

# HONORING DEPENDENT PARENTS

## SUNDAY SCHOOL

### Session 1

#### The Fifth Commandment: An Overview

**Passages:** Exodus 19:1–6, 20:1–21 (20:12); Psalm 19:7–11; Matthew 15:1–9

- The Ten Commandments were given to adult children with their own children and aged parents ravaged by entire lives as slaves
- God gives his people his law as a gift to show his love for them.
- The meaning of the fifth commandment explained and applied throughout the rest of Scripture.
- In the Bible, “honor” for our parents has three parts or aspects:
  1. Respecting them by
    - a. Heeding their counsel, and
    - b. Not forgetting or despising them.
  2. Defending them by
    - a. Providing for their material and spiritual needs, and
    - b. Not exposing them to ridicule or unnecessary social censure.
  3. Encouraging them by
    - a. Thanking, praising, and imitating them, and advancing their righteous projects.
    - b. Not Cursing or mocking them.

#### Case Study #1: Rebekah, Jed, and Marla<sup>1</sup>

Rebekah is 43 years old, the only child of Marla and Jed. Marla has moderately advanced Alzheimer’s Disease and lives in a state-run nursing home across town from Rebekah. Jed still lives in the modest home in which Rebekah grew up, also in the same town where Rebekah and her family now live. Jed’s physical health is poor: he has some trouble breathing (but still smokes two packs of cigarettes a day); he has diabetes; and he spends most of his time in a wheelchair. Jed retired from his job as a truck driver five years ago and spends most of his time watching sports on TV. Recently, he has taken up gambling on sporting events. Jed seems to be able to think as clearly as ever; but his personality has changed. He had been a quiet, brooding presence before retirement. As Jed’s wife Marla lost her memory, Jed became more and more angry.

Jed’s anger is almost always aimed at Rebekah. She makes the 15-minute drive to his house two or three times a week to make sure he is OK, check to make sure the lights and water are on, and

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<sup>1</sup> This case study is discussed in detail in Davis, *Honoring Dependent Parents* (P&R, 2026), 21–29, 32–35.

leave a couple of meals in the refrigerator. Rebekah and her husband have three children (17, 12, and 2), and usually she brings one of them with her. (She knows that Jed is less likely to rant in front of his grandchildren.) Although Rebekah doesn't enjoy visiting her father, she knows that the Bible says she should "honor" him. Jed has never shown much interest in religion. Marla—who turned to Jesus early in her marriage to Jed—had taught Rebekah to love Jesus and to keep God's commandments. Rebekah also visits Marla in the nursing home, but on different days. It is draining, and she often wonders if she is doing "enough" for her.

Rebekah has only a vague idea of Jed's financial situation. Recently, as she was getting ready to leave, he handed her \$20 and said, "Use this to buy me some lottery tickets. They won't deliver them with my other groceries. Also, I need you to visit me every day. I get lonely." When Rebekah looked at him, blankly, her father said, "Your mother would want you to do these things. She taught you to 'Honor your father and mother.' And if you were serious about obeying her, you would visit *her* more often, too."

Together in groups of three or four, discuss

- Does the fifth commandment obligate Rebekah to buy the lottery tickets and visit every day?
- Does keeping the fifth commandment mean she should visit her mother more often?
- (If time allows) Describe a situation in which you would treat a dependent parent *differently* from the way you would treat one of your children.

**Homework (and for discussion next week, also in the Workbook):**

2. Monica is 81 years old. Her favorite activity since she was a little girl has been baking yummy things for her family and friends. Monica is most "alive" when she is chopping nuts, using her professional grade stand mixer, and taking delight in pulling things out of the oven. Arthritis and a wonky hip have slowed her down, but the kitchen in her new assisted living apartment is where she wants to be. Monica's children think the kitchen is too dangerous a place for their mother. They worry that she will cut, electrocute or burn herself. The children had a safety expert visit Monica, and the expert thinks the children should take Monica's knives and mixer and disable the oven. **What would you want the children to do if you were Monica?**
3. Paul is 78 years old. His wife died two years ago and he still lives by himself. His children have noticed that Paul is more forgetful than he has been and that he gets tired more quickly than he did even three months ago. Paul's children want Paul to see a doctor, but every time they bring it up Paul shuts them down. The children have considered using physical force, emotional blackmail, and outright trickery to get him to the doctor. **What would you want the children to do if you were Paul?**

*Please send questions or suggestions to Bill Davis at [bill.davis@covenant.edu](mailto:bill.davis@covenant.edu).*