

HONORING DEPENDENT PARENTS

SUNDAY SCHOOL

Session 3

Honor as Respect: Heeding (Part 2) & Defending (Part 1)

Passages: Matthew 15:1–9; Exodus 21:17; 1 Timothy 5:3–16

- What the Pharisees were teaching: that giving to the priests *instead of* providing for needy parents fulfills the fifth commandment.
- Jesus quotes the fifth commandment and Exodus 21:17 to show that the Pharisees were teaching people to *break* the fifth commandment (not keep it).
- 1 Timothy 5 is about a specific problem in Timothy’s church: providing for needy widows. The church should provide, but only if the widow is a “true widow,” which includes having no family. 1 Timothy 5:8 is especially pointed.
- Honoring includes providing, but it can happen in more than one way. (The cases will help us to see how...)

Principle #2: We honor our dependent parents by heeding (seeking out and taking seriously) what they would have advised that we do with our resources (time, energy, opportunities, reputation, property, money, relationships, and so on) if their advising powers were restored.

Case Study #3: David, Lexi, and June¹

David (50) and Lexi (52) have been married for twenty-four years. They have two teenage children and live in a modest, three-bedroom townhouse near where both David and Lexi work. The townhouse is on three levels, and the only bathroom is on the second level. David’s mother, June (78), lives across town in a small apartment, and it is clear to both David and Lexi (and June’s doctors) that it is not safe for June to live by herself any more. She is fretful and forgetful in ways that surprise David (but not June, who says it is all “in his head”). June leaves appliances running without noticing, tells the same stories within the space of ten minutes, and simply shuts down when David points out the lapses or asks if she is OK. June uses a walker for stability even at home, and David suspects that she seldom bathes because she is unsteady in the shower. June refuses to see a doctor, and when David found an advanced practice nurse who was willing to visit her, she wouldn’t answer any of the nurse’s questions.

¹ This case study is discussed in detail in Davis, *Honoring Dependent Parents* (P&R, 2026), 61–66.

June's relationship with David and Lexi's children is warm, and June dotes on her son, David. But June is persistently critical of Lexi, both when she is not around, and more bitterly to her face. It is especially difficult because Lexi is the only object of June's anger.

David has looked at places that June might live if she moved out of her apartment, but he hasn't talked to his mother about any of them because they were simply depressing. More than once, David has tried to talk to Lexi about having June move in with them, but Lexi shuts him down immediately. June has treated her terribly as long as she has known her. She owes June nothing. Even if Lexi owed June something, June couldn't move in with them because the bathroom is on the second floor of their apartment. June cannot climb stairs, so it is out of the question. David suggested that he could look for an apartment that was all on one level, but Lexi rolled her eyes and walked away.

Money is an issue. David's father divorced June almost twenty years ago after he had an affair. He hired a lawyer to guide him through the divorce, while June trusted that the truth would protect her. The truth was insufficient, and June received much less than she should have in the settlement. She was fifty-nine years old when her husband divorced her, she had never worked full-time outside the home, and the assets she could liquidate barely got her to social security eligibility. June has government assistance for her apartment, utilities, and food, and she lives simply. David and Lexi both work but not in high-paying jobs. Together, they can afford to live in a nicer apartment than June currently has. They eat out sometimes, they take their children on vacation to the beach every year, and they have nice computers and streaming services in their home.

June does not have a dementia diagnosis, and because she is unwilling to talk to doctors or nurses, she is not likely to have one any time soon. She is not safe in her own home; but she is not asking David for help. David is pretty sure that if he does nothing, his mother will hurt herself—probably by falling—and that she will end up in the hospital. He wishes his wife would help him find a way forward.

David wants help thinking through what it means to honor his mother, June:

1. Does the fifth commandment obligate Lexi to help David honor her mother-in-law even though June has never been pleasant to Lexi?
2. Does the fifth commandment obligate David to rearrange his family's finances to provide a place for June to live?
3. What steps can David take to persuade his mother to treat his wife more kindly?

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

8. Javier is 77 and has been in an assisted living facility for three years after chronic kidney and respiratory issues made it unsafe for him to live alone. When Javier moved into his assisted living apartment, his three children all lived close enough to visit regularly. One of the children would visit Javier once week, usually staying for an hour or two. It was enough. Javier did not feel abandoned, and he learned what he needed to pray for them and know that they were praying for him. His oldest son, Julian, struggled the most with visiting his dad. He sometimes cancelled at the last minute; and his visits were often awkward. Recently, the two other children moved across

the country to take jobs they needed. Julian wants to know how often Javier *needs* him to visit.

What would you want from your children if you were Javier (and why)?

9. Tatiana is 68 and in failing health. She lost her husband ten years ago, and since then has depended on her four children for money, time, and energy. Together, they help her pay for things that public assistance will not provide. They take turns driving her to her many medical appointments, cleaning her apartment, washing her clothes, and cooking her meals. They have a schedule for calling Tatiana to make sure she has taken her medications. Three of her children have children of their own. Each of Tatiana's children have complained to her that they are asked to do more than their "share" to take care of her. Each has asked her to tell the others that they need to do more and give the one complaining "a break" or "a rest" or "a life." **What would you want your children to do if you were Tatiana (and why)?**

Please send questions or suggestions to Bill Davis at bill.davis@covenant.edu.