

Word #5: Honour your father and mother

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[0:00] Now, for the past few weeks, you've been looking through the Ten Commandments. Until now, the focus has been on the first four commandments, which form the bedrock of our relationship with God.

That tell us who God is, how we are to worship Him, how we honor His name, and how we enter into His rest. But today, we cross a threshold.

We shift from our vertical relationship with God to our horizontal relationship with one another. And right at the very front, before any other social law, God starts in the home.

And it begins with the fifth commandment, which says, honor your father and mother. Now, when you hear these words, most people in this room immediately fall into one of two camps.

If you're reading this verse as a parent, you'd be like, preach, pastor. Go tell my kids that they should honor me. If you're reading this verse as an adult child, though, you might not be so quick to agree with me.

[1:11] You think about the baggage, the tension, the communication that comes with this commandment. Especially as adults, navigating boundaries with our parents, differing expectations, or sometimes unsolicited advice makes honoring complicated.

And what adds to the confusion is that our culture already assumes filopietty by default. From a young age, we'll handle the checklist.

Make your parents proud. Get the right job. Settle down. And above all, protect the family's public image. Don't do anything that brings shame to your parents.

So when we read this commandment, it's easy to think that God is just rubber stamping our cultural norm. So it's God saying the traditional Asian values are much better than those stinky Westerners who only do individualized freedom and space.

It's God saying that Asian values are biblical values. It's tempting to make that leap, isn't it? So what is biblical honor?

[2:33] What does it actually mean to honor our father and mother, and especially if they aren't believers, or if there's a painful history between you?

So what I want to do this morning is go through different parts of the Bible to show that God doesn't buy into either side of this cultural tug of war. On one hand, the Bible rejects radical individualism, the modern mindset that says you're on your own, nobody can tell you what to do, not even your parents, so just chase your dreams and follow your conviction at all costs.

But on the other hand, it also rejects absolute cultural compliance, the idea common in patriarchal societies like ours, that parents are always right, that you owe them blind obedience, and that your life is a debt you constantly have to pay back.

I think what the Bible has for us is that in Jesus, God points us to a far more radical love than we could ever come up with on our own. So that is our goal.

And today's message will be divided into three parts if you have your outline, which is parents represent God, number one. Number two, therefore care for them. But number three, but exalt Christ above all.

[3:51] Parents represent God, therefore care for them, but exalt Christ above all. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for the institution of family.

We thank you that you yourself showed us what it's like to love and that you've given us the responsibility to also love those around us, chiefly those who are related to us by blood.

But we also know that nobody who enters this church hall this morning is without pain. And some of us carry scars that cut so deep from our relationships with our parents.

That it isn't easy to listen to what the Bible has for us. Some of us have prayed years and years for our parents to see eye to eye with us, to believe in you.

Some of us have parents who are on their deathbeds, and we're not sure whether they have truly trusted in you yet. So I ask that, Lord, wherever we are, wherever we are in the season of life, you will use our time together this morning, short as it is, to help us, to give us a renewed perspective on how to love and honor our parents in response to our love for you.

[5:11] We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. So parents represent God. Parents represent God. God calls us to honor our parents because they are given the massive responsibility of reflecting God's heart and authority to their children.

Parents represent God in many ways. First, parents like God are our authoritative providers and protectors. Just as God is our supreme provider, He delegates authority to parents to protect, to provide for, and order the lives of their children.

In the ancient Near Eastern and biblical worldview, a parent's authority was not self-derived. Rather, it was a delegated trust from God.

And in Matthew 7, Jesus Himself highlights the parental reflection of God's provision. He says, which one of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone?

If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him? Second, parents serve as the primary spiritual delegates of God to the next generation.

[6:30] They are the first pastors and theologians a child ever encounters. In Deuteronomy 6.6, God explicitly charged parents, not the priests, not the community elders, with embedding His Word into daily family life.

It says here, these commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down, and when you get up.

In the New Testament, Paul commands Timothy's mother, Eunice, and grandmother, Louise, for the way they pass down the faith to Timothy through faithful daily teaching.

And third, parents represent God in setting boundaries, correcting, and guiding children towards righteousness. Parents reflect God's character when they discipline their kids out of love, rather than anger.

We think of Hebrews 12.7, which says, endure hardship as discipline, for God is treating you as His children. And then in verse 10, they, meaning our earthly fathers, discipline us for a little while as they thought best.

[7:45] But God disciplines us for our good in order that we may share in His holiness. And so just as God's discipline is meant to restore and protect, biblical parental correction reflects the loving, life-giving guardrails of a heavenly Father.

Of course, I could go on and on about all the different ways parents represent God in the Bible. But the point is this. No matter what kind of family you were raised in, whether your parents are slash were Christians or not, one of these models probably resonates with you more than the others.

Maybe for some of us, our mothers were stern disciplinarians who taught us right from wrong.

Maybe our fathers worked grueling hours just to provide and put food on the table.

Or maybe they were the ones who sat down, sat us down, and taught us God's Word. But whatever model sticks out, the emphasis is that through their care, provision, and guidance, our parents were given the task of representing God to you.

And I love when Hebrews 12, where it says, discipline as they thought best. Okay, so give them some grace here, as we would ask grace from our children as well.

[9:08] So it's not something that we can just write off as if there is no right or wrong. That the way we treat our parents, especially as adults, is never just a matter of personal preference or cultural etiquette.

In other words, it is not entirely subjective. It doesn't depend on how we feel on a given day. It doesn't depend on the family context.

If parents represent God, then the universal charge for all Christians is to honor them. Because the way we treat them carries immense spiritual weight.

You think of World War II. All of a sudden, if you were a barber, you had to cut hairs, you had to give a haircut properly. Because suddenly, there was something more important.

Accountants have to make sure that accounts are balanced. In this way, because parents represent God, there is a divine, there is a spiritual part to the way we treat them.

[10:16] It's never just based on us. So in a real sense, then, how we treat our parents is an extension of our love for God. We simply cannot say, I love God, I worship Him, I surrender my life to Him, but this particularly challenging area, maybe not so soon.

We simply cannot say, I believe and I follow Jesus while simultaneously holding on to grudges towards our parents. We cannot put on our best mask in church, but treat our parents harshly at home.

Our relationship with them directly reflects our relationship with the Lord. So parents represent God, therefore, number two, care for them.

See, precisely the fifth commandment calls us to honor our parents. In Leviticus, chapter 19, verse 3, this same charge is paired with a far stronger word.

One, I think, that isn't immediately obvious in modern translations like the NIV. NIV simply says, each one of you must respect your mother and father.

[11:35] But the literal Hebrew word used here is to fear or revere. Now, if you grew up in an Asian household, you would say, Pastor, you don't need to tell me that. I grew up fearing the cane every day.

Okay, that's not the kind of fear that we're talking about. In the Old Testament, this specific word for fear is almost exclusively reserved for our awe-filled response to Almighty God Himself.

It's not about fear of failure. It's not about fear of shame. Nor is it about fear of punishment. Instead, it means treating someone with gravity weight and reverence.

In other words, God is saying that the honor and respect we show our parents should be a direct reflection of the respect we carry for Him. Notice, too, the absolute equality in God's design says here, every one of you shall fear his mother and his father.

This is absolutely revolutionary because in the ancient Near Eastern culture that routinely marginalized women and elevated only the patriarchal head of the host, God's law explicitly demands that both father and mother share the same exact weight of sacred honor and reverence.

[13:04] Now, because of personality traits, shared interests, or past history, many of us naturally find it much easier to connect with one parent over the other.

The Bible, however, says that you don't get to embrace your mother's warmth while neglecting your father just because he's difficult to talk to. You don't get to discuss business with our dads because it's a very safe topic while ignoring our mother when she is erratic.

God calls us to give both father and mother the exact same weight of honor and respect. See, friends, when we look at how Scripture instructs us to treat our parents, we see a clear distinction based on our season of life.

For children living at home, honor is expressed through direct obedience. It's Ephesians 6. Children are to obey their parents in the Lord. They're to learn submission. But surely, that doesn't apply once we've grown up.

The kind of childlike submission to parental authority doesn't apply once we've left the home and started our own lives. We can't expect a married man to call his mother from Parkinson asking for permission on which shirt to buy while out shopping out with his wife.

[14:37] So for adult children, it's not about obey but honor. Honor. This word, it shifts from functional obedience to a posture of profound respect and physical financial care.

That's the emphasis. Physical financial care. In the context of Exodus chapter 20 verse 12, scholars and commentators widely agree that the primary insistence of this commandment is to demand that adult children take care of their parents in their old age.

When parents reach a stage when they were no longer able to work or provide for themselves, the responsibility fell entirely on the children. So biblical honor was never an empty, polite gesture nor mere lip service but a concrete commitment.

We are to ensure that as long as they live, our aging parents are sheltered, they're provided for, they're defended, and they're cared for when their strength and their memory failed them.

Now I recognize in our modern world the application might look a little bit different. Many parents today are financially independent, they have pensions, investments, retirement savings, passive income, and they don't necessarily need our money.

[16:07] So what does it mean for us if this honor is just physical care, how does it apply to parents who don't necessarily need us to pay for them?

So what does that look like? I think biblical care for sure goes far beyond writing a check. Honoring our parents means stepping into their lives as their strength declines and their world gets smaller. Do you recognize that when you were a little kid you have 30 friends, high school, 15 friends, college, 10 friends, started working, five friends, got married, no friends.

Okay? The older you get, the smaller your circle becomes. and it is our responsibility to care and treat our parents with dignity.

Now this includes little things like helping them with technology, offering them emotional support, navigating medical decisions alongside them.

[17:23] It means protecting them from isolation, driving them to appointments, calling home regularly, and giving them the dignity of being valued and loved rather than treated as a burden or outsourced entirely to someone else.

When Paul highlights this commandment in Ephesians 6, verse 2 to 3, he points to a crucial detail. He says this, this is the first commandment with a promise that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.

Now, back in Exodus, this promise was tied to the land of Israel. God told his people that if they honoured their parents, they would live long in the land he was giving them.

So, God was saying, if you build a culture that honours and cares for your elders, your nation would endure. My blessing will rest on you. Now, look at what Paul does here in Ephesians.

He takes that promise, but he's riding under the new covenant to a global multi-ethnic church. So, he changes the promise from live long in the promised land to that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.

[18:40] So, in God's moral order, when a family, a church, and a society honour the generation that came before them, his blessing rests upon that community.

Therefore, for the Christian adult today, God commands us to care for our parents. We don't call home only when our schedules clear up, only when our finances are easier, or when life becomes less chaotic, nor is honouring our parents merely fulfilling a cultural duty of filial piety.

Caring for our parents, scripture says, is a direct result, a direct act of Christian devotion. It is a practical expression of our submission to Jesus Christ.

To honour our parents, they may go well with you, that you may enjoy long life on the earth. Parents represent God, therefore care for them, but exalt Christ above all.

Now, we come to the final truth this morning. Yes, parents represent God, therefore we care for them, but above every earthly relationship, even the most sacred family bond, we must exalt Christ above all.

[20:01] In Luke chapter 14, verse 25 to 27, Jesus drops a statement that completely shocks our ears, and quite frankly, sounds almost scandalous to a culture like ours, that deeply values filial piety and family devotion.

He says to the crowd that's following Him, if anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, even their own life, such a person cannot be My disciple, and whoever does not carry the cross and follow Me cannot be My disciple.

So there is the elephant in the room, the elephant in the Bible. Hate your father and mother. So how is it that Jesus, the one who commanded us to love our enemies, who also reaffirms the fifth commandment, say we must hate our parents?

What is he suggesting? For one, scholars point out that Jesus is using a classic Middle Eastern idiom of radical comparison, where to hate simply means to love less.

We think of Genesis 29, where Jacob is said to have hated Leah, meaning simply that he loved Rachel more. Jesus is not commanding us to carry malice, bitterness, or coldness toward our parents, nor is he giving a line in the Bible that we can look to to justify our disobedience, because if he were, then his supreme command to love our neighbors as ourselves, chiefly of us including our parents, will then fall apart.

[21:42] Matthew 10, verse 37, gives us that same truth. Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. See, in the first century, choosing Jesus meant risking immediate rejection.

It meant risking alienation from one's own household. There was simply no such thing as casual Christianity. Like 2,000 years later, choosing Christ over parental approval remains just as challenging, especially for some of us, isn't it?

Parents' expectations can quietly dictate your career, your marriage, your finances, and even your faith.

Our culture constantly says your parents gave you life, so you owe them absolute allegiance. But Jesus says no, they represent God, but they're not God.

They reflect His authority, but they do not replace it. When a parent's demand push you to compromise your faith, disobey God, or walk away from the gospel, your ultimate allegiance is already settled.

[23:00] Look closely at how Luke constructs this call to discipleship across verses 26 and 27. In verse 26, Jesus speaks of coming to Him.

So here, He's talking about the initial entry point, anyone who comes to Me. So the decision of faith to enter into a relationship with Him when we first trust Him as our Savior.

But when you look at verse 27, again, the NIV is not very obvious. The NIV translates the phrase as follow me. But the ESV more accurately renders it as come after me.

So whoever comes to me, initially, makes the choice of following Jesus, but then decides to come after me, must bear the cross. So the sequence is first you come to Him, then you come after Him. And what Jesus is doing here is describing the ongoing daily pursuit of walking directly in His footsteps. True faith isn't just a single decision made years ago at an altar call.

[24:12] It is a lifelong journey of following Him. And precisely, friends, it is in the day-to-day task of following Jesus that our discipleship gets tested.

Because in the most basic sense, to be a disciple is to sit at the feet of a rabbi and to learn the law. But Jesus demands far more than an earthly teacher.

Perhaps we can all agree in principle that Jesus' teachings are important. We might even say it is necessary for us to follow Him lest we go astray. But when push comes to shove, when our loyalties to Christ are put to the test, where lies our allegiance?

cross-bearing is not the cross-bearing must carry their cross. And in the Greek, this is a deliberate use of the continuous present tense.

Cross-bearing is not merely a one-time willingness to die. It is a grinding process of enduring friction, culture rejection, and ongoing sacrifice for the sake of Christ.

[25:26] And for many of us, carrying this cross means navigating deep, ongoing tension within our homes, especially with parents who don't share our faith.

For some of us, that friction shows up when we're expected to bow before altars or burn Joss papers at traditional family funerals. For others, it appears in subtle, everyday conflicts, when family trips or big meals are scheduled on Sundays.

And there are times when parents nag us for spending too much time at church while neglecting our home. Or when they react with resistance to a call to full-time ministry, out of fear, they will waste a good degree and leave no financial security for the future.

For some of us, discipleship is hard when our parents criticize who we date and marry, talk down of our spouse, pressure us in terms of how much money we should contribute to the family, even down to how we raise our children.

In times like this, discipleship is tested. And how do we respond? Are we just supposed to march out the door and say, I'm a grown adult, I don't have to obey you anymore, Jesus says I should hate you, so I'm going to honor God's calling and choose what's best for me.

[26:50] Absolutely not. Of course, you laugh because you know that can't be true. Jesus never calls us to use his lordship as an excuse to be harsh, disrespectful, or cruel to our parents.

Cross-bearing in the Christian life is never a license to justify bad manners or pride. We are to stand firm with humility, with gentleness and grace.

We are to say no to compromise, but we still seek to show our love and respect to our parents whenever appropriate. While you cannot participate in idol worship at a funeral, you can arrive early, you can serve drinks, you can comfort those to breathe.

If Sunday means conflict with church, you can arrange an earlier service time, you can show up, be fully present, and love your family well. If you call into full-time ministry, you don't dismiss their financial fears with self-righteous talk, you sit with them, you assure them that following God will

never mean abandoning them in their old age.

And when there are clashes, be it finances, family, children, all the things that you can fight with your in-laws and your family or your parents about, remember that you don't win your parents to Christ by winning an argument.

[28 : 12] Listen patiently. Validate their concerns. State your convictions with grace and respect. Show them that managing your life according to biblical principles does not mean dismissing their wisdom or pushing them out of your life.

In everything, let them see that putting Jesus first doesn't make you love them less. It actually equips you to love, respect, and care for them far better than you could ever do on your own.

Now, as we close, I'll be the first to admit that just like any of God's commandments, honoring our parents is a lot easier to agree with in principle than to practice daily.

I think there is something uniquely challenging about the fifth commandment. We can be masters at our job. We can diagnose a complex medical condition in a patient.

We can immediately spot what's broken in a client's company. We can troubleshoot We can code in seconds. Yet, when it comes to our own families, especially in how we relate to our parents, we feel completely stuck.

[29 : 35] Particularly when we see those same patterns, their stubbornness, their insecurities, their harshness, their divisiveness playing out in our own marriages and parenting, we beat ourselves up.

Haven't we all played the family of origin card just to justify our sin? Oh, my parents never showed me this. That's just how I was brought up, so don't expect anything different.

So this leaves us in a painful limbo. On one hand, the parental bond is something that we can never truly sever.

Their blood, their genes, their influence remain in us long after they are gone. But on the other hand, simple conversations can feel like a minefield.

Because let's face it, no matter how low we get, how many degrees we earn, how successful we become, the moment we walk into their living room, we are just their child.

[30 : 44] And I think that dynamic makes it incredibly hard to navigate sensitive topics or standing conflicts. And after another exhausting argument, don't we all catch ourselves sighing and thinking, how much can I really expect them to change anyway?

After all, you can't teach an old dog new tricks. Now, brothers and sisters, the good news is that the gospel can heal even the deepest wounds of our family of origin.

I think too often our standing of the gospel stops at justification. Jesus died on the cross for me and I am saved through him. But think about it. When was the last time you marveled at the reality that you are an adopted child of God?

When was the last time you woke up and said, how amazing it is that I am a daughter of God?

When we come to Christ, God not only justifies us by declaring us not guilty in the courtroom of heaven.

He also takes us out of the courtroom and invites us into his family. Galatians chapter 4 verse 47 says, But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his son to redeem those who are under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons.

[32 : 16] And because you are sons, God has sent the spirit of his son into our hearts crying, Abba, Father. So you are no longer a slave, but a son. And if a son, then an heir through God.

See, friends, when we forget our adoption in Christ, we fall back into orphan tendencies. We start living like spiritual orphans, trying to unlove, trying to self-protect out of insecurity, and looking to our earthly parents to give us what our heavenly father can provide.

We react to our parents out of fear, out of self-defense, or performance. The moment they nag us about our career, criticize our spouse, or question our parenting, our ego will defend itself because we are depending on their approval for our ultimate worth.

But the gospel invites us to marvel at the reality that we are an adopted child of God. And as the Spirit of God cries Abba Father in our hearts today, the cycle of family trauma breaks.

When we see how God welcomes us as a fully and permanently secure heir, we stop needing our parents to be perfect. We no longer demand that they give us the validation that only God can give.

[33 : 48] We can forgive them for their flaws because we too have been forgiven by a father. The gospel allows us to step out of slave-like honoring our parents to grace-filled service.

We don't serve our aging parents to earn a gold star. We don't take them on trips to post on Instagram. We don't honor them for an inheritance or avoid family shame. We serve them because our heart is overflowing with the patient, unearned love of the father who adopted us when we were a spiritual rebel.

And when we are secure in the father's love, we gain the freedom to love without defensiveness. When a critical comment comes our way, we don't have to lash out. We can take a deep breath, ground ourselves in our father's delight, and respond with gentleness and grace.

So let us walk in our true identity as adopted children, so secure in God's love for us that we publicly testify the gospel to our families.

[35:07] When our parents see that their criticism no longer provokes us, that their stubbornness is met with patience, and our service to them is motivated by genuine love, they are seeing a picture of the gospel itself.

So when your strength to honor your parents fails, and your patience runs dry, preach the gospel of adoption to yourself. You are no longer a slave, you are a son, a daughter, and an heir through God.

So may we be a people who live so deeply in our heavenly father's embrace that we are empowered to bring the very same grace, honor, and love into our earthly homes.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we praise you for you are our father.

You have taken care of us since eternity past. You knew us when we were in our mother's womb. Every step of our life, you guided us, you provided for us, you disciplined us, and even when we were far, far lost, on the journey towards hell, you saw us, you chose us, you saved us, and the spirit gives us the seal of adoption to be welcoming to your family, to be given the privilege to call our father.

[36:52] Oh, Lord, we praise you for this, and we confess of our forgetfulness. We confess of so often we live like orphans, trying to get any ounce of validation we can get from our spouses, but also from our parents.

That makes honoring them so difficult when there are differing expectations and worldviews, when schedules clash. We pray, Lord, may we wake up each day, marvel at the reality that we are chosen and beloved sons and daughters of yours.

I pray that this secure love from you will flow into our homes, flow into our relationship with our parents, and I pray for those of us who might be exhausted, praying years for years for unbelieving parents, still nowhere close to any signs or any assurance.

I pray for those of us who are battling generational resentment passed down, baggage that was passed down, that feels like it would take so much to just open the can of worms, and it would take so much effort and energy to unravel them one by one.

I pray, Lord, you also guard our hearts from feeling the needs to be the messiahs of our family, to be the ones who usher in our parents' salvation, but help us to see that in the daily challenging moments of discipleship, to do what we can, to be faithful in loving and honoring them because you love us first, and trust that in all things, you will build our families up, you will take care of our parents better than we could.

[38:55] We ask all these things in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.