

Ten Values That Build Strong Families

HONORING MY PARENTS

Pastor Jonathan Swenson, St. Mark Lutheran Church, 22 June 2008
Based on Exodus 20:12

Katie and the kids have gotten us off to a great start, so let's just continue in that same direction by unpacking this 4th Commandment, the command to **HONOR OUR FATHER AND MOTHER**. You may or may not have realized that this commandment is the first on the list to deal with human-to-human interaction. Up till now, commandments 1-3 have all been about our relationship with God. But now, God starts a new focus on his TOP TEN... he begins to instruct us in how to live with one another. And the first relationship he addresses is the relationship between us and our parents.

It's also the first (and only) commandment with a promise written right into its verse in scripture. **Exodus 12:20 reads: (COMMAND) "Honor your father and mother, (PROMISE) ...so that you may live long in the land."**

So why is that? Why does God attach a promise to this command, and why is this relationship... of honoring our parents, so important?

I. WHY DID GOD GIVE THIS COMMANDMENT?

Well, before we even begin to answer that question, it might be good to first state the obvious. There are no perfect parents. *All of us* have weaknesses and faults and inconsistencies. Because of our sin, we all miss the mark at times. Only God is the perfect parent. So, WE ALL NEED HELP, God's help, both in honoring our parents, imperfect as they may be, and in being honorable parents ourselves. That's one of the reasons God gives us this command, to support the position and role of parenthood.

But that being said, there are a couple more reasons why God gives us this command: First, he gives us this command because **he wants us to respect all forms of authority in our life, and respect for authority begins at home**, in our relationship with our parents.

Martin Luther in his Small Catechism explained the 4th Commandment this way... "*We are to fear and love God so that we do not despise or anger our parents and others in authority, but respect, obey, love and serve them.*" (M. Luther, Explanation of the 4th Commandment, Small Catechism). And who are the "OTHERS IN AUTHORITY" that Luther is referring to? Well, Luther said that there were *three basic areas of authority in our lives*: the home, the church, and the government... and we, in our day and age might add to that list, one's school and one's place of employment. In other words, in this command, **God wants us to learn to respect all people who are in authority over us**, not just our immediate family.

The third reason God gives us this command has to do with this fact: **The way that I learn to honor and respect my parents, the way that I relate to them, will affect every other relationship that I have in life.** (How I relate to my parents will affect every other relationship in life.) In other words, the child who grows up

saying, "Nobody tells me what to do!" is going to have a hard time in school, a hard time keeping a job, and probably have a hard time with life in general because, as we all know, there are a lot of times in life when you have to do what somebody tells you to do whether you want to or not. That's just the way life works, right? So God wants us to learn to respect **all** people who are in authority over us, not just our immediate family.

Ultimately, the way that we learn to respect the authority of our parents, will reflect directly on the way that we learn to respect and honor God, as our Heavenly parent. So... the stakes are high. How we learn (or fail to learn) to honor our parents has implications for all other relationships in life, including, and most importantly, our relationship with God... So... how *do* we get it right?

II. HOW AM I TO HONOR MY PARENTS?

Well, according to scripture, it depends on what stage of life you're in. In each stage of life, you apply this commandment differently.

1. AS A CHILD, I HONOR MY PARENTS BY OBEYING AND RESPECTING THEM.

Eph 6:1: *"Children, obey your parents; this is the right thing to do because God has placed them in authority over you."*

In other words, the Bible teaches that as long as we're under our parent's roof we are supposed to obey them – willingly, pleasantly and immediately. When you're out on your own that's a different issue. But as long as they are providing for you – food, shelter, insurance, etc... as long as they are providing that for you, whether you are 5 or 25 -- and as long as you're dependent upon them, the Bible says, you are to obey them.

2. AS A YOUNG PERSON (YOUNG ADULT) I HONOR MY PARENTS BY ACCEPTING AND APPRECIATING THEM.

Proverbs 23: 12 says, *"Listen to your father who gave you your life and do not despise your mother."*

Now, that doesn't mean that I pretend they were perfect. It doesn't mean ignoring their mistakes. It doesn't mean agreeing with all that they did as parents, or agreeing with all they might ask you to do now, as an adult. It doesn't mean that. But acceptance *does* mean means that I realize that God used them to bring me into the world.

Our parents gave us a gift that no one else could give: -- they gave each of us the gift of life itself, and they have spent a good amount of their financial resources and time and energy to support us in this life they've given. Someone once said a father is someone who carries pictures in his wallet where his cash used to be! And that is pretty much true, isn't it? Our parents have sacrificed a lot for us, and so they deserve to be thanked for it by the way that we treat them, by the way

that we listen to their advice, and by the way that we forgive them for the mistakes that they may have made along the way.

- 3. And then, finally, in the last stages of life, AS AN OLDER ADULT I HONOR MY PARENTS BY AFFIRMING AND NOT ABANDONING THEM.** The sad reality in our society today is that for many parents, the older they get, the less respect and affirmation they get. So, how do we continue to affirm and not abandon our parents as they enter into their elderly years?

Prov. 3:27: *"Do not withhold good from those who deserve it, when it is in your power to act."*

And what are some practical applications of this verse? Well, obviously, if our parents are in poor health, we look after them, and make sure they are well cared for physically. If a nursing home is eventually needed we do EVERYTHING we can to make sure it is of the highest quality, and a place where they can be loved and affirmed by others as well. If possible, we take them into our own homes and care for them there, just as they cared for us when we were children.

We also affirm our parents by staying in touch with them. Every time you write a letter, or make a phone call, or send an e-mail or a card with a picture, and every time you share the details of your life with your parents, you're obeying this command, to "honor your father and mother."

Ultimately, when it comes to honoring our parents, we might translate the verse from Proverbs 3 this way: *"Do the right thing while you've got time to do it."* Affirm your parents now. All the flowers in the world at their funeral won't do them one bit of good once they have died. God says, God commands us, to HONOR OUR PARENTS **NOW**... while we have the opportunity to do so.

A WORD TO PARENTS

All right, now I want to shift gears here a little bit. And to do that, I first have to tell you that as I prepared this message, I realized I was feeling a bit convicted in some of my own parenting practices lately, and as is often the case with us preachers, I realized I was writing the second half of this sermon as much to myself as I was to any of you. But the word that kept coming to me as I was preparing this message was this: **If we want to be honored as parents, we must begin by first being honorable ourselves.**

And one of the ways that I believe we honor God and become honorable parents is by making sure our children, before they leave the nest, have learned three critically important things from us, with regards to their Christian faith.

- 1. Jesus Loves Them.** In other words, we need to teach them about the gift of GRACE that is theirs in Jesus Christ.
- 2. Jesus brings FORGIVENESS** through his death on the cross.

3. And third, that **Jesus brings (the gift of) ETERNAL LIFE** through the power of his resurrection.

It may sound rather obvious to say it, but it needs to be said from time to time, just to remind ourselves: PARENTS – **There is NOTHING more important for us to do in this life than to teach our children to know and love Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior.** Let' face it, there are a LOT of things competing with that role and responsibility... Sports, music, grades, friendships... all those things are good and they are important... but if we haven't talked to our children about Jesus Christ, we're dropping the ball, we haven't done our job as parents, and we need to start doing it now. It is the most important thing that God asks us to do as parents, because our children's eternity is at stake.

Jana and I were talking about this just yesterday, and sort of holding ourselves accountable for doing a better job than we have been doing lately in grounding our children in their faith relationship with Jesus, so that in 4 and 6 years, respectively, when our girls walk out the door to college, we will know that we have done everything we could to ground them in relationship with Jesus as they head out to a world that is going to attack that Christian faith in nearly every way possible.

And so, I told you I was feeling convicted in this as I was preparing my message, and so yesterday, and this is absolutely a true story... this is how it went down... yesterday, as I was trying to put the finishing touches on this message, my two girls were heading out for a week of camp with their cousin in Minnesota. So, just before they headed out the door, in order to make sure that I wasn't being hypocritical in my preaching this morning, I felt that I should check in with them on these matters. This is absolutely true. So, I first asked my older daughter, Christina, this question.... I said, *"Christina, if something were to happen to me while you are away, what do you think is the most important thing I will have wanted you to know about life... what is the most important thing I hope that I have passed on to you as your father?"* And she first rolled her eyes, like only a teenager can do... but then she sort of gave in and gave a great answer to the question. She said, *"You would want me to know that you love me, and that God loves me and wants me to go to heaven, so he sent Jesus."*

And I thought, *"Awesome, this is great. I am doing an EXCELLENT job as a parent. I can preach on this stuff tomorrow."* And then my younger daughter, Caitlyn, came up the steps. So, to make sure I was two for two, I asked her the same question, *"Caitlyn, what is the most important thing that you think I want you to know in this life... the most important thing that I have wanted to pass on to you as a parent?"* And what was her answer? Well, she got a big silly smile on her face and tossed out this profound and faith-filled response... she said... *"Umm... to have fun?"* And I thought to myself, *"well one out of two ain't bad! ☺"*

But then I rephrased the question, and gave her a few hints, and then she finally fumbled her way into the kind of answer I hoped she would give... and I felt a little bit better... *but my point is this:* Parents, we need to teach our children about the love of Jesus, and the forgiveness of our sins that is found only in him. That is the most honorable thing we can do.

The second thing that I believe we need to do as parents is to make sure they have heard three things from us, about our love for them, before they leave the nest. They need to hear about Jesus love, but then they need to hear three specific things about OUR love for them as well. So, what are those three things? Well, to share them with you, I'd like you to watch a video from a portion of a teaching from our Men's Fraternity curriculum, with teacher Robert Lewis. And just a word of explanation about this clip: The topic that he is speaking on in this particular session is the relationship between FATHERS AND THEIR SONS, so as you watch this clip, you'll hear a lot of FATHER AND SON references. But really, what I want you to realize as you take this in, is that what he is saying applies to all parent and child relationships... FATHERS AND MOTHERS connecting with and building into SONS AND DAUGHTERS alike. So, that being said, let's watch the video. What are the three things that every child needs to hear from their parents... let's take a look...

(MEN'S FRATERNITY VIDEO, SESSION 5)

Every child must hear three things:

- 1) I Love You**
- 2) I'm Proud of You**
- 3) Here's what you're good at...**

Parents if we get those three things right, and if we communicate them consistently and personally to our children, along with the message of Jesus Christ, we will have done our job well. I encourage you to put those ideas into action, today. Your kids and your parenting of those kids will be the better for it.

Finally today, I want to end by giving A WORD TO THOSE WITHOUT PARENTS, or WHOSE PARENTS WERE NOT HONORABLE. As I alluded to earlier, I know that *for some of you this is a very painful message.* It is easy to honor your father and mother when they are good, godly people. But some of you had parents who hurt you deeply. Your life was devastated by it. There was neglect or abandonment, or abuse or alcoholism or some other painful situation... and it hurt you deeply. And you need to know, first of all, that the Bible clearly says that God will deal righteously and fairly with people who hurt others in those ways. God WILL deal with those realities.

But what does God expect **you** to do if you had a parent who was dishonorable in any of those ways? How do you follow this commandment to "honor parents" if they were dishonorable to you? Well, first of all, realize that God is not asking you to gloss over it. He's not asking you to deny the pain. He's not asking you to repress it or to make excuses for your parents, their alcoholism their abuse, or something else. God does not want you to fake it. But he does invite you to face it, head on. And I know that is scary, but its the only way, ultimately, to get past your pain. And if that applies to you, know that any of your pastors would be happy to meet with you or to lead you to a professional Christian counselor who can help you bring healing to that part of your personal journey.

Ultimately, it may be the case that only God knows the pain you feel. But **He does know** and **He does care** and **He can help you overcome that pain**. And **He can even bring good out of it if you'll let Him**.

Scripture says, "***Your father and mother may abandon me, but the Lord will take care of me.***" Regardless of your circumstance, you have a heavenly father and He's perfect and He loves you unconditionally and He will never leave you and He will never forsake you and He wants you in His family. He wants you to know Him and He wants you to get to know Him through His son Jesus Christ. He loves you more than you will ever realize, and wants nothing more than for you to get to know Him better.

Let's close with prayer...