

- **\*Read Luke 15:11-13/Prayer\*** It can be a parent's worst nightmare. A child comes to you and says simply, "I'm leaving." Now, we're not talking about "hey, I'm leaving to go to school." Or a "hey, I'm heading off to college." But what we're talking about is, "I'm leaving the church and my faith behind so that I can live life the way I want to." While this son might not have left the church per say...he was leaving his family behind and going off in pursuit of vain pleasures. Do you think this father had really ever taken some time to sit down and consider what he would do if this day ever came? I don't know the answer to that definitively, but I know that we can learn from this story and prepare ourselves in case this day ever comes in our lives. We can prepare ourselves to answer the question we might ask ourselves, "What do I do if they leave?"
- Now, you might be thinking that I am being pretty pessimistic in these thoughts. "Nick, we shouldn't think about things like this because it does no good." But the truth is that we must prepare ourselves for things such as this because without giving thoughts to what you would do in this type of situation, we are bound to do anything in response. I know this is the truth because I am currently experiencing this type of situation. A close family member of mine has decided to suddenly leave his parents home and pursue a life that involves sin. I have never felt so helpless in my life to help my family members who were heartbroken and crushed. However, we all know exactly how we ought to react, and it is because we have prepared ourselves to respond the right way to this type of situation. I know there are people even here in this audience that have experienced this. I am currently going through this and others might be as well. And I feel confident in saying at someone here will have to endure such a thing in the future. This is a worthwhile study.
- This evening, I want us to consider how it is that we ought to respond to such a situation where a family member or close friend had decided to leave their faith and the church in pursuit of sin. Again, only through preparing our minds for such a thing can we truly be ready to handle it the right way. I am convinced that the Bible lays down a clear plan of action that the Christian ought to implement in such a case, and I want us to consider it this evening so that God will be honored and praised even in such a difficult situation such as this. What do I do if they leave? Let's answer this question through the Word of God.

**I. I can't let my emotions dictate my actions.**

- A. In situations where the stakes are high and emotions run deep, it can be easily for us to allow our emotions to dictate our actions. I think in a situation such as this, it can happen in different ways.
- B. It might be that we become paralyzed by our sadness, anger, frustration...whatever it might be. We can't do the right thing if we are paralyzed and crippled.
- C. It might be that we allow our love for the person to push us to not be able to imagine us doing anything but accepting and supporting this person...even in their willful sin. This too isn't ok.
- D. Or it might be that we become so angry with the person that we are not willing to work through the issues were facing. This too isn't an appropriate response. Our emotions are controlling us in such a case.
- E. Instead, we need to be as Paul says and be careful how we walk so that we will walk as a wise person and not a fool. **(Eph. 5:15)** The fool allows for emotions to rule while the wise person follows the instructions of Peter and keeps a sober mind so that he might handle a delicate situation the right way. **(I Peter 5:8)** Satan seeks to destroy us through our unchecked emotions, but we must rise above such a thing.

**II. I need to seek God's plan of action.**

- A. This ties in nicely with our previous point about not letting our emotions dictate what we do. Far too often we allow either our emotions or our own limited wisdom dictate how we will approach and deal with a situation, but Scripture is clear that the wisdom of man cannot direct him in the right direction. **(Prov. 3:5,6)**
- B. It is through God's Word and His Word alone that we have come to possess the wisdom that will help us to handle the most difficult situations in life the best ways. **(II Tim.3:16,17)** I know that we often reference these verses frequently, but in my mind we can't be reminded enough that we must rely upon God's Word and wisdom to do what is best and please Him in this life.

**III. I need to shower them with love.**

- A. Depending on the situation and circumstances, it might be that the loved who has left feels as if they are not loved by those closest to us. Right or wrong, we must be sure to press upon them the fact that they are loved not just by us, but they are also loved by God.
- B. This expression of love needs to simply be a continuation of the love we have already expressed to them in our relationships. A failure to express love for one another will greatly hinder our efforts to persuade them to do what is right in their lives, and it might even keep us giving strong efforts to bring them back to doing what is right.
- C. Do we remember what Paul says in **Galatians 6:1**? He says that we ought to give every effort to restore a brother or sister in sin with a spirit of gentleness. We do this because we would want for the same love and gentleness to be shown to us in our times of struggles.

- D. Consider what Jude says on this matter of helping those who are struggling in their faith and doubting. (**Jude 22,23**) It is our job and their loved ones to snatch them out of the fire so to speak, BUT we must also recognize that true love recognizes that they have things undone in regards to their faith and God. We love them, but we hate and are unwilling to condone their lives in sin.

#### **IV. I need to stand firmly on Scripture.**

- A. While we do love them, we must stand strong on the truth of God's Word and not allow for our loved one to think that we condone or will support or enable them in their sinful decisions. Scripture is very clear on this issue when it says that disciples are to treat those who stray away from the truth and faith differently than they did before. They are no longer in fellowship and the relationship ought to reflect such a change. We must not sacrifice the truth of Scripture for the sake of maintaining an earthly relationship.
- B. We are well familiar with what Paul says to church in Corinth when they were dealing with the man who was caught up in sexual immorality. Paul is very clear in **I Corinthians 5:3-5;9-11**, that those disciples living in sin is to be marked as unfaithful and the fruits of fellowship are no longer to be enjoyed.
- C. Later on in the New Testament, Paul further expands by pointing out that the breaking of association is done with the goal of the person recognizing that their actions have created a problem between them and God and His people. (**II Thessalonians 3:11-14**)
- D. However, also take note of how this point ties in with the previous point that while we might have to extend discipline...we still show love by not treating him as an enemy, but we are admonishing him as a brother. It is imperative that we find the proper balance in these types of situations.
- E. It might be that our firm stance on Scripture leaves our loved one in a spot where they have to hit rock bottom. If that is the case then so be it. In fact, that is exactly what we see back in **Luke 15:14-17**. It wasn't until he was at rock bottom that the son realized his mistakes and came to his senses and decided to return to his dad and seek his forgiveness. We must recognize the truth that love sometimes means we have to be tough and not support our loved ones when they seek to live in sin.

#### **V. I need to pray consistently.**

- A. Over the past week I have prayed and prayed and prayed and prayed some more. I have prayed privately and I have prayed with my aunt, cousin, and other families on the phone and the prayers have all had a common theme..."Lord, strengthen us to do what we must and we pray for the erring one to come to his sense so we can come back to you."
- B. Saying those prayers has done nothing but comfort our hearts, but it also shows God that our faith and trust is truly in Him. My aunt specifically made mention to me that this situation has really taught her the importance of relying upon God and putting everything at His feet. We, as people, are not able to handle things like this well by ourselves. But through God strengthening us because of our trust and faith in Him, we can make it through the difficulties and look for God's will to be done on the other side. We must be people, especially in these situations, that pray without ceasing. (**I Thess. 5:17**)

#### **VI. I need to be ready to receive them back.**

- A. Finally, we do all of things consistently, but our last work must be prepare ourselves to receive the loved one back the instant they are willing to come back and do what is right. Our attitude must be like that of the father back in **Luke 15:20**.
- B. I'll be honest with you...if my cousin walked through these doors right this second and told me that he realized his mistakes and he wanted help with his issues...I would run out of this pulpit and hug him and cry tears of joy because a lost sheep has come back to join the fold.
- C. Friends, this is the goal! Restoration is the goal! So many people turn their noses up to Biblical discipline because they think it is cruel and unloving, but that just couldn't be any farther from the truth. Just as God cannot abide with sin, so shouldn't we be willing to do that, either.
- D. We extend that tough love with the simple goal of showing the loved one just how serious their decisions are and how negative the impacts of those decisions are. What makes it worth it though? What makes it worth it is when they come back! When they come back then all of the difficult decisions to change our relationships will be made worth it.

You and I have all heard story after story of the straying Christian who came back because their loved ones helped them to realize just how unacceptable their decisions were thought their constant love, but firm stance on the truth of God's Word. But we probably also know many stories about how straying Christians never came back because their loved ones weren't willing to do hard things and express disapproval for their decisions. It's sad that we have to have discussions like these, but they are a reality in this life. These are the most difficult of situations, but we must lean upon the strength of the Lord and follow His wise plan for bringing the erring Christian back to the Lord. May God help us to follow His will and wisdom and may the goal of restoration become a reality in the most difficult of situations.