

JULY 31st
PARENTS MATTER

“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.” **EXODUS 20:12**

C.S. Lewis once wrote this to a searching friend, “When I have learned to love God better than my earthly dearest, I will love my earthly dearest better than I do now. If I learn to love my earthly dearest at God’s expense and instead of God, I will be moving toward a place of not loving my earthly dearest at all. When first things are put first, second things are not suppressed, but increased.” Lewis summarizes the reason for the order of the Ten “Words.” Only when we have loved God with all of our hearts will we be enabled to love others well. First things first: vertical, then horizontal.

When we love God and His name, we are propelled in power to love others well. This love for others begins with our parents. We find ourselves at different places today. Some reading or watching this are empty nesters. Others reading this still have children in our home. Some don’t have children. On the other side of the coin, some of us have parents that are still alive. Others have parents that have gone on to heaven. This command reaches all of us. What does God have to teach us today?

God makes honoring parents primary here. Honor refers to obedience when children still remain in the home. As we read and reflect on this command, what does this mean for parents? We must be faithful to give godly instruction that is appropriate to the age that our children are. We must avoid what the New Testament describes as “exasperating your children.” Personally, I’m really good at that last part. I want my children to obey and I want control, so I often demand it. And of course, it needs to be done on my time and done perfectly according to my expectations. You can imagine how that scenario goes. However, as we receive God’s grace for us and internalize it, we can then offer grace to our children. This doesn’t give a license to disobey. Instead, it gives children room to learn obedience and grow in grace as they learn to love God by honoring their parents.

Adults that have graduated out of the house are not required to obey their parents. Rather, honor refers to dignity and respect that is given to them. We must ask ourselves, how am I showing dignity and worth to my adult parents? What example am I giving to my children in what it means to honor your parents? As is often said, “the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.” How our children see us honor our parents is how they will often treat us.

A final word on this command. The tail end contains a promise: “...that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.” What does this mean? When we honor parents by listening and obeying their instruction, we generally will live a longer life. The example is direct but can be helpful: “don’t run out into the street to get the ball unless you look first to make sure it’s clear. Don’t touch the stove with your bare hand and your hand will remain unburned. Don’t throw water on a grease fire.” These are commands given and following them shows honor and wisdom. It will preserve your life by following them. The command in Exodus 20 doesn’t mean that we will be trouble free or we won’t die in a tragic accident when we are young. It means that honoring our parents is the wisest way to have a fruitful life of meaning and significance.

Spend some time thinking about how important parents are. Thank the Lord for your parents, even when parents sometimes hurt and wound us. Ask God for wisdom how to live out this command.

For Further Reading: Luke 2:41-52

