

STUDY 6 - HONOR YOUR FATHER & MOTHER

Commandment 5: 'Honor your father and mother. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the LORD your God will give you.' (Exodus 20: 12)

All societies are held together by links that run between people and between generations. This commandment concentrates on the most important of those links: the relationship between parents and children in the family.

The commandments we have looked at so far have dealt with issues of relationships between individuals. With this commandment we start to move inwards into the heart of our lives by looking at our relationship with our parents. As we move into this area we need to realize that, for many people, the topic of families is one filled with hurts, grief and guilt. Our families can be the source of some of our greatest blessings, but they can also be the source

Leaders Note:

The atmosphere needs to be one of acceptance with no condemnation or judgment. It may well be that significant issues will come up in the course of the evening that will need ongoing prayer and ministering to.

→ 1 STARTER

A) Begin with giving one or two of these scenarios to members of the group to work through in pairs -then discuss them together. Be prepared for emotional issues to be raised.

- Your friend comes to tell you of their dilemma with their sixteen-year-old son . He asked them the other night if they would mind if he had his ears pierced. Your friends aren't keen on it. What would you advise?
- A couple ask you for advice regarding a choice of possible career moves. The husband has been offered two possible jobs, one in the south and one in the northeast. The job in the south is in a nicer location with better schools while the northern job is within thirty minutes, drive of her elderly parents. His parents have both died. They ask you what you think the responsible Christian decision would be.

- Some members of the church have decided to let their seventeen-year-old daughter, a pillar of the youth group, stay at home while they go away on a conference. They have agreed that she can have a couple of friends over to watch a video on the Saturday night. You find out accidentally that the teenagers are actually planning a large party. What do you do?
- A friend is discussing the plight of his recently widowed father who has been left alone in a big, hard-to-maintain house over a hundred miles away. Your friend and his wife have a big house themselves, yet in the discussion there has been no mention of him coming to live with them. Do you suggest it?
- One of your friends has two grown-up sons who have left home and a younger teenage daughter who is still living at home. The couple became Christians a couple of years ago and have since decided they brought their first two children up too liberally and need to be a lot stricter with their daughter. You are aware that their daughter is becoming increasingly resentful, rebellious and angry about this. What do you do?
- A couple have two children. The husband's parents are extremely anxious that the children be sent to private school and are even offering to pay the fees. The couple do not want this and he is worried whether to reject such an offer would be to fail to honor his father and mother. What do you advise?

B) Have a number of volunteers say what they found hardest about honoring their parents.

C) If there are any parents present, ask them to share what they have found hardest about being parents.

→ 2 SURGERY

Discuss *at least one* of the following:

A) A recent landmark study claimed that the cost of family breakdown to the US taxpayer was a minimum of 112 Billion dollars in 2009. How would these costs arise?

Who is going to pay for them?

B) Most social welfare (care, support, etc) for people still occurs within families. Is it realistic to expect any state to be able to afford to provide an alternative?

C) You are writing a novel that features a vicious and scheming villain.

- What sort of family background would you invent for him (or her)?
- Is the common linkage of criminal behavior to a bad family background stereotyping or does it have a basis in reality?

→ 3 STUDY

This is divided into an Old and a New Testament part.

The Old Testament

A) Read Exodus 20:12.

In the world of the Bible, what would the social, economic and religious importance of the family have been? What responsibilities would parents have had towards their children?

- What would be your definition of 'honoring'? Is it the same as 'obeying or 'respecting'?
- How could you *dishonor* your parents? Give examples.
- Why do you think this commandment mentions both father *and* mother
- Israelite society was made up of families rather than individuals. Why is this case was the break-up of families so serious?
- This commandment has a blessing attached. Do you think that this is because God rewards people who honor their parents, or is it because honoring parents leads to the sort of society where long happy lives occur? If families fail, what is the implication for Israel's stay in the Promised Land?

B) Read Leviticus 20:9.

- Is the crime here merely disobedience?
- What does this suggest about the importance of the family?

C) Read Proverbs 13:24.

- What is the relationship between love and discipline.
- Should there be limits to discipline? What?

D) Read Deuteronomy 6:4-7 and then Proverbs 22:6.

- What, according to these passages, is the vital duty of parents?
- Does this apply today?

E) Read Leviticus 19:32.

- How does this broaden the commandment to honor parents?
- What is the link between reverence for God and respect to the elderly?

F) Read Ruth 1:1-18.

- What relation is Ruth to Naomi? What responsibilities does she take on?
- In what ways does Ruth act as a model for how children are to honor their parents?

The New Testament

In his disputes with the Pharisees, Jesus reinforced this commandment.

A) Read Matthew 15:1-9.

The background to this passage seems to be that a practice had arisen by which money that should have been given to parents could be dedicated to God instead. It could then be recovered later, possibly after their deaths.

- Although the Pharisees claimed the moral high ground over ritual washing, what does Jesus accuse them of?
- Why does Jesus find their refusal to honor their parents particularly immoral?
- What principle does Jesus lay down here about the relationship between religious duty and honoring our parents?

Jesus himself, however, knew only too well the problems that families can bring.

B) Read Mark 3:20-21, 31-35.

- Why does Jesus' family come to find him?
- What are their concerns? Do you find them understandable?
- Does Jesus obey them?
- What principle does his response imply?

In his teaching, Jesus warned his disciples of inevitable family tensions.

C) Read Matthew 10:32-39.

- How might following Jesus cause a problem within a family?
- Give some examples.
- What family links does Jesus warn may be severed?
- What does this passage tell us about what our ultimate priority should be?
- Does Jesus imply that giving our loyalty to him will be painless or easy?

D) Read John 19:23-27.

- List the different things that have happened to Jesus in the last few hours. What do his words in v.26 show about his priority now?
- Jesus' ministry appears to have been in spite of his mother's wishes (see Mark 3:20-21), yet now he arranges for her to be taken care of. What lessons can we draw from this for our relationships with our parents?

E) Read Ephesians 6:1-4. This passage continues on from the passage on husbands and wives that we looked at in Study 4.

- What was the promise attached to this commandment in the Old Testament? How does Paul rework it? Why do you think he changes the wording?
- What is the duty that Paul places upon children?
- What is the duty that Paul places upon parents?

Leaders Note:

The wording in some Bible versions 'obey your parent in the Lord' has allowed some people to argue that this only applies to 'spiritual' parents and not to our human parents. In fact the NLT reading 'because you belong to the Lord' appears to reflect the sense of the original more accurately.

F) Read 1 Timothy 5:1-8.

- How does Paul say we are to treat the elderly?
- What should the church do with the vulnerable widow? What role is it to adopt?
- What does Paul say that neglect of needy relatives indicates?
- On the basis of this passage, is the church politically right-wing (against handouts) or left-wing (in favor of social care)?
- Does this sound like your church? Is this sort of welfare policy either needed or feasible in today's society?

→ 4 SUMMARY

Think about how we honor our parents

- When, if ever, does this commandment expire?
- What are the limits to obedience?
- How do we honor an unworthy and unkind parent?

Think about how we *are* parents

- Is this commandment only for children or does it also have a bearing on how parenting is to be done?
- How can parents treat their children in such a way as to make the keeping of this commandment easier?
- If a husband and wife are openly contemptuous to each other, can they expect respect from their children?

Think about the wider implications

- What does this commandment say about the value of the family?
- If your own parents have died, are you now exempt from this commandment?
- Jesus passed on the responsibility for caring for his own mother to a disciple. Does this have implications for the care of those who cannot be taken care of by their own families?
- How can the church uphold the value of the family without seeming to be exclusive to those who are singles?
- The implication in the Bible seems to be that how we treat our parents is linked to how we treat God. Is this true?

Discussion

1) Some people are uneasy about the idea of God being their heavenly Father, because of the problems they have had with their earthly father. How might we deal with this?

2) What would you say to a teenager who came to you who was having a really hard time with their parents?

3) What would you say to parents who came to you who were having a really hard time with their teenage children?

So what?

At the end of this study:

- What has challenged you most?
- In what areas are you most vulnerable?
- What attitude or action do you need to change?

→ 5 STEPPING OUT

Practical suggestions

1) Find some free time when you can be undisturbed and sit down and prayerfully evaluate your relationship with your parents.

- What is there to thank God for? Have you thanked God for it? Have you expressed your gratitude in any way to your parents? If you can, why not do it now?
- What is there in your relationship with your parents that needs either forgiveness or healing? What can you do to bring about any healing?
- Are there any duties to your parents (whether they are living or dead) that remain outstanding?

2) If you are a parent, then, in a similar way, examine your relationships with your children.

- What is there to thank God for? Have you thanked God for it? Have you expressed your gratitude in any way to your children? If you can, why not do it now?
- What is there in your relationship with your children that needs either forgiveness or healing? What can you do to bring about any healing?
- Are you making time to talk with your children?
- Are there any duties or responsibilities to your children that remain outstanding?

3) In terms of your wider family, are there things that you can do to improve relationships? For example:

- When was the last family reunion you had?
- Is there some rift that you can help heal?
- Do you have isolated relatives who need visiting?

4) How can your church practically help in:

- Supporting parents in 'the most difficult job in the world' -that of bringing up children?
- Supporting young people in their responsibility to honor their parents
- Taking a lead in being family to those without a family of their own?

Further study

A) Read Proverbs 1:8,9.

- Whose moral teaching is a child to follow? What does this say about who does the teaching within a family?
- What is held out as being the reward of this parental teaching?

B) Read Luke 2:39-52.

- What does verse 41 teach us about the position of Jesus' parents toward their religious duties?
- From verses 49-51 what do we learn about Jesus' own attitude to a) God and b) his parents?
- How is Jesus' position an example to us?

Questions to think about

- How does Jesus' relationship to his heavenly Father act as a model for us to honor our parents?
- How is God's fatherly care of us a model for our own parenting?
- Today, many people becoming believers in Jesus lack any personal experience of an effective, traditional family. Yet the church can often expect them to become perfect fathers or mothers overnight. Is this realistic? What alternative responses might we suggest?

For prayer

- Pray for your own family. Pray that God would reveal to you what you can do to strengthen it.
- Pray for families that you know well. Pray specifically for good relationships within them.
- Pray that your church would be a source of support and encouragement to families.
- Pray that the national decline in the nature of family relationships would be reversed.