SESSION 6

Honor Your Parents
Showing Respect for Parents Is Obeying God and Reflecting Christ

Summary and Goal

In the Fifth Commandment, God promises life to those who honor their father and mother. We obey this Commandment by respecting the authority God has given our parents and by caring for them in their old age. Honoring our parents is also a way we reflect Jesus Christ, who is the only One to perfectly love and honor His mother and father.

Steps to Prepare

1. Read the main passages for this lesson, recording your insights and questions:
   - Deuteronomy 5:16
   - Proverbs 23:22-25
   - John 19:25-27

2. Study the Expanded Lesson Content (pp. 70-77).
   - Determine what elements of this lesson are most applicable to your particular group.
   - Consider ways to personalize the lesson content for you and your class.

3. Review the Teaching Plan (pp. 68-69).
   - Refine the lesson plan based on your group’s particular needs.
   - Adjust the plan if necessary.

4. Pray for the Lord’s guidance as you lead your group through this material.

Lesson Outline

1. Respect the authority God has given to your parents (Deut. 5:16).
2. Remember your responsibility to bring joy to those who gave you life (Prov. 23:22-25).
3. Reflect the Savior who honored His mother and father perfectly (John 19:25-27).
Introduce the Lesson
Begin the session with a discussion of contemporary movies and television shows and their portrayal of parenthood (leader p. 70; personal study p. 56).

What image comes to mind when you think of parenthood? Does it line up with a view that honors or tears down?

Summarize this lesson on the Fifth Commandment and the promise that comes with it (leader pp. 70-71; personal study p. 56).

1. Respect the authority God has given to your parents.
As you read Deuteronomy 5:16, encourage your group to look for the two things that make this Commandment stand out from the other nine. Highlight the unique features of this command (leader p. 71; personal study pp. 56-57):

- The tag (“as the Lord your God commanded you”) that refocuses our attention on God as the source of this Commandment
- The promise (“that your days may be long…”) that connects obedience and life

Use “Further Commentary” to explain the general nature of the promise (leader p. 71).

What are some of the blessings children receive when they honor and obey their parents? What are the blessings we receive as adults who honor our parents? Why do you think God chose to attach a promise to the Fifth Commandment?

Explain how our obedience to this Commandment is a way we honor God. Apply the Commandment to someone living at home under the authority of parents. Emphasize the need for heartfelt obedience, not disrespectful obedience (leader pp. 71-72; personal study p. 57).

Why are we prone to disrespect authority as children and teenagers? What are some examples of a respectful posture toward authority? What are some examples of disrespectful obedience?

Discuss the difficulty of keeping this Commandment when we are dealing with absent or abusive parents (leader pp. 72-73; personal study p. 58).
How does your relationship with your parents impact how you view God? How can we show respect to parents who do not deserve respect?

2. Remember your responsibility to bring joy to those who gave you life.
Introduce Proverbs 23:22-25 by showing how the command to honor parents does not end when we are grown up. Use *The Pursuit of Happyness* as an example of a father imparting wisdom to his son. Turn to 1 Timothy 5:8 to show the seriousness with which God takes the command to care for one’s family (leader pp. 73-74; personal study pp. 58-59).

What are some practical ways we can show respect to our parents in their old age? What do we communicate about ourselves if we are indifferent to our parents?

Discuss the responsibilities we have to our children: teach them the way of the Lord (Deut. 6:4-9); discipline them (Prov. 3:12-13; 13:24); and provide for them (Matt. 7:9-11) (leader pp. 74-75; personal study pp. 59-60):

How does the gospel impact the way we care for our parents? How does the gospel impact the way we parent our children?

3. Reflect the Savior who honored His mother and father perfectly.
Read John 19:25-27 to show how Jesus cared for His mother even as He was dying on the cross (leader p. 76; personal study pp. 60-61).

What do we learn from Christ’s love for His parents? Why is it important to see in this story that Jesus is an example of love and also the Savior who forgives our failure to love?

Apply this passage, showing (1) how Christ provides the love we’ve always longed for from our parents and (2) how our imperfections as children and parents are covered by His work on the cross (leader pp. 76-77; personal study p. 61).

What are some of your regrets in how you have treated your parents? Your children? How does the gospel apply to those regrets?

Conclusion
Connect the command to honor our parents to our mission as Christ’s followers (leader p. 77; personal study p. 61).

How is our mission impacted by the way we treat those in authority over us? In what ways is our mission hindered by our failure to care for our parents?

For Further Discussion
Do you think our culture as a whole honors and respects the elderly? Why or why not?

For Further Discussion
How does our experience of forgiveness free us from living in regret and empower us to fulfill our responsibilities as parents and/or children?

For Further Discussion
How does a Christian understanding of authority differ from that of the world?
The Bible speaks to every aspect of life—including the family. God has something to say about our relationship with our parents. After all, He is the One who chose who our parents would be, and no matter our experience with our mother and father, God’s Word speaks to us and tells us what our posture toward them should be.

Watch movies and television long enough, and you’ll notice many different depictions of parents. Some stories reflect writers’ idealistic views of parenthood. Other stories are a projection of writers’ own difficult relationships with their parents onto the characters. Think of the current television shows that claim to be about the family. Each show has a different perspective on the roles of father and mother. If we are shaped more by our media choices than by God’s Word, we are likely to have a skewed vision of our parents. And how we view our parents will often determine how we treat them.

What image comes to mind when you think of parenthood? Does it line up with a view that honors or tears down?

**Lesson Summary**
In the Fifth Commandment, God promises life to those who honor their father and mother. We obey this Commandment by respecting the authority God has given our parents and by caring for them in their old age. Honoring our parents is also a way we reflect Jesus Christ, who is the only One to perfectly love and honor His mother and father.
In this session, we will see that our parents are put in place by God to guide us and love us. Our respect for our parents demonstrates our love for them, in the same way that our reverence for our Heavenly Father demonstrates our love for Him. It is important that we recognize that God’s Word is clear as to how we should treat our parents—in a way that honors both them and the Lord.

1. Respect the authority God has given to your parents (Deut. 5:16).

16 “Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may go well with you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

The Fifth Commandment is different from the other nine for at least two reasons—it comes with both a tag and a promise. First, let’s look at the tag: “as the Lord your God commanded you.” The other commands do not refocus attention on God as the source of their authority. Of course, all 10 are from God, but in this case, extra care is given to reinforce the truth that God is the One commanding us to obey our parents.

Next, let’s look at the promise: “that your days may be long, and that it may go well with you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.” Long life and prosperity come from honoring our parents. God provides an “incentive” to obey this command. (See “Further Commentary” on how to understand the general nature of this promise.)

In the Old Testament, the punishment for disobedience or dishonoring your parents was serious. In some cases, dishonorable children were put to death for rebelling against their parents (Deut. 21:18-21). Just as disobedience led to death in the garden of Eden, disobedience to one’s parents would lead to death in the promised land. Obedience, on the other hand, would prolong life and freedom.

But long life doesn’t apply only to the people in the Old Testament. The promise attached to this Commandment is reiterated in the New Testament as well (Eph. 6:1-3). Even though we are not under the same restraints of the Old Testament law, we are assured of God’s blessing when we choose to honor our parents.

What are some of the blessings children receive when they honor and obey their parents? What are the blessings we receive as adults who honor our parents? Why do you think God chose to attach a promise to the Fifth Commandment?

Looking at this passage, we must wonder: Why did God put this command here? It must be that He knows our natural inclination to His commands will be disobedience (or at least rationalization that leads to disobedience!).

Further Commentary
The root word for “honor” in this passage is the Hebrew word kabad, which is the same word used for “glory” in the Old Testament. The fundamental idea is to give weight or make heavy. This means children should hold their parents in high esteem. The verb is in the imperative tense, which emphasizes the force of the command and indicates there is no caveat or exception to the rule. The command does not depend on how the parent responds to the child. We are to honor our parents, not because they are always worthy but out of respect to God.

Further Commentary
The Promise
“Another question that normally surfaces in discussions of the Fifth Commandment has to do with the absolute nature of the promise. Are we to expect that every obedient child will live a long life? We know that not all children who give every indication of being obedient to their parents and walk with the Lord have long lives. The answer appears to be that this law is a general rule operating out of a general principle rather than an absolute law without exceptions. Many children who honor their parents will live a long and prosperous life, in no small part because disobedience to parents often results in a life fraught with danger that may result in a shorter life than that of the obedient.”

—Mark F. Rooker
So instead of seeing this Commandment as a basic or trivial truth, we ought to see it as a fundamental, foundational way to honor God first, by placing His design above our sinful nature. In other words, we honor God by honoring our parents. Because God is the One who put this command in place, we can honor and obey God through our obedience to our parents.

But what happens later in life? As we get older and more independent, we may find it hard to believe this command still applies to us. Just what does it mean to honor our father and mother once we are no longer children?

We’ll look at God’s instructions for adults momentarily. For starters, we should note that when you are living at home, you honor God by obeying your parents. The old saying “As long as you live under my roof, you will do as I say” may sting, but that’s because there is truth to it. Those who remain under their parents’ care and authority by living at home honor God by obeying their parents. Although Scripture does not speak directly to the scenario of an adult living at home, we can still see the connection between “honor” and “obedience” in how an adult respects the rules of the house.

We should also remember that obedience with a poor attitude is not honor. There is such a thing as disrespectful obedience, and it’s not what God desires. God doesn’t just want our actions to be right but our hearts as well. If obedience were enough, then God could have drawn the line there. But the command to honor implies much more than mere obedience. It implies a respectful posture toward those who have authority over us.

Why are we prone to disrespect authority as children and teenagers? What are some examples of a respectful posture toward authority? What are some examples of disrespectful obedience?

Some of us may feel like objecting to this Commandment with “You don’t know my parents!” It’s true that no parent is perfect. Even the best of parents fail to make correct choices every time. Still, it is possible to honor our parents even when they make mistakes. The Bible does not tell us to obey our parents because they are always right, it tells us to honor them because God has commanded it.

Many Christians are discouraged by the idea of keeping this Commandment. Why? Because the failures of their parents have led them to adopt a distorted view of God. This command can be especially difficult for those who grew up without fathers or mothers who provided, protected, and cared for them.
Scripture is not silent toward those who suffer at the hands of bad parents. God knows our pain, and He desires to fill the void left by an absent or abusive parent. Psalm 27:10 says, “For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the LORD will take me in.” Good parents reflect God by comparison. Bad parents reflect God by contrast. Either way, God desires to show us all a divine love that is far greater than that of any parent, and He has demonstrated His love through the giving of His Son.

How does your relationship with your parents impact how you view God? How can we show respect to parents who do not deserve respect?

2. Remember your responsibility to bring joy to those who gave you life (Prov. 23:22-25).

The Old Testament includes proverbs that show how our obedience and honor result in our parents’ delight and joy; “A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is a sorrow to his mother” (Prov. 10:1). Our choices can bring joy or grief to our parents. Just as God delights in our obedience and is grieved by disobedience, parents delight when we obey and are grieved when we rebel. Honor brings delight. Foolishness brings heartache.

So not only are we required to respect the authority of our parents, we are also to bring joy to them in their old age. As children, we honor our parents by obeying them. As adults, we honor our parents by respecting them and treating them well.

The command to honor our father and mother does not lose its relevance when we leave home. We are to honor our parents as long as they live. This is not something we grow out of. Even when we begin families of our own, it is important that we honor our parents. But how can we honor our parents when we are grown up? The Bible shows us how in Proverbs 23:

22 Listen to your father who gave you life,
and do not despise your mother when she is old.
23 Buy truth, and do not sell it;
buy wisdom, instruction, and understanding.
24 The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice;
he who fathers a wise son will be glad in him.
25 Let your father and mother be glad;
let her who bore you rejoice.

In a perfect world, we wouldn’t need reminders to honor our parents in their old age. But because of our sinful nature, we chafe against this command because we don’t like being reminded that our significance is not self-derived. The existence of our parents reminds us that we are not self-made people. God gave us life, and He used others to do so.
Our significance is not found in our own wisdom or independence. Significance comes from who we are in Christ. This passage from Proverbs reminds us of our need to drink deeply of the wisdom that comes from previous generations. Our esteem and significance is magnified through humility and obedience, not selfishness and rebellion.

In *The Pursuit of Happyness*, a movie based on a true story, Christopher Gardner (played by Will Smith) encourages his son by imparting wisdom. He models strength and courage, and then he challenges his son to live the same way. The film gives us a contemporary example of an adult teaching a child, and a child learning from an adult.

God teaches us through the lessons we learn from our parents and grandparents. Previous generations provide wisdom that helps guide our future. Throughout the Book of Proverbs, readers are encouraged to listen to the wisdom of their parents. The writer encourages his son to apply wisdom to his life. In heeding the wisdom and instruction we receive from previous generations, we can avoid troublesome mistakes.

Later in life, we honor God by caring for our parents. Take a look at what the apostle Paul said: “But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Tim. 5:8).

The language in this verse seems harsh, doesn’t it? Paul was harsh for a reason—God is serious about the matter of caring for family. This is not just a command; it is a warning to examine our hearts to see if we are truly believers! We are to honor our parents by caring for those who once cared for us.

Jesus commanded us to love our neighbor as ourselves. If we are to treat our neighbors in a loving way, how much more accountable should we be for our families? This verse is clear that anyone who does not provide for family has, in effect, denied the Christian faith and is worse than someone who does not believe in Jesus.

What are some practical ways we can show respect to our parents in their old age? What do we communicate about ourselves if we are indifferent to our parents?

As parents, we must make sure we are reflecting God in how we treat our children. We answer to God for how we lead our families. Our kids are gifts from God, and He has given us the responsibility to bring them up in the Lord.

In Ephesians 6:4, following the restatement of the command to honor our fathers and mothers, the apostle Paul wrote that fathers should not stir up anger in their children but instead bring them up in the training of the Lord. This places a heavy emphasis on the role of parents in discipling their children.

Here are some verses that speak of a parent’s responsibility to treat children in a manner similar to how God has treated us:
Teach them the way of the Lord

Deuteronomy 6:4-9: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

The Lord teaches us through our parents, and then it becomes our responsibility to teach our children. God spoke through the Law and the Prophets but now teaches us through His Son (Heb. 1:2). It is our responsibility as parents to pass on the teachings of Christ to our children and to raise them in a way that points toward Christ as our Redeemer.

Discipline them

Proverbs 3:12-13: “For the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights. Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who gets understanding.”

Proverbs 13:24: “Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.”

Discipline is seen as a form of love, not evil. Although some view discipline as harmful, Scripture sees it as a sign of care. It is an attempt to correct in order to prevent future harm. Parents who do not discipline are seen in Scripture as disinterested in their children. They do not care to teach their children how to live but instead will leave them to their own devices. In the same way, our Heavenly Father disciplines those whom He loves in order to redirect us to the right path in life (Heb. 12:3-11).

Provide for them

Matthew 7:9-11: “Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!”

Jesus compared God’s love for us to the way we provide good gifts to our children. He spoke of prayer by appealing to a parental principle that is universally recognized—even imperfect parents give good gifts to their children. From this we recognize that parents should never intentionally harm their children but instead provide for them in a way that lovingly reflects the Father’s heart.

Voices from the Church

“Gratitude is the faithful response to the discovery that we are creatures.”
Stanley Hauerwas and Will Willimon

“The greatest tribute a boy can give to his father is to say, ‘When I grow up, I want to be just like my dad.’ It is a convicting responsibility for us fathers and grandfathers.”
Billy Graham

How does the gospel impact the way we care for our parents?
How does the gospel impact the way we parent our children?
3. Reflect the Savior who honored His mother and father perfectly (John 19:25-27).

Caring for our parents reflects the heart of Jesus. We can see the love Jesus had for His mother, especially at the cross:

25 but standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Woman, behold, your son!” 27 Then he said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.

Imagine the difficulty of living through this moment. Put yourself in the scene as you watch the child you raised suffer and die a horrifying death. Mary mourned the loss of her child, but she was not alone. In this moment of physical torment, Jesus took time to demonstrate love to His mother. He acknowledged her presence and commissioned one of His disciples to care for her.

This powerful scene depicts the close relationship Jesus had with both Mary and the disciple He loved (most likely, John). If you were going to ask someone to take care of your mother, you would probably turn to a close friend. There would need to be a solid, trusting relationship between the one making the command to care and the caretaker.

We reflect the Savior when we put the needs of others above our own. In this moment, Jesus could have been focused on His own situation as He endured the agony of the cross. But even here we see His self-giving love. He placed the needs of His mother above His own. In this event He demonstrated what honoring one’s parents looks like. Even in death, Jesus was obedient to God’s commands.

What do we learn from Christ’s love for His parents? Why is it important to see in this story that Jesus is an example of love and also the Savior who forgives our failure to love?

In Jesus, we receive the love and acceptance we have craved from our parents. Whether your parents were present or absent, you understand the deep, human longing we all have for affection. Only the love that Jesus provides is great enough to fill our need.

Too many times we see God the Father as a demanding tyrant who is never satisfied with our obedience. Always disappointed, He hovers over us with a rod of punishment. The gospel changes our view of God. Because of Jesus, we know that God loves us as His children. He sees us through His Son.
We often strive for acceptance and affection from our earthly parents. Thankfully, the love of Christ provides fulfillment that is greater and lasts longer than even the love our parents can provide. Not only that, the sacrifice of Christ covers over our own failures as parents.

The Bible is full of imperfect parents. Abraham neglected his first son in favor of Isaac. Isaac’s favoritism only helped spur on the competitive spirit between Jacob and Esau. Jacob then passed the same competitive nature on to his sons, who eventually sold their brother into slavery. Later in the story of Israel, Saul tried pitting his son against David in order to maintain his royal line. David was at war with his own son at one point, only to see his children later battling each other over the throne. All throughout Scripture, we see how God has worked through imperfect parents.

We may be imperfect parents, but because of our faith in God’s perfect Son, we are accepted anyway. In John 19, we see how Jesus loved and respected His mother even as He died for her. Because of His perfect obedience, our failures as parents and our failures as children can be forgiven. The slate can be wiped clean. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we can now honor our father and mother because of Christ, who honored His father and mother completely.

What are some of your regrets in how you have treated your parents? Your children? How does the gospel apply to those regrets?

**Conclusion**

In this session, we’ve looked at the truth that our parents are given to us by God. We honor God by honoring our parents. How does this impact our mission? In a day and age when children and teenagers are expected to rebel, we put forth a vision of adolescence that emphasizes obedience and honor. In a culture that despises the elderly, we put forth a vision of old age that emphasizes wisdom and respect.

Our mission is enhanced by how we treat those in authority over us. In honoring our parents (even when they are not deserving), we demonstrate to a watching world the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

How is our mission impacted by the way we treat those in authority over us? In what ways is our mission hindered by our failure to care for our parents?
Devotional Material

Encourage your group to read the three devotional readings included in the Personal Study Guide.

Study Material

- “The Fifth Commandment”—Chapter 5 from The Ten Commandments by Mark F. Rooker
- “Respect Authority”—Chapter 8 from Written in Stone by Philip Graham Ryken
- “The Fifth Commandment”—Article by R. C. Sproul; find a link to this article at gospelproject.com/additionalresources
- “The Fifth Commandment”—Article by Mark D. Roberts; find a link to this article at gospelproject.com/additionalresources
- Previous Biblical Illustrator articles, including “Parents’ Roles in the Ancient World,” can be purchased, along with other articles for this quarter, at www.lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator. Look for Bundles: The Gospel Project.

Sermon Podcasts

Ted Traylor: “The Power of One Family”
Darrin Patrick: “Honor”

Find links to these at gospelproject.com/additionalresources

Tip of the Week

Learning by Doing

“People learn best when learning is applied.” When a person responds to God, he discovers that truths he has learned in class help him live successfully as a Christian. Such a person comes to class motivated, ready to learn... An effectively motivating class should encourage the [group member] to respond. There is something about actually applying a truth in life, seeing our lives change, that keeps us coming back for more. As [group members] apply biblical truth to life, they are motivated to go further in their understanding of the Word of God.”

References

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