

## How Do I Honor My Parents? Exodus 20:1-12

Jeff Foxworthy has said that “Moms will clean up everything. Scientists have proven that a mom’s saliva is the exact chemical composition of Formula 409.” Ray Romano has said, “The Italian and Jewish families in my neighborhood were very similar, especially the mothers whose world revolved around food. Mothers believed that any problem could be solved with food. Mothers could never accept that you were actually full.”

Jay Leno recalls, “Whenever my dad got mad at me, he would never actually hit me. But he did have one of the great belt movements. He’d say, ‘Do I have to go for the belt?’ Then he’d wiggle his waistband around a little, to which my brother would say, ‘Not the belt, Dad, we’d prefer that shovel with the nails in it.’”

And Joan Rivers has said, “Daddy is the guy who is quick to appear with the camera and just as quick to disappear when there’s a diaper to be changed.”

Michael Burkett points out, “A mother will go to the store for bread and milk, and return with enough groceries to feed Bangladesh for a year. A father will go to the store for bread and milk, and return with bread, nacho-flavored Doritos, and \$5 worth of lottery tickets.”

Mothers and fathers... we love them and we wouldn’t be here without them! This morning we’re focusing on the 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment, as we reach the mid-point of our Sunday morning worship series, *Ten Life-Changing Truths*. This commandment is given to children of all ages. Let’s read aloud together: “Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you” (Exodus 20:12).

What does the fifth commandment require? It tells us to honor our parents. In his book *Mere Morality*, ethicist Lewis Smedes says that honor is the moral nucleus in any relationship between sons and daughters with their mothers and fathers. He writes, “Whatever else a son or daughter may feel about their parents, however deep their love or intense their anger, however rich their gratitude or bitter their resentment, God commands all children to respect and honor their parents.”

Notice that there is nothing in the fifth commandment about giving gifts or holding special celebrations. There’s nothing here about candy or flowers, fine dining or even Hallmark cards. There’s nothing here about sentiment or tradition. There’s not a word about holidays or reunions, birthdays or anniversaries. No, the only thing that this commandment requires is honor.

What does honor entail? In our Scripture text the Hebrew word for “honor” carries the meaning of “weightiness.” In the ancient world, to honor someone meant that you respected that person as someone who carried a great deal of influence, dignity and authority in your life. In fact, one of the core values of an ancient Hebrew home was the honor accorded to parents and grandparents and great-grandparents. Whether a child was 5 years old or 55 years old, to honor one’s parents involved listening, learning and loyalty.

Let’s think about this. No matter how wonderful your parents might be or might have been, I suspect that all of us will agree that the only perfect parent is God. The reason is clear: “...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

We're all broken by sin. But our Heavenly Parent sent His Son to take our sin, on himself on the cross. Recently I saw a church sign that put it this way: "Many people use duct tape to fix things. But God used nails."

When God sent His Son to the cross, Jesus honored His Father's will. By dying, Jesus paid the penalty for our sin. The Bible says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

For this reason we honor and worship our Heavenly Father and His Son, the Lord Jesus. At the same time, sad to say, some of us have earthly parents who seem unworthy of honor. Some parents are abusive, manipulative or neglectful.

If you have or had a parent like that, what is God telling you to do? Are you supposed to ignore the pain and pretend everything is great? No, you're not. Yet, the fifth commandment remains. God is still saying I want you to honor and respect the role and position of your parents. How, then, can we keep this commandment? How can we express honor as we listen, learn and are loyal to our parents? There's no one-size-fits-all answer. The answer really depends on your own age and life stage. At different points in our life journeys we will live out the fifth commandment in different ways.

In his discussion of this commandment, Dr. Rick Warren offers a helpful outline which I want to acknowledge. Warren captures the idea that the way we honor our parents varies across the life span and changes through the years. Follow along on your back-page bulletin outline, if you wish. Here's a first truth: As a youth or child I honor my parents by obeying and respecting them

### **1. As a youth, I honor my parents by obeying and respecting them.**

The Bible teaches, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right" (Ephesians 6:1). What does it mean to obey? The verb *to obey* in the original text carries a range of meaning, including "to be subject to, to respond to and to answer." From a biblical standpoint, then, the main elements of obedience are hearing and heeding, respectfully responding and doing what your parent says.

Interestingly, this passage in Ephesians 6 continues in the next two verses by referring to the fifth commandment: "'Honor your father and mother'—which is the first commandment with a promise—that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth" (Ephesians 6:2-3). In the original text the word for "honor" refers to giving regard, respect and obedience to your parents. The opposite of honoring, then, is disregard, disrespect and disobedience.

So, tell me: How are things in your home? If you are a young person are you honoring your parents with regard, respect and obedience? Or, has there been too much disregard, disrespect and disobedience lately? If you're going keep the fifth commandment, your relationship with your parents may need some work. Begin by acting as if your parents really deserve your regard, respect and obedience. You might be surprised by what obedience and respect can yield!

Now, no one needs to tell a teen that her or his parents aren't perfect. Some parents leave a lot to be desired. Still, the Bible calls you to obey your parents.

As long as you're under your parent's roof, and you depend on them for your food, clothing, shelter, insurance, and a thousand and one other things, your parents deserve your honor—meaning your regard, your respect and your obedience. When a young person is on his or her own, the requirements of honor change somewhat. We'll focus

on that next. But as long as your parents are your primary support, children and youth are to honor and obey their parents.

This leads to a second truth for second stage of life for honoring parents: As a young adult, I honor my parents by accepting and appreciating them.

## **2. As young adult, I honor my parents by accepting and appreciating them.**

When a teen becomes a young adult, when she or he assumes primary responsibility for their own care and support, the way that a young adult will best honor their parents is by accepting and appreciating them.

Let's face it. The older you get as a young person, the more you start seeing the faults of your parents. You see their hang-ups, the chinks in the armor. But rather than putting-down your parents, rather than point out your parent's faults or failures, if you really want to carry out the fifth commandment you need to accept them in spite of their weaknesses.

Now, you might ask, "Why should I accept my parents? I didn't have a choice in the matter!" The fact is, neither did they! The argument cuts both ways! You've been blessed with each other! That's why acceptance is vital.

Acceptance does not mean pretending that they are perfect. It doesn't mean ignoring their mistakes. It doesn't mean agreeing with all they do or agreeing with all they ask you to do. Acceptance basically means this:

First, you accept the fact that God used your imperfect parents to bring you into the world. Your parents may be excellent, better than average or mediocre. But regardless of how they treated you growing up, the fact is they gave you something that no one could give you—they gave you your life. For this alone they deserve your honor and respect.

Second, you genuinely listen to what your parents have to say. When you're on your own, you're not bound by their advice. But you might benefit by it. The Bible says, "Listen to your father, who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old" (Proverbs 23:22). If you disagree, disagree without being disagreeable. Listen to them and don't tune them out. When you do as a young adult, you show honor and respect to your parents.

Third, you forgive your parents for any past hurts you've endured. How often do we unintentionally hurt those we love the most? It's almost part of the territory of family life. If you live together under one roof, at one time or another, you're going to be hurt by the people you love. That's why our families need to be a place of grace. Forgiveness, fresh starts and do-overs are needed! While a lack of forgiveness, keeping score and growing bitter is self-destructive.

As a young adult, to accept your parents remember that God chose them to bring you into the world. Listen to what they have to say. Forgive past hurts and wrongs. You'll honor your parents when you forgive them for what they did wrong, and you choose to focus on what they did right.

Along with accepting your parents, if you're a young adult a second way that you can honor them is simply by appreciating them. It's easy to take parents for granted! But there are two things that you can appreciate about your parents.

First, you can appreciate your parent's efforts. If you're a young adult—and the parent of young children—you know from first-hand experience that parenting isn't for cowards. It's tough! I mean have you any idea how much easier your parents' life

would have been if they hadn't had you? Do your parents have gray hair—or maybe no hair? Why do you suppose that is? Tell me: When did you last thank your parents for putting up with you? Or, being blessed by you!

Second, you can appreciate your parent's sacrifice. Parenting comes with a price. Emotionally and economically it's expensive! It's time-consuming and it's costly. While few of us think about this when beginning a family, experts tell us that the projected cost of raising an infant to young adulthood is over a quarter of a million dollars per child!

Someone has said that a father is person who carries pictures where he once carried money. For many men, the four stages of life are these: Believing in Santa Claus. Not believing in Santa Claus. Becoming Santa Claus. And then looking like Santa Claus. But Santa Claus aside, when a couple decides to have a child or children, they are choosing to do without certain other things. What could your parents have done if they hadn't spent their time and money on you? Appreciate their sacrifices!

This leads to a third and final factor and phase in honoring one's parents: As an adult, I honor my parents by affirming and not abandoning them.

### **3. As an adult, I honor my parents by affirming and not abandoning them.**

As we've noted, this commandment applies to each of us, whether we're 5 years old or 55 years old or older. When we, ourselves, are mid-years adults or senior adults, still with one or both parents, we are called to honor them by affirming them, not abandoning them.

Let's remember that parents are entrusted with God-given responsibility to "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it" (Proverbs 22:6). As such, parents have God-given authority and an intrinsic "weightiness" about them. By virtue of their God-given role, parents deserve life-long honor. By virtue of their God-given responsibility, parents deserve affirmation, and not abandonment by their children.

In the words of the aging psalmist David, "Do not cast me away when I am old; do not forsake me when my strength is gone" (Psalm 71:9). Parents need and deserve children who honor and affirm them. How can those of us who are adults best affirm our aging parents?

First, you can affirm your parents by staying in touch with them. Every time you write a letter, send a card, make a call or send an e-mail to your father or mother, you can affirm, encourage and honor them. The Bible says, "Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act" (Proverbs 3:27). So keep in touch, assist and support your parents. They brought you up. Don't let them down!

Second, you can affirm your parents by asking for their counsel and advice. Even if you do not follow it, at least seek it and listen to it. If you're married, seek counsel from your in-laws, as well. Remember Jethro who gave wise counsel to his son-in-law Moses; and Naomi who gave counsel to her daughter-in-law Ruth.

Third, you can affirm your parents by praying for them and speaking well of them before others and the Lord. The Bible tells us to care for and support our aged parents. Paul told Timothy, "If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Timothy 5:8).

How we treat our loved ones, especially our aged parents, says a great deal about our own spiritual maturity. Sadly, there are many elderly parents living alone with very limited contact with their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. This leads to an important issue: Some argue that honoring a parent requires taking care of them, as long as possible, at home. Others hold that assisted living or nursing care is the far preferred arrangement.

According to ethicist Lew Smedes, “Having an aged parent live in one’s home can be a challenge to discover untapped resources of love and care. On the other hand, such a move may tax one’s decreasing energy level to exhaustion. For some aged adults, living in a nursing home may be an offensive and humiliating experience. While for others, a nursing facility can be the discovery of new independence and new friends. Each option brings its own possibilities and its own risks.”

Here, it seems, lies the real issue. The question of honor cannot be settled by where an aged parent lives. The real question of honor is determined by the role that a parent plays in a family wherever he or she lives.

To honor our parents, especially as they age, requires the expenditure of effort, energy and expense. At the same time this effort, energy and expense pales by comparison to that which our parents have already given to us!

The psalmist writes of God’s promise to senior saints. “‘Because he loves me,’ says the Lord, ‘I will rescue him’ I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name. He will call upon me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him. With long life will I satisfy him and show him my salvation’” (Ps. 91:14-16).

God, our Heavenly Father grants us the gift of our earthly life and the greater gift of our eternal salvation. Our call is to obeying His fifth commandment by honoring our parents: obeying and respecting them... accepting and appreciating them... affirming and not abandoning them.

## How Do I Honor My Parents?

### Exodus 20:1-12

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*“‘Honor your father and mother’--which is the first commandment with a promise—‘that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth’” (Ephesians 6:2-3).*

#### 2. As young adult, I honor my parents by accepting and appreciating them.

*“Listen to your father, who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old” (Proverbs 23:22).*

#### 3. As an adult, I honor my parents by affirming, not abandoning them.

*“Do not cast me away when I am old; do not forsake me when my strength is gone” (Psalm 71:9). “Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act” (Proverbs 3:27).*

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