* Come to God when we need him
* Rarely if ever enter God’s rest

**Submitted**

* Yields fruit to eternity
* Laugh more
* Grace / forgiveness
* Time with God is life itself
* Abide continually
* Lie down in green pastures/souls restored

God is calling all of us to follow him in obedience rather than only talk about Him. Jesus gives us a stern warning in Luke 6:46-49

*Why do you call me Lord, Lord and do not do what I say?**I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on a rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who builds his house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.”*

God is simply asking us to build our house on the only foundation that will withstand all the troubles Satan throws at is, the solid rock of Jesus Christ. If you do that, you can become the Sheriff and parent he calls you to be.

*In a previous lesson I related the story of not being a “good sheriff”. I had promised to take away my son’s truck if he drank. When that happened, a few months after getting his license, I did not enforce that consequence. My son realized that my boundaries were soft and he held an advantage. My power as sheriff was undermined. A few years later after a disastrous few years after a failed college attempt complicated with drug use, lies, anger, and manipulation, we discovered that he was still using drugs, despite rules rules implemented at an intervention two weeks earlier. This discovery led to a meeting with my pastor and a dear friend and Elder to help us decide the next steps. They revealed the truth of Ezekial 33:1-9, which I now considered for the first time. It cut me to the quick. I heard about the responsibility and blame that I would bear if I did not “blow the trumpet” and allow my son to suffer the consequences of his actions. My pastor knew the fears my wife, Ginny, and I had, as he asked us if we were prepared to “stand over our son’s grave.” This sounds cruel or even harsh at first, but fear of death is the central fear that has to be overcome to carry out a good plan. If I wasn't prepared to stay the course against all fears, then my pastor knew my prodigal, all prodigals, would manipulate such lack of faith to leverage us to give in once again.*

*Ginny and I shed many tears that night as we wrestled with God, but finally decided that we were ready to stand our ground. The next day the camp leader called my son into his office and put us on speaker phone. We asked him to give his truck keys to his leader and in return, he was handed an envelope with 87 dollars in it, the exact bus fare from his location to Dallas. We told him he could use that money for the trip home or use it to start his new life without us. We told him that if he arrived in Dallas the next day that we had next steps waiting, but if he did not get off that bus, he was on his on.*

*Fortunately, he arrived in Dallas the next day and he was flown to a rehab facility immediately. Our son’s journey is still rocky and far from over, but when Ginny and I realized we were ready to “lay our Issac down” and we decided that we were going to became the “ New Sheriffs” God always wanted us to be, we began to restore our relationship with each other and with God. That decision was the beginning of getting our life back and leading ourselves, and our family well. That decision ultimately led to a journey which included founding the Prodigal ministry, the greatest blessing of our lives. We encourage you to trust God and take that next step. You have no idea what God might have in store for you!*

Links:

Audio

Video [*https://youtu.be/AYkinuESCb8*](https://youtu.be/AYkinuESCb8)

Daily Questions

1. Have you ever set boundaries that you did not enforce? Explain the circumstances and reasons behind it.
2. Do you see the need for you to become a “New Sheriff”? Why or why not?
3. From your reading of the message, describe your self as the “ideal” New Sheriff? Be specific in regards to your faith and your character and resolve.
4. Are you ready to become the New Sheriff ? Why or why not?
5. What stood out to you in regard to the material in this lesson discussing how to present your plan as the New Sheriff.
6. After reviewing this material, are you committed or submitted and have you changed over the years?

**Bonus questions**! Since this is the last lesson in the series and the last questions…

Tozer states that the most important thing about a person is their view of God. It may change as you travel this Prodigal journey, but

* what do you believe God to be like?
* How would you define yourself? Ie…Your identity and value is found in…..????

NOTES