* **When God Seems Silent**
* **Message Handout #13**
* **Memory Verse:**
* **Prov.3: 5,6** *Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and he will direct your paths.*
* **Introduction**
* *“Live long enough and important dreams will shatter. Things will go wrong that God will not fix. He could fix them, but He doesn’t. It is a Sacred Mystery”.*
* Larry Crabb
* *As I hung up the phone from the counselor at Wilderness Treatment Center, I was numb. He called me to confirm my son’s safe arrival at the facility and to also confirm that he tested strongly positive for cocaine and marijuana. Just a few hours earlier he had sworn vehemently that he was clean and that sending him to rehab was a mistake.*
* *In that moment and the days that followed my mind wandered back to the circumstances of Hunter’s adoption that had God’s hand all over it. It was April 17, 1984 when Hugh Hogle MD took my wife and I out to dinner. He was my attending surgeon at the time and it was the first and only time we ate together. We had lost two babies over the last two years from miscarriages late in the second trimester due a medical condition we discovered in Ginny. We spoke the entire night on Dr. Hogle’s 5 adopted children of different ethnicities. He spoke about the joy their family had. Adoption had never occurred in our family and had never really been discussed. I spoke with my brother, my best friend, almost every single day for the last 10 years, and we had never discussed it once. But two days later he called me and asked me if I might be interested in a private adoption. He was a lawyer and a colleague of his had a young pregnant mother who was giving up her baby. She was due in June supposedly. For some reason, I told Ginny that I was sure that was OUR baby so we accepted the offer. 3 days later we received a call from my brother that a sonogram revealed that the due date was closer to mid May. Surprised, we began to speed up our planning only to receive a call two days later that the mother had gone into labor. On April 27, 1984, 10 days after that dinner meeting, our adopted son was born and we were flying back to Texas to go pick him up.*
* *. At the time, I was not following God closely, but as the years unfolded there has never been an event in my life that has occurred that I felt more certain was directed by God’s sovereign hand. So I sat there wondering in tears what God was up to. How could he give me a son, only to bring heartache and pain to my son and our family? His life was on the line. How could He take him away?*
* In our Prodigal journey we often find ourselves wondering where God is. We ask,” what is He up to? Why is He waiting to fix this problem? Can’t He see things are getting worse, even downright dangerous?” We can also ask, “What about my Prodigal’s talent? Surely God does not want my Prodigal to waste that talent! Doesn’t God love my Prodigal? If he loves me, why does He make it so hard?” As we wrestle with these questions, we are actually wrestling with God. It is important to understand that wrestling with God is totally OK. God wants us to honestly pursue Him, to know Him, and to have a deep intimate relationship with him. It is acceptable and appropriate to work through honest questions.
* In this week’s message we will focus to the answers to these all too common questions.
* *“Emotions should not determine our Truth, rather Truth should determine our emotions.”*
* Chuck Colson
* **Wrestling with God/Having Doubts is Nothing New**
* **Mark 9:21-24** Jesus asked the boys father, “How long has he been like this?” “From childhood”, he answered. It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us”. “If you can?” said Jesus. “ Everything is possible for him who believes.” Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”
* Despite such admission, we should take heart that Jesus healed the boy in the verses that follow. If we have yet faith like a mustard seed, we can move mountains! (Luke 17:6)
* This verse is just one that might remind us that as finite humans with limited understanding we will always struggle with understanding the grand picture and plan of an infinite, unlimited, omnipresent and omnipotent God. **We must trust in what he tells us about himself.** **The more we know Him, the less wrestling will take place.**
* ***What we believe God to be is the most important fact about us***
* ***(paraphrase from Tozer)***
* **Truths about God that help us when He seems silent**
* **God is always with us**
* **Psalm 139:1-3** O Lord you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.
* **Jeremiah 23:23,24**“Am I only a God nearby,” declares the Lord, “and not a God far away”? Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?” declares the Lord. “Do I not fill heaven and earth?” declares the Lord.
* **There is a lot going on we do not see!**
* **2 Chronicles 16:9 -** “The eyes of the Lord move to and fro through out the earth seeking to strongly support those whose hearts are completely His.”
* **I Peter 5:8 –** “Your adversary the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”
* **Ephesians 6:12** -  ”For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.”
* **Daniel 10:12,13 –** “Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding this, and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard.”
* **Luke 22:31, 32 –** “Satan has demanded permission to sift Peter like wheat. Jesus says “but I will pray for you that your faith will not fail.”
* Note: then Peter denies Jesus three times…huh? **Was Jesus prayer heard?** Discuss this in your group. What do you think?
* **Truth: God’s timing is different from ours**
* **2 Peter 3:9** – “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.”
* **Truth: Our wisdom is limited**
* **Proverbs 14:12** There is a way which **seems** **right** **to** a **man**, But its end is the way of death.
* **Isaiah 55:8 –** “For My thoughts are not your thoughts nor are your ways My ways,” declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are...”
* *When God is silent, that is when He is often doing his greatest work.*
* Larry Crabb
* God’s greatest work in history was through his son Jesus. He did this great work in the still, fear filled, silence of the 3 days between His death and His resurrection. As Crabb states above, it is often in these moments of silence when God is up to something great. These moments of silence make us think of what is truly important, what we can really control, who is actually in control, and if God is good and can be trusted.
* **Common Issues We Wrestle With**
* **Expectations**
* There are certain issues that come up consistently in the minds of those who care and love prodigals, especially prodigal children. We love them and see their potential and talent. We have expectations as humans and we are often frustrated when they are not met. Expectations of college, sports success, high paying job, great spouse, etc. are not bad in and of themselves, but such expectations may not be in God’s plan for your prodigal. It has been said often “Expectations can be planned disappointments” Let’s look at the truth of God’s word to give us insight into this issue.
* **Jer. 18:3,4** – “Then I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, making something on the wheel. **4** But the vessel that he was making of clay was spoiled in the hand of the potter; **so he remade it into another vessel, as it pleased the potter to make.”**
* **Jeremiah 29:11 –** “For I know the plans that I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for calamity, to give you a future and a hope.”
* **What about Prodigals in Marriage?**
* Prodigals in the marriage are a unique and complicated challenge. Marriage is a God ordained covenant between a man and a woman. That covenant relationship commands us to maintain that bond as a priority. (Ephesians 5:22-33) Complexities in the marriage relationship are beyond the scope and purpose of this message. We recommend that all marriage issues be worked out according to the Truth of God’s word in the context of a wise Biblical community. Divorce is rampant in our culture and all too easily attained in today’s world. All too often the marriage is tough and interferes with our personal happiness. When we are unhappy in our marriage we have a choice to simply end the relationship through divorce, or to stay and fight for our marriages and grow from it. If we are sitting on the throne of our lives it is easier to justify divorce than if God is occupying that seat. If we are living for ourselves we are more easily inclined to run from pain and unhappiness than to glorify God by trying to work through the pain, grow from it, and reconcile. (Heb. 12:1-13 ) The picture of our marriage is a picture of how Jesus loves us and thank God Jesus never divorces us in our sin, but is always ready to welcome us home as we humbly repent. However, Jesus’ unconditional love for us also allows room for the enforcement of character shaping consequences.
* Marriage is the closest picture of community where both loving grace and loving truth should coexist. Such ideal community should grow both parties toward the ultimate goal of “Christ-likeness. Fault, is rarely, if ever, 100% one-way in a marriage relationship. **Marriage is an amazing tool God ordained to sharpen us**. If both parties are truly “for” the other person, then speaking truth in love will make them better and grow them to be more like Christ. There is nothing like marriage to show us our faults and the planks in our own eyes.
* However, there are times when one spouse is the prodigal. When the spouse lives a narcissistic, rebellious, adulterous, lying, manipulative and unrepentant life, consequences must be administered. Enforcing those consequences in a covenant relationship is more complicated, but is necessary in certain circumstances. Such consequences should be worked out in the context of a wise Biblical community with the goal of reconciliation, if at all possible.
* These scriptures tell us clearly what we already know. God is in control and he has a plan for our Prodigals that is in their best interest. He sees the entire picture and wants the best for our Prodigals, and it often had nothing to do with what we think is best. If we can be confident in that truth, then we can begin to Trust God in His silence.
* Proverbs 3:5,6 sums up this paradigm eloquently and plainly*. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him and he will direct your paths.”*
* ***Nothing will create bitterness faster when God seems silent then to trust in a god of our own creation verses the God of the Bible.***
* As we wrestle with God, a very important issue is most likely the issue of God’s love not only for our Prodigal but also for us. If we could be certain that God loves us, that would comfort us in the silence. Last week we discovered clearly that we could be certain that God loves us unconditionally. That fact should give us great comfort in moments when we question if he is working for us in the silence.
* 1 John 4:10 In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.
* I John 4:19 We love because he first loved us.
* Romans 5:8 But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
* Isaiah 49:15 Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you
* We also learned last week that he not only loves those by remembering them and holding their hands and dying for us, but he loves us through disciplining us. He loves us when he allows us to undergo hardship (like silence) so that we can be trained by it. (Hebrews 12:1-13)
* **Wrestling with God vs. Anger at God**
* It bears repeating that wrestling with God is not sin. If you cry out to God to know Him better and His character Proverbs 8:17 should comfort you as it states, *“I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me”* There is no sin in honest sincere questioning with an open mind. However anger at God cannot be righteous anger and is therefore sin. Anger at God assumes God got it wrong, can make mistakes, or is uncaring, all of which is simply false and based purely on emotion. Anger at God can be caused by pride, as God doesn’t carry out your plan based on your limited information. Anger at God does not bring Him glory, which should run counter to our purpose. Anger at God is caused by simply not knowing him and His character well enough.
* **How do we navigate God’s apparent silence?**
* ***Remember the Garden!***
* In the silence, Satan whispers in our ears the same thing he whispered to the first human he ever encountered. “God is not who he says he is. He doesn’t love you like he says. He doesn’t have your best interest at heart. He wants to rob you of your happiness. That apple won’t bother you. That apple will give you the knowledge of God and make you His equal. You are the God of your life, do as you think best”. We must remember that Satan is the father of lies and the master manipulator.
* If you knew nothing more about God than his faithfulness and love toward us in sending His son to pay a ransom for our sin, that should be enough. He gives us insight in how to navigate the silence in the following verses.
* **Hebrews 12:2,3** *Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfector of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning it’s shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him, who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*
* If we fix our eyes on Jesus in all things, then we can have an eternal perspective much like Paul does as he writes these verses in **II Cor. 4: 7-9, 16-18** *but we have this treasure [the gospel and Christ living in us] in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed...therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary but what is unseen is eternal.*
* We navigate the silence through **Trust** in the living God. We do not listen to the lies of Satan. We gain trust through **Relationship** with Him. **We trust God in the silence because of who He is and what we believe Him to be, pure and simple.** If you don't know who God is and don’t have a relationship with Him through Jesus Christ, then the silence is understandably scary. However if you own the fact that God is good, He loves us and cares for us, then we Trust Him in all circumstances, even in silence. We can only then wait patiently on the Lord and be confident in the silence that it will all be perfect in the end. (Rev.21: 4)
* In closing I include a powerful picture painted at the end of Brant Hanson’s incredible work, *Unoffendable,* which sums up all we have covered in this lesson.
* *When we lived in Houston, our kids were little, and going anywhere was a logistical nightmare .I remember, one Saturday, finally getting our kids ready to go and buckled into their seats. We had to stop by the grocery store, so I waited in the car with the kids while Carolyn jumped out, bought her stuff, and jumped back in. We drove around some more, through another neighborhood, to drop something off at some friends’. And then we had a couple of more errands to run.*
* *We finally pulled onto I-95 south and drove for about twenty minutes in what I thought was a 65 zone. But it wasn’t; it was 55. I got pulled over by a Harris County officer, and we all sat in the car until he came back with a much-deserved ticket.*
* *Eventually we pulled off the shoulder and kept going until we turned onto another interstate. That's when my daughter took her thumb out of her mouth and said something.*
* *“Um….Daddy, where are we going?”*
* OH yeah, I should tell her.
* “Were going to the big rodeo. We’re going to see horses!”
* “Oh! Okay”
* *That was it, but it dawned on me: How odd had this whole trip been, from her perspective? From the very outset, she’d just been sitting, buckled in, while we went here and there and everywhere. She’d just watched her mom run in and out, and a strange man approach the car with a funny hat and flashing lights, and we turned this way and that, and sped up and slowed down and sped up again.*
* *And she had no idea where we were going. None. But she was cool with it.*
* *If that were me, I’d want to know right off the bat. Where are we going? What are we doing? What’s up next? Why are we doing this?*
* *But she wasn’t the least bit offended with my lack of communication. She’s a child, and children are, by nature, humble. They don’t have to know everything. She knew almost nothing—not the final distance, not the final destination, not the duration of our stay, not even the reason for leaving her home.*
* *What she did know, though, mattered infinitely. It’s the distinctive line between a life of mistrust, stress, exhaustion, anger, bitterness, and ceaseless striving, and a life of contentment and rest. And not just for her, but for all of us who know that, ultimately, we’re not in control.*
* ***She knew who was driving.***
* *She knew, and still knows, that the one who is driving….loves her.*
* *And that makes all the difference.*
* As I look back at that moment, with my son in rehab, wondering what God was up to, I was ill prepared, as I simply didn’t know God well enough. I thought I did, but I didn’t. I still wanted control. I was too proud. However my painful journey over the last 13 years since that day, has humbled me, sharpened me, and opened my eyes to the Truth of who is driving my life...and that **He loves me.**
* *And that has made all the difference.*
* **Main Principles:**
* **We should be guided by the Truth of His Word rather than be swayed by our selfish, unreliable emotions**.
* **God is always with us. He died for us and He loves us unconditionally.**
* **Our view of specific circumstances is limited by our humanness. We don’t see the big picture, we don’t understand time as God does, and our wisdom is limited.**
* **We can honestly wrestle with God over sincere heartfelt questions but we should not be angry with God, as He never get’s it wrong and always has our best interest at heart.**
* **We navigate God’s apparent silence by ignoring Satan’s lies and by fixing our eyes on Jesus. He alone is our hope and encouragement.**
* **An accurate view of God allowing Trust and Faith in Him is the only way to navigate the Prodigal chaos along with the predictable times of waiting in silence, knowing that He is driving and that He loves us.**