

Honoring Parents

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Our Savior's Way
Worshipping Sundays 8:00, 9:30, & 11:00 AM
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Today we're going to be talking about God's gift of families. And on this subject I've got some good news and some bad news. Which do you want to hear first?—the good news or the bad news? The good news is that, according to the latest statistics, in 2016 the divorce rate in America dropped for the third year in a row. It is now at the lowest level in the last 40 years (16.9 per 1,000 marriages; the highest point was in 1977—22.8 per 1,000). So, fewer divorces—that's the good news. The bad news is that in the millennial generation, a lot of people are simply not getting married. They are still having children—but without marriage. Here's the latest statistic--57%--these are parents aged 26-31. They are having children, but they're not married. What does this mean for the traditional family?—It means that the picture we have--mom and dad and the kids (where mom and dad are married to each other and the kids are their biological kids) this is the exception—not the norm. So, in this new family reality—where families are single parents, where families are blended, and maybe a few are still biological families—in this new reality, what do we do with the Fourth Commandment?—"Honor your father and your mother."

Before we get into this discussion, I think we can agree that the Fourth Commandment—"Honor your father and your mother"—is directed toward children. But I want to say a word here to parents. God says, "Honor your father and mother." Why does he say that to children? Because God invests parents with an awesome responsibility. I don't care if you are a biological parent, an adoptive parent, a single parent, a step-parents, whatever—when you stand in the role of parent you have an awesome responsibility. Did you know that, as far as God is

concerned, parents represent Him in the lives of their children? Parents, you are God's representative to your children. You may be saying to yourself, "But I didn't sign up for this. Nobody explained that to me ahead of time. So, I want to back out right now!" The thing is—you can't. God has appointed you to represent Him to your children—and you can't back out of the job.

So, let's remember, first, that God invests this kind of tremendous authority in parents. It's an authority that lasts 10, 20, 30, 40 years. Parental authority and influence can last long after the parents are dead and gone. It is very real, it is very powerful and it has been given to us by God. I remember a young college student in a hospital bed in a hospital room. This young lady was dying of cancer. She said to her mother, "Mom, you taught me how to drive, you taught me how to dress and be popular, you taught me about boys and birth control. But you have not taught me how to die. Tell me, how do I die?" As parents we want to teach our children what they need to know. And God has given us this awesome responsibility. But parents fall short. They don't have all the answers. And what parent wants to teach their child how to die?—no parent. And yet, the greatest responsibility we have as parents is to teach our children to know the Lord and lead them to Jesus. This is the responsibility of parents—to care for the souls of our children. But to children, God gives this command—"Honor your father and your mother"? Here's a short video to help us understand what it means to honor our parents.

What does it mean to honor your parents? In our childhood years this means obedience. I want you to turn to Ephesians 6:1-2—"Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother (this is the first commandment with a promise) that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth." The first way that children honor their parents. When we are young we obey them. We obey them even when it's hard, even when we disagree, even when, as teenagers, we are convinced that our parents are absolutely unreasonable and totally crazy. We obey them. I think it was Mark Twain who said, "When I was a boy of 14, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be 21, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years."

So you get to be 21, you are an adult in your own right, how do you honor your parents then? As an adult, you honor your parents by giving them respect. And let me just say I'm beginning to learn as the parent of three adult sons, "As hard as it is for our kids to navigate becoming an adult—it is even harder for parents to let go and let their children make their own decisions and suffer the consequences of their own mistakes." Here's the kind of respect that one mother wanted from her adult children—"When my children remember their childhood, I want for them only to remember that their Mother gave it her all. She worried too much, she failed at times, and she did not always get it right. But she tried her hardest to teach them about kindness, love, compassion and honesty. Even if she had to learn it from her own mistakes, she loved them enough to keep going, even when things seemed hopeless, even when life knocked her down. I want them to remember me as the Woman who always got back up." It's great when we can remember our parents that way, isn't it? Then we can give them the respect—the honor they deserve.

But as I say this, I know that there are some of you that are saying to yourself, "My parent was not a good parent. They didn't treat me right. They were harsh or they were absent or they didn't understand me." Well, everyone has two chances at a parent-child relationship. Even if you had a bad parent, you can be a good one for your kids. That reminds me of a story about something that used to happen back on the farm. Farmers would take a hen that was sitting on her eggs and they would remove the chicken eggs and put duck eggs under her. The hen didn't know the difference. There were no parenting classes on egg identification. And when the eggs hatched they hatched not chickens, but ducklings. The mother hen would go around and find them food and take care of them and she thought she was taking care of her own kids. And then one day she would come to this little pond of water (and I saw this with my own eyes once) and suddenly those little ducklings would pop into the water and swim. And the mother hen would be absolutely incredulous. She'd be having an identity crisis right there on the shore. She'd be clucking and running around and beating her wings. I knew what she was thinking, "These kids I've raised—look what they're doing!" And, you know, as a parent I can identify with that hen. I know exactly what she was feeling. In fact, I've done some clucking and

running around and beating my wings myself. I've even thought to myself, "What happened? Did somebody slip a duck egg in my nest when I wasn't looking?!" Kids grown up. They do things you don't expect. As adults they make their own decisions. And hopefully, along the way, parents and children can be open and honest with one another, can communicate with one another, and can love one and accept one another for who we are. Children can love parents and parents can love children as the people God made them to be and not for what we wish they might become. That's the way God loves us in Jesus Christ—an overwhelming measure of unconditional love and a healthy portion of forgiveness.

So, as a child you obey your parents. As a young adult you respect your parents. And then, as your parents age you begin to cherish them. You see their mortality and that they are not perfect. And you know you won't have them with you forever. And in that you get a sense of your own mortality—that you won't be around on this earth forever either. So, you cherish them because the time you have together is precious. Three years ago my Dad's younger brother died after the same heart operation my Dad had undergone. It was then I started giving my own father a hug every time I saw him. I made a conscious decision to spend more time with him and with my mother because I cherish that time. My brother and sister call them every day. My wife Sally has a reminder on her phone to call her Dad every day at 4:30 before he goes to dinner. He is 93. Your own parents may be super healthy and you may think they'll be around forever, but that's just another reminder to love them all the better now. The Fourth Commandment says, "Honor your father and mother (this is the first commandment with a promise) that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth."

Let's pray: Father in heaven, we thank You today for the good homes that many of us have had. We think, now, of those who can't say that. We ask, today, that you might heal the broken-hearted and set at liberty those who are bruised. We pray that you might fill the vacuum in the lives of those who have experienced hurt and rejection from their parents. Heavenly Father, You gave us Jesus. Help us to find in Him Your overwhelming love and forgiveness. Give those who do not know You the faith to believe. And give each of us the opportunity to honor our parents. Amen.