

## Wolves

Matthew 10:16: Jesus said, “See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.”

### We have wolves targeting our kids, Coming to terms with that.

Welcome back to Session 2. May your presence mean you are boldly willing to step in the gap between your precious young and evildoers. The questionnaire you were given to fill out before coming to this session has given you the idea of what is going to be discussed now. For us family leaders, here is what we have to know and recognize from the very start. We have competition. We are not the only ones noticing what is going on in the lives of our offspring. Others are there regarding those we love but they have a different agenda. They want to have some influence on our kids. Some of them might be simply finding ways to build up our young ones. That is good. But then there are those who have something else in mind that serve their own purposes. Those are opposition, the competitors we must realize are there. Jesus calls them wolves.

Every parent wants to see their children grow up safely, unharmed, not broken down. The same goes for grandparents as they watch their beloved grandchildren develop. However, when we hear Jesus state this verse like 2,000 years ago, we realize we might have a challenge on our hands. Are our children wise, shrewd in dealing with wolves? Are we like the father in Proverbs, chapter one observing our children and realizing they are simple-minded, apt to be foolish and truly need the wisdom Jesus is talking about?

The big question here is this: Is Jesus telling us the truth or just trying to scare us. Does he believe there are wolves out there that have a lot of cunning, an insatiable appetite and a destructive ability? Wolves looking at sheep as “easy pickings”, a sumptuous meal? Is he exaggerating or was he aware of something we perhaps don’t notice? After all have you and I ever been told we are sheep--that our children are sheep and we are all out there somewhere where wolves lurk? Maybe Jesus is only talking to his disciples about those days Christians were burned at the stake, not our time. What do you think? If Jesus is right, do we really believe it and are we talking about it?

*Discussion Question: Let’s not overlook what we have already said and done in this regard. What are some of the things you have already talked about with your kids or warned them about? Do you believe what is going on in our present world pose a threat or a danger to our young people somehow? Have you thought of yourself as a family leader that actually has competitors? Discuss this.*

Well, if we sort of believe it, let’s come out of the closet and talk about it. I am reading the front page of the Star Tribune on September 15, 2022. The headline is Sextortion Case Largest in U.S history. This is about a 31 year old man who used the Internet to develop a method by which he could get into the life of girls 12-17, threatening them to send explicit photos of themselves on social media. “He created fake social media accounts posing as minor girls and threatened his many victims with sending explicit



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images and videos of the girls unless they sent him more lewd content. In many cases, he followed through with sending sexually explicit images of the girls to friends, family, and classmates. He also extorted some girls to help him obtain child pornography from other victims.” His victims numbered over 1,000 girls from all 50 states and some from other countries.

Was this man one of the wolves Jesus was talking about? Many of these girls suffered life changing ways like getting into cocaine and meth, or quitting school, cutting their skin with razors. Written statements in the court by some described depression and suicide attempts, changing schools, loss of friends, leaving behind beloved sports. One girl said, “I felt that being dead would be less painful than all the emotions I experienced every day.” The man was sentenced to 43 years in prison. Many others like him have not been caught.

*Discussion Questions: If we call this man a wolf, what advantages did he have that gave him such a success rate from his point of view? What do you think it was like to be one of these girls trying to work this out? What do you think was going on with the parents while this was happening? How important is preparation before a youth starts to deal with situations and traps like this?*

As a father of my third daughter who was the victim of a sex trafficker, I read this story and asked myself two questions: Did the parents or grandparents of these girls ever talk to them and prepare them for attacks like this—meeting up with a wolf like this? Secondly, did they have the kind of close relationship with their daughters so that once approached by this sextortionist, the first thing their daughters would do would be to tell their parents and discuss what to do next?

I know I didn’t have that kind of close relationships with my own daughter so she would have automatically come to me with such a dilemma. I also know I never prepared my daughter through conversations to believe that such dangers are actually out there. She didn’t know what I knew about such predators and what I didn’t know. We could have discussed some of the unseen dangers but we didn’t. After all, I had been an adult for many years and she was still young and inexperienced with evil manipulation. She did not know that I was conversant and open to discuss treachery in a helpful way that would save her from much distress! Also she didn’t know I was ignorant of the manipulative scheming practiced by those seeking to take advantage of young people. Concerned for her, I needed to learn some tricks myself.

Another daughter was very young when she was molested. I have to confess my wife and I never discussed the reality and threat of child molestation with this daughter before it happened. The truth is this. We parents are special people God has put on this earth to be the people our kids have in their lives that get them ready for the evil doers in this world, people they will meet up with. No teacher, pastor or Sunday School teacher is going to be in the daily position to do the kind of job God has assigned to us. Are we doing it? Do we know how to do it? Are we gambling with the life of our child? Good and important questions!

Public television has just announced (12/19/2022) that it has been reported that 3,000 boys have been victims of sextortionists and twelve have committed suicide.

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*Discussion Questions: Say you had read this article about this sextortionist or this report about boys. Now you want to share what it says with your daughter or your son and have a conversation. How could that happen? Practice a role play like this with some other member of your group. One be the parent and have another person be the daughter or the son. With other members do the same kind of role play again. As members of the group, what is it you start to see here?*

Well, first maybe we need to identify who these wolves might be in our modern times. We have read the story of one. Are there others? See the page [Twenty-Two Kinds of Wolves and Manipulators Hurting Our Kids, Using Our Kids](#).

One example: Internet pornographers are wolves. They don't care what happens to youth. They set their traps with juicy human bait. Of all the young men in America, 68% visit a pornographic site at least once a week. Have not traps set by Internet pornographers been sprung on these young men's lives, detouring them towards havoc and heartache. It doesn't end there. What about the suffering their future wives and children may have to deal with?

*Discussion Questions: Look at the sheet showing 22 different kinds of wolves that are out there today. Each person pick out the three that concern them the most. Have each discuss why they picked one. If there is time, the group could go around and discuss a second on each person picked. Then ask the question: Has anyone ever told me directly: You need to prepare your offspring for these wolves. Do you feel equipped to do so? Discuss. Would getting some assistance as to what you could do about this ahead of time be of value to you?*

When wolves in the wild hunt, they follow a series of steps:

1. Stalking and chasing their prey.
2. Testing for weaknesses.
3. Figuring out the best approach for attacking.
4. Taking down their prey with their strong bite.

***Discussion Question: Think of an example of a human wolf. In what ways do they think and carry out a plan like a wolf in the wild?***

*Closing Prayer Ideas: 1. Pray for victims 2. Pray for recognizing who the modern day wolves are and what to do about them. 3. Pray for becoming the family leader each of us need to be considering the many resources available to the wolves to be successful. 4. Praise God for giving us these insights and what God will show us so we can effectively prepare and compete against the wolves for the lives of our offspring.*

End of Session 2

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*Newspaper article on Sextortionist could be used if there is still time left.*

**"I HAVE NAKED PICTURES OF YOU."**

The text buzzed on Ashley Reynolds' phone. School was out for the summer, and she was kicking back on her aunt's porch in Phoenix. It must be a scammer, she thought—even at 14 Reynolds was sure of that. She'd never even taken a naked photo. So she ignored the texts, but within minutes she got another. And another. And no matter what she did, the messages wouldn't stop. "They're going to be sent to all ur friends," she remembers reading. "I need u to take pictures in your bra if u dont want them to see you...."

Reynolds is now 20 and a hospital receptionist in Phoenix, but she can easily recall how scared she felt that evening six years ago, when those threats dragged her into one of the largest cases of a sickening new Internet crime wave. It's called sextortion, in which predators coerce or manipulate someone (often an underage someone) into sending lewd, compromising pictures or videos, many of which are released publicly or traded as child pornography. Although there are no specific numbers for sextortion, it's on the rise; according to the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, reports of online child sexual solicitation surged 44 percent between 2010 and 2014.

Reynolds knows that if she speaks out, the world will learn that she, as a frightened teenager, sent an utter stranger naked photos of herself, and that people may judge her. She also knows that if she doesn't, more children will be tormented. "No question," she says. "I'm going public."

## **The Dark Tunnel**

In 2009 Reynolds was a popular freshman and student government officer. An outdoorsy type who loved to hunt with her family—they called her One-Shot Sally for her accuracy—she was always the one in her girl pack to grab the video camera and get friends to do silly skits. The one to give a courtesy giggle if no one laughed at a joke. She was everyone's friend, and not at all streetwise. "I was just oblivious to bad character, I guess," she says.

The scammer had first contacted her on Myspace, then the second most popular social networking site after Facebook. He called himself CaptainObvious; his profile picture, taken in a bathroom mirror under dull fluorescent light, showed a boy of about 16 with long dark hair. She knew he was bluffing. "I was just like, *Ew*, and ignored it," she says. But when he

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instant-messaged her on her phone, she felt creeped out. How did he have her number? "And then he kept saying, 'I'm going to send out your photo.'" Over the next two hours, she tried to stop his torrent of messages. "Dude, leave me alone," she wrote. "Stop texting me." But after a while she began to wonder whether he might have something. Reynolds and her best friend were always goofing around on Stickam, a video chat site—they'd never exposed themselves intentionally, but her laptop was close to the bed. Had she left her webcam on? Could he have snapped a picture, like a Peeping Tom?

He said he'd stop bothering her if she sent him photos of herself in her bra, and for reasons she still can't quite explain, she did it. "All I was thinking was, Just get him off my back," she says. "I'd never heard of sextortion. I thought he would go away." The fact that she didn't worry more about the consequences is typical for her age; adolescents feel immune to danger, says Jane Anderson, an attorney adviser at the nonprofit AEquitas, which trains lawyers how to best prosecute cases of violence against women. "Teens are also digital natives who have grown up with a total lack of online privacy," she notes. "The more you've lived on social media, the less likely you are to question it." Or as Reynolds puts it now: "I thought I could handle it on my own."

Captain Obvious *did* disappear, but a few days later he was back. "Those pictures you sent are blurry. Send them again," Reynolds recalls him writing. She pushed back: "I already sent you the pictures you wanted. Why are you still bothering me?" But he threatened to release what he had, which terrified her. "I couldn't bear to have my friends and family think I was promiscuous," she says.

So she did it, and from there, his demands escalated: She needed to photograph herself fully naked, he insisted, doggy style, touching herself.... "He had me do stuff that I didn't even know existed," she says. "One time he wanted me to use a brush and put it inside of me. I said, 'Hell no.'" During a surprise party friends threw, he texted her constantly. "I told him, 'It's my fifteenth birthday, please let me go,'" she recalls. "And he said, 'I know. Send me the pictures and you can do whatever you want.'" Eventually just the sight of the ugly brown bathroom doors that were the backdrop in her photos—"the frickin' cheap wooden doors that showed up in all those pictures"—made her sick. By the third month he was asking for 60 pictures, "not per week or month, per *night*," she clarifies. "It was like I was in a tunnel and I didn't know where it was going to end. I was depressed and afraid I'd get in trouble—the most alone I'd ever felt in my life."



Had she only known there were about 350 other girls in the same dark tunnel.

### The Crime That Never Goes Away

What Reynolds was going through had barely been heard of in 2009. But since then, "image exploitation" crimes—including revenge porn, in which a former lover posts illicit pictures to get back at an ex, and naked-photo leaks like the acts of online vandalism last year that targeted Jennifer Lawrence and other stars—have increased significantly. Sextortion, while not as well known as these crimes, is especially damaging because, for one, its victims are largely minors; the average age is 15, with some as young as nine, according to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC). Typically predators prowl platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Skype; impersonating teenage boys, they use various methods to hook girls—often flirting, sometimes threatening.

And the salacious photos they collect end up in a teeming underworld of peer-to-peer file-sharing programs. "The vast majority of these guys turn around and barter these images of child pornography online for other images," says Michael Osborn, chief of the FBI's Violent Crimes Against Children unit. And victims are never free of the crime. "As young adults, they have to live with the fact that their images are out there being consumed and traded like some type of horrible currency," says D. Rodney Brown, an assistant U.S. attorney in Jacksonville, Florida, who has prosecuted sextortion cases. "I'm not being funny or poetic. Many of the programs where pedophiles go require some 'pay before you play'—you have to provide images to get into them."

Most cruelly, a sextortionist makes each girl produce her own pornographic images; he forces her to victimize *herself*, an act that can have "a devastating emotional effect," says Martha Finnegan, a child/adolescent forensic interviewer at the FBI. "And that's what society doesn't get: Yes, the girls participated in this. But they're *children*; they're still very much victims. Even though they haven't been touched, the trauma level we see is as severe as hands-on offenses, because a lot of these kids don't know how to end what can go on, sometimes, for years.... And they think it's not happening to anyone else."

But it is. While Reynolds was trapped in her own private purgatory behind the brown wooden doors, 2,000 miles away Samantha Chonski, a music-obsessed 13-year-old in a Pink Floyd cover band, had been imploring CaptainObvious to leave *her* alone too. He'd popped up on her Stickam and had a screen shot of her and her friend flashing their breasts. "We had just lifted up our shirts really quick, being so dumb," says Chonski, now <https://adultssavingkids.org>



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21 and a salesperson for Clinique outside of Philadelphia. "I can't imagine how fast he had to click that and be like: Bam!" She remembers begging him for hours in a chat, saying, "Please don't make me...I'm just 13," and him telling her, "Just this one more thing...."

She was terrified at the thought of those pictures and videos getting out. "I had 2,000 Myspace friends," she says. "I couldn't imagine if all those kids got that stuff. I was already getting teased in middle school." And the FBI's Osborn says those fears are well founded: "We see photos routinely sent out to all the friends at school, church, the neighborhood. And then the bullying begins. We've had many kids who have dropped out; some who have committed suicide." Chonski admits she definitely thought about it.

And she and Reynolds weren't the only ones victimized: From Miami Beach, Florida, to Auburn, Washington; from Mason City, Iowa, to Prairieville, Louisiana; girls were hiding with their phones and webcams and answering Captain Obvious' demands. In Colorado a 13-year-old student became anxious that anyone looking at her on the street had seen her naked. In another school, a bubbly teen stopped seeing her friends; instead, she would later tell a courtroom, she'd come home "and look for places to hang a noose in my room, feeling like there was no other way out."