

HONORING DEPENDENT PARENTS

SUNDAY SCHOOL

Session 5

Honor as Respect: Defending (Part 3) & Encouraging (Part 1)

Passages: Ruth 1, 4

- The book of Ruth is a historical account that highlights the consequences of honoring a dependent parent
 - Naomi is dependent: She is financially ruined, emotionally devastated, and alone
 - Ruth is a Moabitess (not an Israelite), a woman, and a widow herself
 - Ruth refuses the opportunity to cling to her tribe in order to embrace the true God and care for her mother-in-law
 - Ruth does not abandon Naomi, she heeds Naomi's advice, she provides for Naomi by gleaning, and she encourages Naomi when she is in despair
 - Ruth's faithful honoring of her mother results in God's people having a kingly grandchild (David: Ruth 4:18–21) and an even greater grandchild (Jesus: Matthew 1:5).

Case Study #5: AI Companionship Options¹

Micah (49) is sure that his mother, Lois (76), needs to move into an assisted living facility. Lois's husband, Simon, died two years ago in a car accident. The loss was a shock, and Lois has struggled since it happened. Until the last few months, Lois was able to manage on her own alone in her small, one-story home. Micah noticed the memory and coordination issues before Lois did, and he decided to do some research before talking to Lois about her situation. Money is not a problem, so Micah started visiting the nicer assisted living facilities near Lois's home.

One facility he visited was Haven. The online reviews stressed the attentiveness of the staff, the quality of the food, and "the impressive anti-loneliness options." Micah had no idea what that might mean, but he was sure he did not want Lois to be lonely. He and his family lived nearly three hours away, and his work schedule made it difficult for him to visit in person. Moving out of her home would take Lois away from her friend group in her neighborhood. How she would adjust to a new social environment was one of Micah's biggest concerns.

When Micah arrived at Haven, he was impressed. The grounds were immaculate, the place smelled clean, and everyone, including the residents, was smiling. Early in the tour, the guide took him to a hallway that showed the range of "companionship packages." Micah asked if these were what

¹ This case study is discussed in detail in Davis, *Honoring Dependent Parents* (P&R, 2026), 162–69.

the online reviewer meant by “anti-loneliness,” and the guide said, “We prefer to use the term *companionship*. We have strong empirical evidence that these packages improve physical and mental health outcomes. Residents using these services live longer, maintain their appetite, and their memory degrades more slowly.” Micah wanted all those things for his mother.

In the first room they visited, the resident, Millie, was holding a small animal. She was talking to it and stroking its fur. The animal was looking up at her with lustrous eyes, whimpering affectionately. The guide asked Millie how she was doing, and she said, “Sherman and I are having a lovely morning. Would you like to join us?” The guide declined and thanked her for letting them meet Sherman. In the hallway, the guide explained that the animal was a very lifelike robot based on a baby harp seal. Millie had been told it was a robot when she was given it. She had named it “Sherman” and always cherished it like a pet. The guide was quick to add that Millie’s health had improved steadily since she and Sherman were introduced.

A robot pet was the least expensive of the companionship packages. The next room on the hallway was the home of an older man. On his bedside table, he had a small device that looked like a fuzzy softball. After introducing Micah to the man, the guide said, “Ivan, can you show Micah how you talk to your daughter?” Ivan turned to the device and said, “Stephanie, what are you doing today?” A light on the device lit up, and a woman’s voice said, “Good morning, Dad. Today I’m making a sales presentation in Tucson.” Ivan said, “Have you been to Tucson before?” The voice said, “No, this will be an adventure.”

Micah was impressed and daunted. Could he be on-call whenever his mother wanted to talk to him? In the hallway, the guide explained that Stephanie was not on the other end of the line. The companionship package that Ivan used was set up with Stephanie’s help. She gave them a sample of her recorded speech and real-time access to her calendar and emails. When Ivan said “Stephanie,” the device used AI software to compose Stephanie’s answers from her calendar and emails. It used a voice synthesizer to make it sound like Stephanie speaking. Ivan could talk with Stephanie for hours if he wanted!

Again, Micah was impressed. He asked, “Does Ivan know that he isn’t actually talking to his daughter?” The guide said, “We leave it to the family to decide what to explain to our residents. He has never complained. Stephanie herself calls him every other week, and they pick right up like they’ve been talking every day. Occasionally, the AI makes up something to keep the conversation going. That hasn’t been a big problem, though. Ivan assumes his memory is the problem.”

The last room on the hall had the most expensive option. It was also the option with the most impressive health outcome gains. In this room, Micah was introduced to a woman, Dahlia, with moderate Alzheimer’s disease. On Dahlia’s desk was a large voice-activated video monitor. The guide asked Dahlia if they could talk to her husband. She turned to the screen and said, “Walter? Are you there?” The screen came on, and it appeared to show a video call with an older man. Dahlia beamed and said, “It is nice to see you, Walter. These people want to talk to you.” Walter introduced himself, and Micah and Walter had a short conversation about Walter’s relationship with Dahlia, his wife. Walter showed Micah pictures of a vacation Dahlia and Walter took ten years ago. Dahlia sighed contentedly as Walter talked about the vacation.

In the hallway, Micah asked how often Walter visited Dahlia. The guide said, “Walter died three years ago. The family set up this package because grief was killing their mother. They supplied us

with video footage of Walter and everything they could find from his emails, search histories, and personal documents. They gave us diaries and photo albums to scan into the system. Walter and Dahlia can spend hours remembering their life together. Because her memory is fading, Dahlia often asks the same questions that she asked the day before. Walter's answers are patient, and because the AI software is dynamic, they are never identical. The family is thrilled with how their mother is doing."

- Can Micah use any of these three packages in a way that would honor his mother in her transition to the assisted living facility?
- Could he honor his mother while concealing from her that the devices are not giving her a living pet, direct phone contact, or time with a living spouse?
- If Micah thinks he wouldn't mind if *his* children set up one of these systems when he was older, would that make it OK for him to set up one for his mother now?

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

13. Using the story of Micah and Lois, **what do you want your children to know about your wishes for contact (virtual or otherwise) if you are in Lois' situation?**
14. Edgar is 78 and has moderately advanced Alzheimer's Disease. Edgard's wife, Sally, died three years ago; but Edgar often forgets that she is dead. Edgar is a gentle person and lives with his son and daughter-in-law, Liam and Candace. Nearly every day, Edgar will ask one of his children, "Is Sally coming home today?" The first time he asked Candace, she said, "No, Edgar, Sally died three years ago." Edgar was devastated. Sally was dead! He cried for an hour and took no interest in eating for the rest of the day. By the next day, he would have again forgotten that his wife was dead. Since that first terrible reaction, Liam and Candace have been perplexed about how to answer. Should they try to change the subject? Lie and say Sally is coming? **What would you want your children to do if you were Edgar (and why)?**
15. In addition to raising your children to be responsible, Christ-like adults, **what other projects have you been pursuing that you want your children to advance when you no longer can (and how they might do it)?** Write out two or three suggestions to guide your children.

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