

HONORING DEPENDENT PARENTS

SUNDAY SCHOOL

Session 6

Honor as Encouraging (Part 2) & the Church

Passage: Acts 6:1–6; 1 Timothy 5:9–16; John 19:25–27; Galatians 6:9–10

- The office of deacon was created to address the needs of widows in the church. (The passage takes for granted that the early church agreed that the church should care for widows. The deacons were tasked with making sure the Greek widows were treated fairly in the distribution.)
- Paul's instructions to Timothy show that meeting the material and spiritual needs of "true widows" is part of the work of the church.
- Jesus sets an example for us: even as he is hanging on the cross, he makes sure that his mother is cared for.
- Looking to the church to help adult children honor their dependent parents is consistent with what the New Testament says about bearing each other's burdens.

Case Study for Encouragement: Angie's New Home¹

Angie (83) lost her husband, Joseph, three years ago. They had been married for sixty years. Together, they were faithful pillars of their small, inner-city church. Joseph had been a deacon. They tithed on their meager income and gave sacrificially to help others in need. They never had children, but Angie taught Sunday school until she was too weak to prepare the lessons. Until recently, Angie still hosted the women's Bible study on Tuesdays. If someone would drive her the eight blocks from her home, she attended every meeting at the church.

Angie's health is declining. Diabetes and chronic kidney disease leave her weak, and her eyesight is dangerously limited. Many at church are concerned. She never complains, but clearly Angie is not safe living by herself. The social worker who has been looking in on Angie has recommended more than once that Angie should get help. Neither Angie nor the church can afford to pay for in-home nursing care. The deacons at the church have done some research on local options. They visited assisted living facilities and found the expenses staggering. They visited nursing homes and found them depressing. The only nursing home that they did not rule out was a twenty-five-minute drive away from the church and Angie's home. It was a county-run facility, but the smell of the place discouraged them from asking a lot of questions.

¹ This case study is discussed in detail in Davis, *Honoring Dependent Parents* (P&R, 2026), 199–202.

Angie has no living family members. The church determined that Angie met all the requirements Paul lays out in 1 Timothy 5 as a “true widow.” Taking Paul’s instructions seriously, the church embraced the responsibility to care for Angie. They decided that “parking” her in a dreary nursing home would not honor her appropriately. Doing better than that, they thought, would take money. The church’s resources were tiny. Only half of the congregation was employed, and none of those were paid well.

To raise the money needed to secure a place for Angie in a nice assisted living facility, the church set up an online appeal for help. They had heard of amazing sums of money raised for less noble causes. Surely seeing Angie’s picture and reading about her life of service would move people.

The online appeal raised \$137.40 in three weeks.

Now what?

The deacons went back to the county-run facility. They confirmed that Angie qualified for state and federal support that would pay her expenses. They looked carefully at the small room that Angie would share with another woman. The residents looked glum. The food in the dining hall was healthy but colorless. Angie could afford it financially, but what kind of life would this be?

Before talking with Angie about what they had found, the church leaders met to take stock. They didn’t have money. Did they have other assets that they could devote to Angie’s care? Together, they made a plan. Then they explained it to Angie. She could hear their love for her, but she was still apprehensive.

Angie moved into the nursing home. Her roommate was a nearly deaf woman who slept almost all the time. The roommate didn’t mind if Angie had her television on loudly and had guests. Before Angie moved in, the church got permission to decorate the room for her. A group framed pictures of church events and hung them near her bed. They found a used laptop computer and used the GoFundMe money to set up an internet connection in the room. Angie’s former Sunday school students wrote “Welcome, Angie” cards in large letters and piled them on her dresser.

Along with preparing her room, the entire congregation signed up to take turns visiting Angie in her new place. Angie would never go two days without a visitor. On the days when no one could visit, someone would call. Quietly, some of the families figured out snacks they could bring that Angie could eat without being worried about her blood sugar or kidneys. They would bring enough for her to share with the other residents.

Most all of, the church wanted to find a way to bring worship to Angie. Angie’s health kept her from attending worship in person. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the church had purchased a camera and figured out how to livestream their services. They had discontinued the practice when the pandemic waned, but the equipment was still in a closet. Angie’s laptop and internet connection would mean she could attend virtually.

Even before Angie’s first Sunday in her new place, the deacons saw problems. What would Angie do if she couldn’t get the equipment to work? Merely viewing church by herself might be depressing. The deacons saw a way to handle both challenges. The families of the church agreed to take turns joining Angie on Sunday mornings and Wednesday nights to attend church with her. She would not be alone. They could sing the songs together and hear each other responding in unison. On communion Sundays, elders would bring their families and serve the Supper.

The church did not have money, but their loving care for Angie made her new home more than merely safe. Angie became one of the most envied residents at the nursing home. She had a steady stream of visitors. Her room was full of reminders that she was not forgotten. She had safe treats to share with others. And on Sunday morning, she and her visitors were happy to make room for others who wanted to join them for worship. To honor Angie, they didn't need money. They needed to be the church.

Homework (for discussion with your children!, also in the Workbook):

16. In light of the story about Angie: **What are you hoping the church will do to help your children honor you (or to care for you if your children cannot or will not)?** (Visiting? Praying with and for you? Including you in worship? Helping you navigate social and medical services?)
17. Suppose your children wonder they are “doing enough” to honor you or frustrated because they can't seem to do anything to make you happy. **Who do you want your children asking for help understanding you and your needs?**
18. What (truthful things) do you want said about you or highlighted at the memorial service for you after you die? Who do you want to say these things then?
19. Even after you've explained these responses to your children, it will help them honor you if they can find what you've written here. **What is your plan for making sure they can find these written responses if you cannot help them find them (be specific)?**

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