

Words of Life: 3. To Honor and To Be Worthy of Honor
Exodus 20:12; Matthew 15:1-9
February 28, 2021
Pastor Tami Luckhardt

At the age of 12, my little brother, Scott started abusing drugs and alcohol and for the next 18 years, my parents did everything they could to help Scott but no one and nothing could help Scott, except Scott. At the age of 29, he was arrested for stealing food out of a little league snack bar that was closed for the season and he put in jail in San Diego for 90 days. This is when he hit his rock-bottom and started his journey to sobriety. Since Dec 12, 1995, he has remained clean and I am so proud of him. Once clean, he and my dad became golf buddies, fellow pranksters and best friends. In the Dec of 2011 when my dad's open-heart surgery went terribly wrong and he was tethered to oxygen and feeding tubes for the last 3 years of his life, it was my brother who was there, day in and day out, as the Sunday afternoon TV sports buddy on the couch as well as for the 2am medical emergencies. And since our dad passed in 2015, Scott and his newly wed wife, Sandra are the ones who continue to be there for my mom, day in and day out. Every time I express my gratitude to him for all that he has done (and continues to do for our parents), he says that he considers it his privilege and honor to be able to return the same love and care to them that they showed to him. My little brother, Scott, has taught me a lot about what it means to honor my father and mother.

We continue today in our message series *Words of Life, The Ten Commandments Through the Eyes of Jesus*. As we look at each of the commandments, the principals that lay behind them, and the way Jesus spoke to them and lived them, instead of just see a list of rules and regulations, we can instead see them as guardrails (given to us by a loving God) that help us stay on track to experience the good and beautiful life intended for us. In weeks one and two, we examined the first four commandments. These commandments address how we are to honor God and live in right relationship with God. The remaining six commandments speak to how we are to live in right relationship with one another; our parents, our families and our neighbors. Today we will examine the 5th commandment, honor your father and your mother. This commandment is so important, so foundational for creating a good society, that it appears first among all the other commandments that instruct us on how we are to live in relationship with others. This is also the first commandment that comes with a promise, *honor your father and mother so that your life will be long on the fertile land that the Lord your God is giving you*. I'll say more about that promise a little later.

What does it mean to honor? The Hebrew word for honor is "*kavod*" is a verb that means "to consider" or "treat as weighty". We treat our parents as weighty when we take their values, needs and experiences to heart. When we're young, our parents' role is to protect and teach us. So for children, the word for *honor* also means "obedience." Paul writes in Ephesians, "*As for children, obey your parents in the Lord, because it is right.*" Interestingly, the Hebrew word for obey is "*shema*" which also means "to listen" or "to hear." So for kids and teenagers, honoring your parents means that you listen and hear them and obey them, doing what they ask you to do. Not all of us have loving and engaged parents so what do we do when our parents act dishonorably or in ways that hurt us and create distance in our relationship? I don't believe for one second that the fifth commandment was written to honor abusive, neglectful or harmful parents. These folks are no longer acting as legitimate parents and they are the exception to the rule. This commandment is not a requirement to continue to be abused by someone who acts in ways that are inconsistent with a legitimate and loving parent. If you were abused or neglected by your parents, there are other scriptures you might turn to for direction or therapists that you might see that specialize in child neglect and abuse who can help you find healing. Part

of that healing may be remembering Jesus' call to "those who are willing to hear: Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who mistreat you. (Luke 6:27-28) Forgiveness is a spiritual exercise that allows the one who was harmed to rise above the pain and find release.

While there is a directive in this commandment for kids to honor their parents, many scholars believe that the 5th commandment's primary intent was to ensure people cared for the elderly. It was part of the social contract God gave to Israel in an attempt to teach them that you must honor your father and mother because as they get older, they are going to need your help. This was God's social security plan! Only as recently as the 20th century did we even have things like Social Security, Medicare, pension plans and assisted living homes. Before that younger generations were meant to care for the needs of the older generation. This happened primarily through the family. As we age, there are a lot of decisions we can make that will help our children honor us and avoid creating frustrating situations. I know for Jerry and me, as parents of adult children and adult children of aging parents, we've come to see clearly that we all have a role to play in upholding this commandment. So we have tried to simplify our living by giving away things we don't need, writing health care directives and a living will. It is how we show honor and are ourselves worthy of honor.

In Matthew 15 we find Jesus rebuking the religious leaders of his day because they had come up with this idea, this loophole, that if a son were angry with his parents, he could make a pledge to God and to the temple in Jerusalem and then he was off the hook from having to financially help his parents. But Jesus is saying God commands you to take care of your parents. It doesn't matter what other pledges you make, your primary obligation (after your obligation to God) is to your parents. Then when Jesus was dying on the cross, as he looked down upon his own mother, he told his most beloved disciple, John that he was to take care of her after he was gone. I think this fifth commandment is a call for us not only to care for our own parents but to also care for other adults in our community.

To give you a picture of what it looks like, I want to share with you the story of a ministry here at Messiah Church called Young at Hearts. Young at Hearts began in several other forms back in the 1980's and about eight years ago Barb Krause and her husband, Todd Hendries became hosts so to continue to provide social gathering opportunities for seniors. Over the years, Barb's parents and sister joined the team long with whole army of other servants so that these quarterly events have been able to continue. They always include a meal, a musical guest or speaker as well as a message of faith and hope. And they take a moment each time they gather to remember and honor their friends who have passed since they last met. When I asked Barb why she and Todd have continued to do this, she said, "We have been blessed in so many ways by the friendship and wisdom of seniors, hearing their stories and growing in our own faith because of them. It is always amazing to witness those little acts of love-folks offering a smile and a listening ear, sharing a laugh or a word of encouragement and welcoming new friends." Now for those of you Young at Hearts who are wondering, while it still feels a little early to plan the next event, Barb and Todd are ready to go when the time is right. I wonder if there are people in your life who Christ is calling you to honor this week.

Now, about that promise. Remember I said that this is the first commandment to come with a promise attached to it. "Honor your father and your *mother so that your life will be long on the fertile land that the Lord your God is giving you.*" It is saying that if you honor your father and mother, you will live long. I don't think this is God saying, "Let's make a deal," but instead I think God is saying, if you do this for others, when you're at that age, other people are going to do it

for you because you modeled this for them when they were young. It becomes part of the fabric of all our lives.

Isaiah 46:4 says, “Even in your old age and gray hairs, I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you. I will sustain you and I will rescue you.” How does God sustain us in our old age? I believe it’s through our children and our families and others who will come alongside us in life. The fifth commandment is about honoring our parents and the elders in our midst so that we ourselves are worthy of honor.

Let us pray: God, how grateful we are to you. You are our Father, our Mother, our loving parent. Thank you for loving us enough to sacrifice everything for us. Even if our earthly parents failed us, you, O God, remain steadfast. You have loved us relentlessly. Make us mindful of the older adults in our lives that we’re meant to reach out to this week. May we honor you as we honor those in our lives who need our care and attention. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of February 28, 2021

Weekly Prayer: Jesus Christ, may I feel you near to me this day. Help me as I seek to follow you in honoring others above myself. Thank you for loving me enough to sacrifice everything for me. May I honor you as I honor those in my life who need my care and attention. Amen.
This week we are memorizing the fifth commandment: Honor your father and your mother.

Monday, March 1

Scripture: Exodus 20:12; Ephesians 6:1-4

Honor your father and your mother so that your life will be long on the fertile land that Yahweh is giving you.

As for children, obey your parents in the Lord, because it is right. The commandment Honor your father and mother is the first one with a promise attached: so that things will go well for you, and you will live for a long time in the land. As for parents, don’t provoke your children to anger, but raise them with discipline and instruction about the Lord.

Observation: The letter to the Ephesians quoted the fifth commandment as “the first one with a promise attached,” directing God’s people to respect and obey parents. It added an important qualifier, which was at least implicit in the Exodus commandment: “obey your parents in the Lord.” It also differed from Greek and Roman “household codes” in a key respect. The remarkable thing about this passage is that the children and slaves evidently have, in Paul’s eyes, what we would call ‘rights’ as well as the parents and masters.

Application: In practical, everyday terms, what does it look like when parents “don’t provoke your children to anger, but raise them with discipline and instruction about the Lord”? What factors have you seen make the difference between healthy parent/child connections, and those that cause pain on both sides of the relationship? How can you more fully honor your parents and/or your children?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I give you my allegiance above all human allegiances, even family ones. But I also ask you to help me be the most loving, caring family member I can possibly be. Amen.

Tuesday, March 2

Scripture: Matthew 21:28-32

Jesus said, "What do you think? A man had two sons. Now he came to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' "No, I don't want to,' he replied. But later he changed his mind and went. "The father said the same thing to the other son, who replied, 'Yes, sir.' But he didn't go. "Which one of these two did his father's will?" They said, "The first one." Jesus said to them, "I assure you that tax collectors and prostitutes are entering God's kingdom ahead of you. For John came to you on the righteous road, and you didn't believe him. But tax collectors and prostitutes believed him. Yet even after you saw this, you didn't change your hearts and lives and you didn't believe him.

Observations: Jesus often used parent/child examples to cast light on how God and we relate. In this story, he asked which is better: giving a parent nice words while ignoring his or her wishes, or expressing your inner resistance and then doing what the parent asked you to do? The answer seemed obvious—but it's not always simple in real life. Jesus also taught that loyalty to God was the only relationship more important than the relationship to parents (Matthew 10:37-39). In Jesus' day, people didn't just dislike tax collectors. They despised them—often rightly—as traitors who abused the poor. In Jesus' day, prostitutes were, well, prostitutes (though often, then as now, out of economic desperation). How could Jesus say prostitutes and tax collectors were entering God's Kingdom before the religious leaders? For what reasons does God prefer honest interactions to pious words about changes we don't intend to make in real life?

Application: Jesus' story contrasted a son who (insincerely) talked a good game with a son who ended up actually doing what his father asked. Which son, he asked, more authentically honored his father's will? In what areas, if any, are you aware of a need to grow toward greater authenticity in your family or spiritual life? Ask God for the courage to speak the truth in love to yourself, others and God.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, as you show me the kind of life you are calling me to lead, I want to say "yes" to your call—and I want to mean it, to live out the "yes" that I say. Amen.

Wednesday, March 3

Scripture: Psalm 71:14-18; Proverbs 17:6

But me? I will hope. Always. I will add to all your praise. My mouth will repeat your righteous acts and your saving deeds all day long. I don't even know how many of those there are! I will dwell on your mighty acts, my Lord. LORD, I will help others remember nothing but your righteous deeds. You've taught me since my youth, God, and I'm still proclaiming your wondrous deeds! So, even in my old age with gray hair, don't abandon me, God! Not until I tell generations about your mighty arm, tell all who are yet to come about your strength.

Grandchildren are the crown of the elderly, and the glory of children is their parents.

Observation: In our youth-obsessed culture, we are keenly aware of the advantages younger people tend to have in energy, ambition and drive. But God doesn't despise age. Psalm 71 named one spiritual advantage for older servants of God. Three times the psalm talks in terms of 'always' (no psalm makes more use of this word). In the past, "my praise has always been of you." In the present, "I need you to be a shelter to which I can always come." In the future, "I

will hope always.” One benefit of a longer life with God is a larger set of reasons for praise and faith.

Application: The fifth commandment specifically mentioned “father” and “mother.” Do you believe the principle behind the commandment extended to grandparents as well? Our culture delivers a steady stream of messages about the awfulness of growing older. Are there ways that signs of age lead you to think less, even subtly, of yourself or other people? In practical terms, what might it mean to honor your grandfather(s) and grandmother(s)?

Prayer: God of the ages, teach me how to honor older family members. And if I am an older family member, teach me how to guide younger family members to know and love you. Amen.

Thursday, March 4

Scripture: Matthew 15:1-9

Then Pharisees and legal experts came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, “Why are your disciples breaking the elders’ rules handed down to us? They don’t ritually purify their hands by washing before they eat.” Jesus replied, “Why do you break the command of God by keeping the rules handed down to you? For God said, *Honor your father and your mother, and the person who speaks against father or mother will certainly be put to death.* But you say, ‘If you tell your father or mother, “Everything I’m expected to contribute to you I’m giving to God as a gift,” then you don’t have to honor your father.’ So you do away with God’s Law for the sake of the rules that have been handed down to you. Hypocrites! Isaiah really knew what he was talking about when he prophesied about you, *This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far away from me. Their worship of me is empty since they teach instructions that are human rules.*”

Observation: The criticism about “unclean” hands was not about germs, but about a Jewish ritual tradition. People could cleanse their hands to remove ritual impurity contracted in the public markets. They would pour water over the hands or immerse them as far as the wrist. Jesus’ reply was to challenge another custom that provided people a loophole which allowed them to ignore the fifth commandment, a far more serious consequence than eating with ritually unwashed hands. Jewish people could vow and dedicate property to the temple.

Application: We know many early Christians faced great hostility from parents and other family members. Sometimes parents disowned them, casting them totally out of the family. Jesus knew this was likely, and spoke to it in Mark 10:29-30. He seemed to say that only a person’s commitment to God was more important than that to parents. Are there other loyalties that you sense our culture placing ahead of loyalty to honor parents? If so, what does it take to embrace Jesus’ values?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you know I like “loopholes” that let me do whatever I wish. Deliver me from the urge to look for loopholes that allow me to ignore your command to honor my parents. Amen.

Friday, March 5

Scripture: Isaiah 49:8-15; Matthew 23:37

The LORD said: At the right time, I answered you; on a day of salvation, I helped you. I have guarded you, and given you as a covenant to the people, to restore the land, and to reassign deserted properties, saying to the prisoners, “Come out,” and to those in darkness, “Show

yourselves.” Along the roads animals will graze; their pasture will be on every treeless hilltop. They won’t hunger or thirst; the burning heat and sun won’t strike them, because one who has compassion for them will lead them and will guide them by springs of water. I will turn all my mountains into roads; my highways will be built up. Look! These will come from far away. Look! These from the north and west, and these from the southland. Sing, heavens! Rejoice, earth! Break out, mountains, with a song. The LORD has comforted his people, and taken pity on those who suffer. But Zion says, “The LORD has abandoned me; my Lord has forgotten me.” Can a woman forget her nursing child, fail to pity the child of her womb? Even these may forget, but I won’t forget you.

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You who kill the prophets and stone those who were sent to you. How often I wanted to gather your people together, just as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. But you didn’t want that.”

Observation: The Bible’s use of father images to portray God is common knowledge. Many fewer people realize that the Bible also used “mothering” images to communicate the depth of God’s love for us. Isaiah said God is less likely to forget us than a mother is to forget her nursing child. Jesus compared his concern for the people of Jerusalem to that of a mother hen. (Psalm 131 was yet another example.) These images were even more striking because they came from a highly patriarchal world.

Application: It is easy to overlook one significance of the fifth commandment’s call to “honor your father and your mother.” In patriarchal societies (and at times in today’s divided families), children may want to honor one parent while ignoring or even trying to tear down the other one. How, when parents do not agree, can children still seek to creatively and honestly honor both parents, even when they may disagree with one (or both) of them?

Prayer: Lord, I praise you for being not only a God who watches over us with the strength of the best fathers, but one who loves us with the tenderness of the best mothers. Amen.

Saturday, March 6

Scripture: Psalm 68:3-5

But let the righteous be glad and celebrate before God. Let them rejoice with gladness! Sing to God! Sing praises to his name! Exalt the one who rides the clouds! The LORD is his name. Celebrate before him! Father of orphans and defender of widows is God in his holy habitation.

Observation: In ancient times, nearly all legal and financial status came from a connection to a close living male relative. “Orphans and widows” had no such links, so the phrase became a shorthand expression for all powerless or oppressed people. The psalmist extended the thought in verse 6, listing “the lonely” and “prisoners” as others about whom God cared. God, the psalmist wrote, is the uniquely reliable presence with all people, and has particular concern for the hurting and oppressed. Even those whose parents have failed or abandoned them, or who have lost their parents through disease or accident, can turn to God for the kind of dependable love the best parents provide to children.

Application: When we baptize a child at Messiah Church, God wants earthly parents to model God’s love and goodness for their child. Sadly, in the ancient world, and still today, that doesn’t always happen. When, in either a brief time of crisis or over a longer time (even a lifetime), have you needed to turn to God as your primary source of nurture and comfort? Are there ways in which God has provided you the “family” you needed? We Methodists live with the conviction

that we are God's voice, God's hands and feet, in a hurting world. In what ways can you join in God's work of caring about orphans, widows, the lonely and prisoners? Do you know anyone who may not be an "orphan" or "widow" in the concrete sense of the term, but whose life you could enrich by extending God's love and care?

Prayer: God, the psalmist said you are "Father of orphans and defender of widows." Thank you for always caring about me. Give me eyes to see others who are hurting and use me to bless them with your love and caring. Amen.