**Boundaries and Consequences**

**Prodigal Message 17**

**Weekly Scripture memory verse:**

**Galatians 6:7 God cannot be mocked. A man must reap what he sows.**

**Introduction**

Proper personal boundaries define who we are and who we are not. They define what we will allow and what we will not. Finally, they also define what we are responsible for and what we are *not* responsible for.

A healthy understanding of Biblical parenting boundaries allows us to understand that we are responsible “To”, but not responsible “For” our Prodigals as they grow into adulthood. Proper boundaries, enforced with disciplined consequences, allows the child or Prodigal to reap what they sow, which is consistent with Scripture. (Gal. 6) Such an approach gives appropriate feedback and consequences for their actions and is an excellent paradigm to follow in in any healthy relationship, especially parenting. There are no guarantees, as God alone controls outcomes; however, this approach optimizes the chance of raising Godly, responsible children and having healthy relationships built on trust and understanding. Furthermore, this approach honors God by trusting Him with our Prodigals and also gives us freedom, as we do not have to assume God’s role in the process.

**Objectives**

This message will define boundaries and how to apply them in the Prodigal context. Their importance will be highlighted but we will look at the hurdles we all face in setting boundaries and enforcing consequences. We will look at how to set your boundaries and how to maintain them consistently.

**Defining Boundaries**

Physical boundaries define the limits of the property or subject that you are concerned with. Well-known boundaries for land are oceans, fences, or property lines. Boundaries often define where you can go and where you cannot go. Humans have physical boundaries defined by our skin. Everything inside our skin is “us” and everything outside our skin is the world “around us”!

Boundaries are often extremely helpful for your protection and enjoyment. For example, road bumps along the highway help you to stay in the proper lane and warn you of danger when you veer toward trouble. Fences often prevent you from wandering from safety into dangerous areas.

Can you imagine playing a football or baseball game without boundaries? What enjoyment is there when out of bounds is ill defined, every touchdown is disputed, and every field goal or home run is subjective? The result is utter chaos and frustration.

In the same way, when we do not set personal boundaries of what we will allow and we do not define what we will be responsible for and what we will not be responsible for, the same chaos and frustration will be found. *A house without rules and regulations is a house of disorder and chaos.*

**Enforcing Consequences**

***You are free to make your own choices, but you are not free to choose your own consequences****.*

Reasonable, solid, well-defined boundaries, guidelines and rules are useless without enforced consequences for breaking them. The stronger and more rigidly the consequences are enforced the greater the impact the boundaries will have.

In some places in the Middle East the punishment for stealing is cutting off the hand. It should come as no surprise that the theft rate in those countries are among the lowest in the world. The Old Testament dealt with prodigals in such a way.

*If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother and will not listen to them when they discipline him, his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders at the gate of his town. They shall say to the elders, “This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a profligate and a drunkard.” Then all the men of his town shall stone him to death. You must purge the evil from among you. All Israel will hear of it and be afraid.* Deut. 21:18-21

We are not supporting such extreme consequences today, but I imagine that the prodigal rate in such towns went down after the first stoning!

Thanks be to God that the New Testament model of grace and mercy tempers such rigidity and extreme punishment! However Hebrews 12 tells us that God disciplines those he loves and punishes everyone he accepts as a son. Later in this chapter God’s purpose of discipline is revealed. It states that such discipline is for our good and to promote holiness within us. (Hebrews 12:1-13)

Clear boundaries that are enforced diligently brings peace to the home (Prov.29: 15), provides a safe environment (Prov. 19:18, Prov. 24:11), strengthens loving relationships (Prov. 23:24), develops trust (I John 3:18), models proper parenting (I john 3:18), and brings glory to God by following his commands. (Galatians 6:7).

**What Boundaries Will You Choose? *(Purpose defines Priorities)***

In the first few weeks of this ministry, we emphasize discovering your Personal Mission Statement (PMS), which defines your **purpose** in life. Your purpose will define the boundaries you set, if any. If your purpose in life prioritizes being a friend to your child above all else and having them like you, you will have very few boundaries. The ones you might have will be only loosely enforced as you give in time and again to the manipulation of your prodigal. If your purpose is to raise a child who succeeds financially or who sees fame or power as the highest goal, then your boundaries will revolve around grades, proper universities, people skills, and political correctness in all likelihood.

We hope and pray however that your PMS will prioritize bringing God glory. Your life will prioritize God and not your self. You will prioritize Godly living, truth, character and eternity over fleeting, temporal personal happiness and pleasure. If that is your paradigm, then you will prioritize the Word of God in your life, in your family and not only read it daily, but model its precepts to your children and to your prodigal. You will set boundaries that promote raising a responsible Godly child or maintaining God honoring healthy relationships above all else. God is not opposed to us enjoying his creation and achieving worldly fame and success but these endeavors and achievements will not be the priority.

In healthy marriages, personal boundaries strengthen the relationship by defining personal needs and clearly defining what is allowed in the relationship. It is important to have short accounts and be honest when hurtful boundaries have been crossed and deal with them in a healthy way from a servant’s heart.

**How God Models Boundaries for Us**

God defines boundaries for Himself. He is 3 separate and distinct entities in the form of God, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Trinity, three in one, is a concept beyond the scope of most humans understanding, but yet God defines that this remains him responsible for Himself.

He also models proper boundaries by communicating clearly through His Word. He clearly tells us what he likes and what he dislikes. He tells us what He will allow and will not allow. He tells us what He is responsible for, what He thinks and what He loves. He confronts sin and sets boundaries for us that will keep us from sin. However when we do sin, He loves us enough to allow us to suffer consequences for it, which is always for our own good and benefit.

**Hebrews 12:5-8** *My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline nor lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves and punishes everyone he accepts as a son. Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his earthly father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.*

**The Law of Reaping and Sowing**

A key element of understanding why we should set boundaries and allow consequences to mold and shape our Prodigals into Godly responsible adults is to understand the Law of Reaping and Sowing. Galatians 6:7 states *Do not be deceived; God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature, will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.* **You cannot teach responsibility without teaching that you reap what you sow.**

**When parents interfere with the Law of Reaping and Sowing by reaching in and rescuing their prodigals or “saving them” they are enabling**. So how can we know when and if we are to help or not to help our children? Other verses in Galatians help us. Verse 2 states the we are to carry each other’s burdens but verse 5 says each one should carry their own load. Is this contradictory or confusing? Not if you look to the original Greek meaning. The word used in Gal 6:2 for burden is *baros,* which is a heavy, crushing load which one person could not lift and refers to a However the word for load in Gal 6:5 is *Phortion* with is a small load that an individual could carry, maybe in a backpack.

So how do we determine what is enabling and what is helping each other in Christian love? The answer is that you process God’s word in the process of experienced wise Biblical community. Our prodigal closed group and leadership team are happy to help process these issues with you as you participate in this ministry. We will give direction but not directions as you will ultimately have to decide what you will do with your own prodigal, but scriptural direction is most helpful. There is no doubt that our prodigals have challenges that limit their capabilities at times such as psychological disorders or low IQ’s, but experience would indicate that in the majority of instances, parents or spouses of Prodigals underestimate what their prodigals can carry in their backpack. Our prodigals are often capable of doing much more than we believe they can. Community can help here once again.

**The Most Powerful Word in Boundary Setting…”NO!”**

Without a doubt, the most powerful and useful word in boundary setting is **“NO”.** For many of us, this is a very, very hard word to say at times. However if we begin to understand the power, purpose, and often loving nature of that word, it becomes an extremely useful tool for our benefit and the benefit of our prodigals. We gain freedom in its use. Our prodigals gain personal responsibility and wisdom by hearing it when uses appropriately.

How and when we use it is guided by God’s word, processed in the context of wise Biblical counsel, and bathed in prayer. Remember prayer is a way to get in alignment with God’s plan for our life. Listening is as important as petitioning Him for wisdom.

**Benefits of Setting Proper Boundaries**

***“A boundary is only as strong as the consequence given when they are broken”***

*Ecclesiastes 11:8 when the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong*

If boundaries are seriously, thoughtfully and prayerfully defined as we follow God’s wisdom found in His Word, the benefits are great. Such boundaries allow us to better steward our life and talents so that we can complete the works he has prepared for us to do. Eph. 2:10 states, *For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.* Since that is true, we must always be about this task and can not be distracted. By seeing clearly that setting boundaries and enforcing consequences is our only responsibility, we free ourselves up to do the business God has planned for us. If we fail to realize that we are not responsible for the outcome of our prodigals, we free ourselves from enabling or rescuing behavior that is not only harmful to our prodigals, and us but also fruitless and counterproductive. Such enabling behavior causes us worry and wastes time, money and resources.

By following God’s commands in parenting to both love (Matt. 19:19, John 13:34) and discipline (Prov. 19:18,19; 29:15,17,19,21; Ezekiel 33:1-9) we allow God to do the work in our children that needs to be done. (Gal. 6:7, Hebrews 12:1-13). We show our love for Him by obeying His commands. Obeying his commands shows we trust Him and love Him (John 14:23, I John 3:24) and brings Him glory. Such obedience strengthens our walk and our faith and models Christ to others.

**How is “Boundary and Consequence success” measured?**

It is worth a reminder at this point of a key Prodigal principle. We are not in control of our Prodigals. God is in full control of outcomes. The only person we can control is our self. (Prov. 21:31) With that in mind, we must determine what success looks like with out boundary setting.

Most people suffering in Prodigal chaos are so focused on their prodigals that they fail to realize that setting proper boundaries are carried out to benefit themselves. No doubt that setting up proper boundaries that are properly enforced will force the Prodigal to experience a reality that will allow them to take control of their own lives by changing their behavior. However proper boundaries cannot be measured by the outcome of the prodigal, as that is a factor that we cannot control.

Successful boundary implementation can be measured by the restoration of order and the reduction or elimination of chaos. If proper boundaries are enforced consistently and properly, then the home has order restored, respect returns, and the environment is safe once again. Peace, freedom, and trust in God can also occur but these conditions require a sincere faith in God and His Word. In an upcoming lesion we will examine the value of developing a short and long term “plan”, which is nothing more than a list of boundaries and consequences. We will again emphasize that development of such a plan is primarily for you.

**Why Do Boundaries Fail?**

Now that we understand how we measure success, we can discuss why plans to set boundaries fail. We have discussed that boundaries fail when we enable our children by interrupting the law of reaping and sowing. Let’s look at reasons why we might allow our enabling behavior to destroy the very boundaries we have set.

The primary reason boundary setting fails is **lack of effective or unenforced consequences**. People who do not struggle with being a prodigal or addict themselves tend to believe verbal persuasion, reasoning, or threats will work. However Proverbs 29:19 tells us what we see all too often when dealing with a Prodigal. “A servant can not be corrected by mere words, although they understand they will not respond. “ In other words, explanations are fine but only consequences will work to alter human behavior.

So if inadequate and/or unenforced consequences are a problem, then why do we not enforce our boundaries? There are several reasons but it is hard to enforce boundaries if you **fear** that pain or even death will be the result of your actions. If you approach boundaries and consequences with the mindset that if you are too hard, your prodigal might die or have pain that you fear, then it will be extremely hard to carry out the consequences that should be implemented.

Enforcing consequences are very difficult of you **do not have the proper perspective of God and of Jesus Christ.** If you **do not know the Word of God** and his principles and/or **do not process these principles with wise Biblical counsel** with Prodigal experience then it will be very difficult to even know what to do or the importance of boundaries. As stated above, your purpose can only be to glorify God if you are committed to Him through the study of His Word. The prodigal participant needs to fully understand that God says a fully loving parent disciplines their children and let’s them experience suffering, hardship, and discipline. Lack of this paradigm will lead to failed and unenforced boundaries. (Hebrews 12:1-13,)

Finally there is often **guilt and shame** from the parents own past sin. Prior hurts, habits, and hang-ups can interfere with proper boundary setting as they fail to realize their own identity in Christ and that they are themselves forgiven. If you find your self in this predicament then you might explore Celebrate Recovery or Re:Generation or a Christian personal recovery program to realize your own identity in Christ first and foremost.

Boundaries can fail because the **parents are not on the same page**. In the story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 18, what do you think might have been the outcome if the mother had sent the Prodigal more money for a second chance? Parents have to be on the same page so that the Prodigal cannot drive a wedge between them.

**You must know God and trust Him** in order to allow him to be in control of the situation. You will not leave your kids with a baby sitter you don’t know or trust. Likewise you will not stand back and let God work on your child unless you trust Him and know Him to be loving and good.

***Review of why boundaries fail***

* **Lack of consequences**
* **Fear**
* **Guilt and shame**
* **Parents not on the same page**
* **Improper or inadequate knowledge of God and His Word**
* **No community of wise Biblical counsel**
* **LACK OF TRUST IN GOD**

**What about our Boundaries with God?**

Henry Cloud and John Townsend have written one of the most useful books on this topic and their work, *Boundaries*, could not be recommended more highly by our ministry. They have several follow up books that are also most helpful and are included on our Book list. However, one quote from their original work, Boundaries is most helpful to review at this time

***“If we are trying to do His work for Him, we will fail. If we are wishing for Him to do our work for us, He will refuse. But, if we do our work, and God does His, we will find strength in a real relationship with our Creator. “***

Following up on that concept, we must realize that we are not responsible FOR our adult Prodigals, but only responsible TO them. In a separate handout (given to our participants in open group), we list the differences between responsible for and to our prodigals. Understanding this key difference is one of the most important things you can discover on your Prodigal parenting journey. We discuss and review this document often in this ministry and I will refer it again to you at this time.

Other Prodigal parenting axioms are listed below that might help you remember your role and your prodigal’s role and responsibilities. These axioms also apply to spouses, siblings or anyone effected by prodigal chaos.

* The more our kids depend on us, the less they need to depend on God
* As we parent, we need to become less as God becomes more (John 3:30)
* Teach them, model for them, then….get out of the way! (Prov . 21:31)

**Main Principles**

* **A healthy understanding of Biblical parenting boundaries allows us to understand that we are responsible “To”, but not responsible “For” our Prodigals as they grow into adulthood**
* **A house without rules and regulations is a house of disorder and chaos.**
* **The stronger and more rigidly the consequences are enforced the greater the impact the boundaries will have.**
* **Your purpose in life as defined by your PMS will determine what boundaries you set, if any.**
* **Such boundaries allow us to better steward our life and talents so that we can complete the works he has prepared for us to do.**
* **If we interfere with the law of reaping and sowing by rescuing our prodigals from pain, then we are in most cases, enabling, and causing more harm than good for all involved.**
* **A successful boundary is measured by the amount of order that is restored in your life and your home. Great boundaries properly enforced reduce chaos.**
* **You must know God and trust Him in order to allow him to be in control of the situation.**