**Living Guilt Free**

**Prodigal Message 15**

**Weekly Scripture memory verse:**

**II Cor. 7:10** *For godly sorrow produces repentance to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces* ***death.***

*Jim and Sally are some our dearest and closest friends. They were the picture of what I thought a great marriage was. They were kind and loving toward each other. They had a loving, close, supportive family. However unbeknownst to any of us, Jim had a secret that had eaten at him for 18 years. In his non-believing youth he had had a brief affair that was suspected by Sally but had been not been confirmed until she surprisingly asked him one Sunday afternoon out of the blue. As a new believer, the spirit convicted him and wanting some support, he brought her to our house and told her the truth in our living room. I wish every man could witness the pain that I saw that cause that afternoon as Sally literally slid off the couch onto the floor and wept in the fetal position for an hour. The pain from Sally and the guilt you could feel and see from Jim’s slumped posture and tortured face was just overwhelming. Ginny and I have counseled many couples going through the pains of infidelity and a common thread is found. Guilt. How guilt is dealt with is critical to the successful restoration of the marriage and to bringing glory to God out of such a catastrophic circumstance. The relationship can not be restored until the guilt is dealt with appropriately. It must be forgiven, not only by the offended, but by the offender as well*

**Introduction**

Most humans struggle with guilt. However, for those who find themselves in Prodigal chaos, the guilt is almost a guarantee. It is often overwhelming and paralyzing. Guilt is one of Satan’s greatest tools to defeat us. Unless we deal with guilt effectively and completely we will never be what God intends us to be fully in dealing with our prodigal situation. As long as we struggle with guilt it will negatively impact almost every relationship we have, including the one we have with God.

**Dealing with Proverbs 22:6**

*Train a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it.*

This verse can give us great hope but can also be the source of great frustration, confusion, and guilt. It is one of the most misunderstood and misinterpreted verses in the Bible. It implies that if we train our children properly then everything will turn out well. If our children don’t turn out well then one may assume that God’s promises cannot be trusted. Let’s address that from the outset.

For any fully devoted follower of God, we know God is faithful and He can be trusted. (Lam. 3:23) It is critical to look at the proper interpretation of this proverb according to most scholars. According to commentaries such as Constable, Matthew, and others, this proverb must be interpreted in light of the cultural setting of the day. The word for *“train up” is* derived from the Hebrew word for education (“*chinmuch”*) *“in the way he should go*” is meant *“according to his way”.*  Most scholars imply that the proverb does not pertain to righteous living but rather to the way he will be educated to spend his life’s work. They point out that at the time of this writing there was a regimented social class structure of royalty and commoners. Most were common tradesmen and were trained to follow the trade of their fathers. A large number of experts interpret this scripture to apply to training them up according to the skill and trade they have been born into. However the Hebrew word “*hanak”* means to dedicate which could imply that it is indeed intended to train him in conduct and the way of wisdom.

The negative impact this verse can have on parents must be processed through the proper interpretation of what a proverb is. A proverb is generally true but not always true. A proverb is a generalization about a specific issue. Proverbs give us wisdom and direction in the way we should live our lives but are not guarantees of outcome.

The second part of the verse is where the challenge to parents can be problematic. “*In the way he should go”* may mean according to his own personality and genetically preferred tendencies, but it could mean the way he ought to go. The Hebrew grammar permits either interpretation. However we must keep in mind as we interpret any scripture it must be consistent with Biblical teaching in general. One such overarching truth is that we have all been given the freedom to choose our own way. God wants us to love him and be righteous by accepting the sacrifice of Christ for our sins, but He will not force us to be righteous. Forced righteousness is not love. Love must allow choice and God wants us to love him above all else. Therefore we will always have an individual choice. In light of this truth we must recognize that we are not responsible for the choices of our children, we are only responsible for our own choices. In obedience we are only responsible to train our children to follow God. Let’s look at what the Bible has to say about how we should train our children.

**Godly Parenting**

Proper parenting can be viewed very differently. How you parent is determined by what you believe is important**.** If your purpose is to raise children that prioritize their security and well being in financial success, then you will make decisions that look vastly different to those that would be made if only character mattered. Therefore before you embark on your parenting journey it would be most helpful to determine your Purpose in life. As part of the Prodigal ministry we ask you to prioritize thinking about your Personal Mission Statement and write it out. Once your personal mission or life’s purpose is determined, then all of your decisions should be determined with your purpose in mind. This included your parenting decisions. In Prodigal we believe that it is in your best interest to have a mission statement that supports putting God first and living to bring Him glory. If that is your goal then, the ultimate goal of parenting is to raise a child that walks with God.

**Teach them the Word**

Once we realize that our children are actually “God’s children” and are actually God’s gift to us then a central part of our teaching to them is the Bible. It is God’s instruction manual to us. The Bible itself tells of the importance of studying the Bible and its precepts.

* **Deut. 6:6,7** These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. “You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.
* **Eph. 6:4** Fathers do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord

**Model Godly living**

Studying God’s Word and placing it as a priority is important, but it loses its importance if it is not modeled and lived out. Our children will follow the precepts we talk about unless we follow them in our own lives. We must show them that we have true faith in God’s Word.

We must keep in mind that ultimately we are here on earth to evangelize and disciple others. (Matt. 28:18-20) This goal is true of everyone we encounter but there is no greater priority in life, than to carry out those goals with our family first. We are to clearly explain the Gospel, introduce them to the Word, and then prove its value in your life by living by its statutes.

* Mark 12:30 you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.
* Micah 6:8 he has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God
* John 14:23a Jesus replied, ”Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching.

As we model for our children, we must model community to them as well. It is God’s will for us to live with one another and be sharpened by one another. (I Thess. 5:14)

In light of the Biblical model of parenting, let’s look at two different parenting paradigms that can cause parents to be troubled and often guilt ridden.

**Godly Parents with Prodigals**

Many parents have a clear vision for raising Godly children, yet their children rebel against them and against God. We have reviewed God’s apparent silence in our suffering in a previous message. If your child is not following God then it would be important to consider the following points.

* **Perfect parents do not guarantee perfect children**. Why some people do not follow God is a mystery reserved for heaven as we wrestle with election/predestination. We have just discussed every human being’s freedom to choose. However the mystery is that contrasted with the truth of Romans 8-10 explaining election is the truth of John 6:40 *For this is the will of my Father, that whoever looks on the son and believes in Him will have eternal life and I will raise him up on the last day.* We know that it is not God’s will that anyone should perish. So the outcome of our children is not up to us. We are responsible only to train them in the way they should go, obviously following God. The outcome of their lives is totally in God’s purview. (Prov. 21:31)

**There are many Biblical examples of great discipleship and parenting, which did not lead to Godly disciples and children***.*

* + - God with Adam and Eve (Genesis)
    - God with Israel (Old Testament)
    - Jesus and Judas (Gospels)
    - Paul and Demas (see Philemon 24 in contrast with II Tim 4:10
* **It’s a long race** It’s not over till it’s over. When you are in the valley, it seems like God is slow to respond or absent, but we find perspective in 2 Peter 3:9 *The Lord is not slow in keeping his promises as some understand slowness. He is patient with everyone not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.* Take comfort in God’s timing and His desire to be patient not wanting our prodigals to perish.
* **Are you doing all God is calling you to do?**
  + Have you blown the trumpet? Ezekiel 33:1-9 is worth a close look. It clearly points out that we are watchmen for others including our children. We are responsible for warning our children of judgment to come. We need to do everything we can to make it clear to them that they will have to answer to God one day. Judgment in the hands of just God is a scary thing. The only way is to repent of our sin and believe in Jesus.
  + Have you laid your “Isaac” down? We have to love God and trust Him enough to put obedience to Him above all else. We need to allow our children to suffer the consequences of their actions in order to reap what the sow and learn from it. We must realize that such pain is just the discipline that our children need to be shaped into the Godly men and women that God desires.
* Outcomes are a mystery and are totally in control of a loving God
  + Since the Bible is God inspired (II Tim.3: 16) then all passages must be interpreted in the context of the entire Bible. So Prov 22:6 passage tells us as parents we are to train our children for life and it is consistent with this scripture and other to also train them to be Godly. However a hard teaching from the Bible states that not everyone will inherit the Kingdom of God despites God love for them and His desire for all to spend eternity with him. (I Cor. 6:9-11) Revelation states that not everyone’s name is written in the book of life. God’s sovereign choice is a mystery, but it is clear that if not everyone enters the Kingdom of God then our destiny and eternity is in God’s hand and so is the destiny of our children. So how can we interpret this proverb? The Bible would be consistent with the admonition of the Proverb to train our children in the way they should go i.e.…to follow God. However, such training is not a guarantee of outcome. Outcomes are determined ultimately, by God alone. (Prov. 21:31)

**“I didn’t parent well in a Godly way”**

We must realize that such an admission is the proper start. At any point in life, no matter how bad the situation is and how great a sinner we are, we can begin anew and be born again with admission of our sin and belief in Jesus. Romans 3:23 points out that we have all sinned and fallen short of God’s glory. Romans 6:23 clearly points out that the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Once in Christ Jesus, Romans 8:1 gives great comfort in the fact that no matter what you have done there is no condemnation.

Other Scriptures point out that it is never too late to change, and that there is total forgiveness. Ephesians 2:8 points out that this gift is totally from God and that heaven rejoices when we repent and turn to God. (Luke 15:7) it is never too late as God can redeem the years we have lost. (Joel 2:25)

**What did I do wrong?**

Even if you have no knowledge of Proverbs 22:6 or the Bible itself, it is human nature for most of us to feel guilty if our children don't turn out well. Who else is to blame? We often believe we must have done something wrong and ask ourselves the question over and over. *What did I do wrong?*

That question in and of itself, can be healthy or destructive, depending on the motivation behind the question. If you truly desire to humble yourself and determine your mistakes to learn from them then such a question is the beginning of a potential great awakening. It can begin a time of great personal growth, which will benefit you and everyone around you, including your prodigal. However, if that question is simply to place blame on you and to heap guilt on you as a form of self inflicted “deserved” punishment, it is destructive and sinful.

Not to be overly dramatic, but understanding ***the difference between conviction and guilt is often the difference between life and death.***

Let’s first look at guilt. It is human nature to play the blame game. If something goes wrong, it is common to assume someone is to blame. We can blame others or ourselves. If children go awry parents often blame an event such as adoption, divorce, abuse, tragedy, psychiatric illness, or even just hanging with a bad crowd. These factors undeniably can contribute, but we must keep in mind that ultimately every person is free to choose. I doubt any of us have parented perfectly, but to believe that the outcomes of our children’s lives are totally dependent on us is a dangerous lie. This lie is one of Satan’s greatest tools to paralyze us from digging out of the chaos to lead our self and our families well.

Guilt can drive us into isolation. We begin to stop talking, trusting, and feeling, which is exactly where Satan wants us. In isolation, the demons magnify our guilt, which can lead to depression and loss of hope. We can walk through life numb as we manage our pain. We don't allow ourselves to feel so we experience less pain, but unfortunately we rob our self of joy. John 10:10 explains clearly that Satan’s plan is to rob us of the joy Christ came to earth to give us. In this state of guilt and isolation it is hard to parent well therefore enabling can be magnified. We feel guilt by falsely believing we are responsible for their situation therefore we struggle to administer the tough love that is needed. We ponder “what if?” and “if only”.

**Biblical Response to Guilt**

Remember that all have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory. (Romans 3:23) This includes both our Prodigals as well as us. Ie…our Prodigals are responsible for their choices. The following verses speak directly to Prodigals who refuse to follow instruction.

* Prov. 29:1 He who remains stiff necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed without remedy
* Prov.18:1 Whoever isolates himself seeks his own desire; he breaks out against all sound judgement

**Guilt versus Conviction**

We must have an accurate understanding between the difference of Guilt and Conviction. If God tweaks our conscience by the Holy Spirit, it doesn’t mean He is piling on condemnation, it means we are hopefully being convicted and guided by Truth.

Psalm 119:71 It was good for me to be afflicted that I might learn your decrees Prov.28:13 He who conceals his sins does not prosper but whoever confesses them and repents finds mercy

We gain great insight by looking at the following verse.

II Cor. 7:8-10 *for though I made you sorry with my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it. For I perceive that the same epistle made you sorry, though only for a while. Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces* ***death.***

Godly sorrow is conviction by the Holy Spirit, which leads to personal responsibility. In humility, we identify our mistakes and own them. We ask forgiveness in true repentance, and then take advantage of God’s grace and mercy. We trust in His promise to not only forgive but also forget our sins. We should take great comfort in the depth of his forgiveness. See below.

* Isaiah 43:*25 I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers them no more.*
* Psalm 103:12 *As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.*

These truths give us the freedom to be transformed and look forward, learning from our past, but not dwelling in it. **Conviction looks forward and is life giving.**

**Guilt only looks backward and no good can come from that**. Guilt is worldly sorrow which this scripture clearly implies is sin and leads to death. **Continued Guilt is sin, as it shows you are unwilling to accept God’s forgiveness.** This can only come from a lack of understanding or knowledge of God and shows a lack of faith. Walking around paralyzed by guilt does not glorify God. It tells the world, that God is not big enough or good enough or powerful enough to redeem the day. That is not the message we want to send to the world as believers in Jesus Christ.

There are many Biblical Examples of truly amazing Grace from which we can all be assured that God forgives anyone who confesses their sins and truly repents, no matter what the circumstances or the timing.

* The woman at the well (John 4:7-26)
* The thief on the cross (Luke 23:43)
* Saul (Acts 9:3-19)

It is important to realize this very important point. We are not judged by nor should we be convicted by the way our kids turn out. We are not responsible FOR how our kids turn out. We are only responsible TO our kids in the way we parent and train them. Scripture is very clear on Godly parenting principles and every parent would be wise to be intimately familiar with Prov. 19:18,19; Prov. 29:15,17,19,21; Ezekiel 33:1-9; and Hebrews 12:1-13. *No matter how you have handled your prodigal to this point, you can ask forgiveness right now and receive it totally then boldly march forward in obedience.*

**Prodigal Ministry is safe but not comfortable**.

Our God given ministry, Prodigal, is simply a discipleship ministry. Like any discipleship ministry, we should be safe for all comers. We are safe in having walked a similar, though not exact path. We do not know exactly how anyone feels, but having walked a prodigal path our self, we have empathy and understand the powerful draw to rescue and enable. We have experienced the hurt and heartbreak so we can week and mourn with you.

However, we love you enough to tell you the truth, even though we now the truth can be painful. However just like Paul, we do not regret it if it is delivered with the proper motivation of love which we pray will convict you leading to Godly sorrow. Godly sorrow leading to repentance gains the life giving forgiveness that allows us to look forward with hope. It allows us to place our faith in God who alone is responsible for outcomes. We love Him through our obedience to him in the way we can then parent as He fully intended.

**Summary:**

It is **Guilt** if….

* It tells us we are condemned and unworthy
* It tell us that what we have done is bad and unforgiveable
* It makes us want to hide
* It focuses us on other’s opinions of us
* It produces fear
* It makes us want to blame someone or some thing

It is **Convcition** if….

* It tells us our behavior is wrong, but we are still loved
* It gives us courage to ask forgiveness for relationships we have damaged (as well as forgive others)
* It focuses on God’s opinion of us and prioritizes pleasing Him above all else
* It produces joy
* It leads to repentance, forgiveness, and refreshment as we don’t need to “blame”

***What you believe about YOU, is the key to overcoming Guilt...What you believe about what God believes about You is the most important thing about YOU. It is the TRUTH about YOU.***

* + *God* ***loves*** *you (John 3:16)*
  + *You are a* ***child*** *of God…the King! (Gal. 3:26 For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.)*
  + *You are* ***Forgiven*** *(I John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all righteousness)*

**See yourself as God sees you !**

*Sally had to forgive Jim to heal the relationship. However, Jim had to forgive “Jim” to allow himself to freely love and accept love in order to have the relationship with Sally that was full and what God intended. Likewise, we must accept God’s forgiveness, grace and love and rid ourself of the guilt that drives a wedge between us and God and damages every relationship we have.*

**Main Principles:**

* **Living racked by guilt is sin, counterproductive, and not God’s plan for us**
* **Proverbs give us wisdom and direction in the way we should live our lives but are not guarantees of outcome.**
* **The ultimate goal of Godly parenting is to raise a child that walks with God.**
* **Perfect parents do not guarantee perfect children**
* **As parents and as human beings, we are not judged on outcomes. We are judged by our choice to follow Jesus and our obedience to Him.**
* **The solution to being paralyzed by Guilt is to replace it with Conviction of the Holy Spirit and accepting fully God’s complete forgiveness, then march forward in obedience.**
* **We must see ourselves as God sees us to accept his forgiveness and release the chains of guilt that Satan uses to bind us.**