

What Do We Owe Our Parents?

Mother's Day 2020

Happy Mother's Day, everyone. I decided this week to take a short break from our Habakkuk series and do a more topical message for the day. I don't usually get to do a Mother's Day message because normally we are in God at the Movies at this time of year – all though, I was going to be doing *Little Women* today, so it's not that I'm unaware.

So I was thinking this week about what direction to go. You know, family is so diverse and the conventional wisdom on parenting is very culturally driven. I mean, if you handed both a Korean pastor and an American pastor – from the same denomination even – hand them a Bible and ask them to prepare a sermon on parenting, you'd get very different answers – as you would throughout different generations of time within the same nation.

Plus, I find that a lot of “how-to” motherhood messages actually become sort of divisive. I have a good friend who was the children's pastor at a big church and he said that Mother's Day was the easiest Sunday to get volunteers for the nursery. Because every year the pastor would just find a way to hammer working moms with guilt and they couldn't take it anymore.

And then of course, I'm sensitive to the fact that Mother's Day can be very painful for many women in light of fertility issues and so forth. Plus, the reality is, we're not all mother's, we're not all parents. Some of us will eventually be parents, but some of us will *never* be parents. But we are *all* of us children. We have *all* of us had parents. And it's been a critical relationship affecting development in all of our lives for good and for bad.

So rather than have us think down the family relationship chain about what parenting means for our kids, I want us all to think *up* at what it means for our parents. What do we owe our parents? At whatever stage of life we find ourselves? It's a tricky year for gifts and dinners and especially visits, but even still the Bible says that we owe something to our parents.

And I want us to look at it in **Ephesians 6:1–4**, perhaps, the foundational passage in all the Bible on parent-child relationships. “*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 ‘Honor your father and mother’—which is the first commandment with a promise—3 ‘that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.’ 4 Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*”

Now of course, that talks about both what children should give parents and parents should give children. And we will get into both, but primarily, I want to focus on what the Bible says children should give parents and that is *honor*. Plato himself said, “On the scale of human decencies, honor of parents is second only to piety toward god.”

Now, there is an important nuance in Paul’s text. If you look carefully, when Paul says “children”, he’s using a word that literally means non-adults, legal minors. He’s talking to *kids*. You know on one level, all of us are “children”. Everyone of us has or had a mother. No matter how old you are, you’re a “child” of somebody, even if that person has passed away. But there’s another level that Paul is addressing here in this passage and that is not talking to children in general but, in particular, to young kids. He’s talking to youngsters when he says, “Obey your parents...”

And what’s he basing that on? He’s quoting one of the Ten Commandments. Right in the middle, number five, **Exodus 20:12**, “*Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.*” Now I want you to notice the commandment itself does *not* say “obey” your father and mother. That’s not anywhere in that commandment. It says, “*Honor your father and mother...*”

And Paul is applying this general principle to this particular situation. He says **kids** have to **obey** their parents because **all** children have to **honor** their parents. Therefore, you have to be careful and make sure you look and see the distinction between the application of the principle and the principle, which we’re going to look at in a moment.

Then secondly, Paul turns to fathers or parents and he gives them a negative and a positive command. He says, “...do not provoke your children to anger, **instead**...” Now the word “instead” means if you fail to do what I’m about to positively admonish upon you, you *will* negatively provoke your children to anger. He is saying, “...do not provoke your children to anger, *but* bring them up...” with two tools: training and instruction.

Bring them up. If you don’t bring them up - and that’s what parenting is all about - you *will* exasperate. You will lead your children to anger. So what are parents to do? Bring them up. What are children to do? Honor. And that’s all I want to do this morning. I want to look at this. Let’s start with the children, because whereas only some of us in this room are parents, all of us are children, so I think that’s the most important place to start and ask ourselves...*What* does this command require? *Why* does it require it? And ... *How* can we give it? How can we obey it? The what of the command, the why of the command, and the how of the command. Let’s go.

First, *What does this command require?* What is it that this commandment actually presses on us? Let me tell you some of the things the fifth commandment does *not* command. It does not say, “*Love* your parents.” It does not say, “*Trust* your parents.” It does not say, “*Admire and enjoy* your parents.” And we’ve already mentioned it doesn’t say even, “*Obey* your parents.” Why not? Here’s why. First of all, this is a commandment. Now the Ten Commandments are *the* ten principles on which you can build an entire life, on which a whole society is supposed to be able to be built. They are *foundational* principles. They are true for everybody at all times.

And to say, “Love your parents,” in the sense of feeling affection for them would be impossible in certain situations. Why? Because some parents are evil. And it would be stupid and wrong to feel affection for an evil person. You have to love them the way you have to love an enemy – but that’s not really what they’re putting on Mother’s Day cards is it? Another thing it doesn’t actually command is to trust your parents. Why? Because some parents are unstable, and they’re not trustworthy. To trust them, in some cases, would be stupid and wrong.

It doesn’t say, “Admire your parents,” because in some cases that would be impossible without actually denying the truth. And it doesn’t say, “Obey your parents,” because the Bible wouldn’t lay that down as an eternal and absolute rule, because your relationship with your parents changes.

See, that’s the reason it doesn’t say admire or love or trust or obey, because a relationship with a parent is a very complex thing. First of all, it goes through tremendous changes.

Listen, Captain Obvious here to tell you that the way a 5-year-old relates to a parent and the way a 50-year-old relates to a parent is *tremendously* different. And the Bible tells us so. In fact it commands us to evolve in our relationship with our parents. Right before Ephesians 6 is Ephesians 5 which is the source of the lengthy series on marriage we did back in the fall. And we talked about how, in order to have a healthy marriage, you have to shift your relationship with your parents. Now your *spouse* becomes the most important person in your life instead of your mom or dad. When God *invented* marriage in **Genesis 2:24**, He said, “*That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.*”

There is a time in which you have to get out from underneath your parents’ authority. You have to leave your parents. It’s actually *bad* to stay under the authority of your parents as an adult – leads to all kinds of unhealthy pathologies. So the Bible isn’t going to say to “obey”, because sometimes you obey and sometimes you don’t. The Bible is not going to say “love”, because some parents are evil and some parents are wonderful. It’s not going to say “trust”, because some parents are trustworthy and some parents aren’t.

But the one thing it *does* say, and let's get to that...What *does* it say? It says honor. No matter who you are, no matter who your parents are, no matter what condition you are in, every child must always under all circumstances honor their parents, and you have to distinguish that from all these other things. It is extremely important to distinguish it. In many ways your mental health is riding on it. What does it mean to honor? Honor is a moral choice. Honor has nothing to do with your feelings.

I quoted Lewis Smedes last week, he says, "Honor is the **unsentimental moral nucleus** for your relationship with your parents." (*Mere Morality*, p.67) That means everything else may change. Your parents may be trustworthy people, and later on they may deteriorate. Your parents may be authoritative, and then later on you can't be under their authority as you grow up. All sorts of things change. Your relationship with your parents is constantly and totally changing, but there is a nucleus - one true thing at the center. It's unsentimental; it's a matter of a moral choice.

It has nothing to do with your feelings and conditions: "Honor is the unsentimental moral nucleus for your relationship with your parents." We're not talking about the sickly-sweet platitudes of the typical Mother's Day card, even though your mother loves those things. That's not what honor is.

Honor is a decision to treat your parents with **dignity** and with **courtesy**, and it's also a decision to provide long-term **loyalty** to their best interests. It's a decision, and again you have to make a distinction between obeying and affection and trust and even intimacy and confiding in them - all those things - and honor. You can give a person honor without all those other things, and you *must*. We have to get this because I find that adult children have a lot of trouble distinguishing these things. A lot of adult children who have manipulative, controlling, or even abusive parents say, "If I honor my parents then I'll come back under their authority, and I can't listen to them anymore. I can't let them control me anymore. If I honor them then I'll be under them."

That's not true. You don't have to listen to them. You don't have to approve them. You don't have to confide in them. You don't have to listen to what they say, and you can *still* honor them. You can still treat them with respect and dignity. You can still show them that kind of loyalty. Adolescent children make the opposite mistake. Teenagers often say, "Well, I'm obeying my parents. I've got to obey them. I'm knuckling under, but I don't have to honor them. I don't have to be courteous. I don't have to show them respect. If I'm going to obey them, that's enough. They can't punish me for being sullen and cold."

And it's true. You can't punish a child for being sullen and cold, but even there, in the same way you're missing it. It's the honor that is the most important. In fact, the obedience is supposed to flow out of the honor. You have got to make this distinction or you will have to work it out later with a therapist, because there are plenty of reasons why you can't listen to your parents once you grow up. For example, what happens if you decide to become a follower of Jesus and your parents think you're absolutely crazy?

What happens if you find your parents had very distorted understandings of relationships, and when you finally came out from underneath them and realized how pathological their guidance was, you no longer can listen to them in this way? And what you very often do, if you have those kind of parents, is you do two things. One is, in self-defense, you get very cold. You cut them off. You belittle them when you debate with them. *Or* you stay completely tied to them, completely under their thumbs.

And the Bible says you should not do either of those things. If you, as an adult, have unwise parents, you should not listen to them. You should not obey them. You should not submit to their authority, but you have to be respectful, you have to treat them with dignity, and you have to show them, as much as you possibly

can, loyalty. If you don't make that distinction, your conscience will kill you, because this is how God designed things.

If you don't make that distinction, the relationship with them will continually explode, and if you don't make that distinction, society falls apart, because frankly, it's respect for parents that is the basis for every other kind of respect and every other kind of authority. But that's really a tangent for another sermon – we've become a radically anti-authority society. But what does this command require? It commands honor. All children, of any age, and any circumstance, regardless of your parents' caliber, you must honor them.

Now secondly, *Why does this command require it?*

I'll try to be brief on this, but it's intriguing. Why would God command all children to honor their parents? And the answer is there in the text, but you kind of run right by it. There are a lot of people who say the reason children must honor their parents is somehow tied to the nature of blood: "This is my own flesh and blood. Blood is thicker than water." In many cultures, there is supposed to be an awe you feel before your own flesh and blood, and a lot of your parents will use this on you. "You came out of my body, and therefore..."

But I have to tell you, that is not a particularly biblical sentiment. Lots of cultures, lots of ethnic groups, lots of other religions put a big deal on that – it’s a big foundation of racism actually. But the Bible does not put a big emphasis on blood relations. Jesus was always kind of dissing them actually. But in the Bible *adoption* is central. God *chose* to make us His children.

Likewise, honor is a moral choice; it’s not the mystery of blood. I mean there are people who get so excited about finding their “real” father or their “real” mother or people who get very much into pedigrees and lifelines and bloodlines. That’s all a very unbiblical sentiment.

Your parents are the ones who have raised you. Your parents are the ones who - as we’re going to see in a minute - are teaching you and are bringing you up. And biblically, an adopted father, an adopted child, is *just* as much a real family bond as a “natural” or “biological” one. It’s very, very important biblically. There is no religion that puts adoption in the center like the Christian religion does, because you see, we’re all adopted spiritually. And the Bible again and again records God saying, “I love you the way I love my real Son. You’re a member of the family. I accept you in him. I don’t play favorites.” You see?

So *why* we honor matters. It’s not just a matter of flesh and blood. And another mistake, some people say, “Well, it’s because parents are wiser than children,” which we all know isn’t necessarily true. Oh yeah,

early on, but some parents are so foolish that the kids pass the parents in wisdom and knowledge somewhere around the age of 6. That’s possible, and therefore, it’s wrong just to say it’s the blood thing or it’s the pragmatic thing. No. The Scripture gives you the reason why you have to honor your father and mother. It’s right there. It says, “...*for this is right.*” Right! There is a moral order in the universe.

Look, the traditional family was an authoritarian family. The father, in many cultures, had the right to kill the children. He had *that* kind of authority. Now that’s an utterly unbiblical kind of authority. The Bible nowhere countenances that sort of thing, but that was the traditional father. And it was bad enough, but the Industrial Revolution really broke our backs on that approach, because in the Industrial Revolution, for the first time, the father left the place where the children lived in order to make money.

See, before the Industrial Revolution, the father *and* the mother *both* did economic productivity. If they were farmers, they both farmed. If they were shoemakers, they both made shoes. And so both the father and mother were *both* doing the economic production, and they were both raising the kids. But once the Industrial Revolution came, the father had to leave. And for the first time, and it’s not a biblical distinction, you have the “man’s work”, which is to go make money, and the “woman’s work”, which is to raise kids.

Now it's very clear that raising children is not mainly women's work. Otherwise, when God addresses parents and tells them how to raise their kids, he should have addressed mothers. I mean, if this was traditional focus-on-the-family America, right, he would have said, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord for this is right. Mothers, raise your children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." That's not the way God sees it. Fathers *and* mothers have an equal responsibility.

What happened during the Industrial Revolution was the father became totally alienated and remote from childrearing and nurturing, and so when you put the authoritarianism of the traditional family along with the remoteness of the Industrial father, you have fathers who are alienated from kids, wives who are tremendously embittered, and children who are embittered as well.

Listen, it's that time of year that normally you would be taking little gifts to your kid's teachers and throwing lunch parties for them at school. Why? Because they are worthy of honor. Why? Well, because they teach your children and that's a very worthy thing. Yep. Now, let me tell you why parents are worthy of honor. It's goes to the nature of their job.

Back in the marriage series – after being isolated with your spouse for two months, some of you need to go back and listen to that again! – but we said that the essence of marriage is friendship. Bottom line, among everything else, the essence of the marriage is the person you marry has to be your best friend. That's the essence of marriage, so what's the essence of *parenting*? The essence of being a parent is to be a **teacher**. The essence of being a parent is training and instruction.

The traditional idea of just authoritarian parenting: "Children are to be seen and not heard." "Children are supposed to listen to their parents because, 'I'm your flesh and blood, and that's just the order of thing...'" No. The Christian model of parenting is a parent is supposed to have enough authority to teach the child what is right and wrong, to teach the child what is valuable to do in life and what is not, and the purpose of the parents' authority is to raise them *up*, in order to get them *out* from under their authority.

The only authority the Bible recognizes is a *servant* authority, when you are committed to getting a person raised up into critical freedom, into the place where they're standing on their own. When I have that kind of attitude toward you, then what do you owe me as a pastor? You give me authority. You take me seriously – you'll actually sit there and listen to me - but you take me seriously as long as you see I'm there to raise you up, to teach you what I know – not to *control* you – but in actually to make you less and less dependent on me. That's the only kind of authority God ever really recognizes.

The whole idea of the parent is to *raise up* the child, not to keep the child dependent, but to get the child up and out, to get the child to the place where he or she can make decisions for him or herself. And therefore, the whole purpose of authority in the family is so the parents can be teachers. The whole purpose is to raise them up in “the training and in the instruction”. And I want to tell you a hard truth. A parent who has given you *bad* instruction - who has taught you the wrong things about morality and wisdom – they have actually done a better job at parenting than a parent who gave you *no* instruction. “Well, they’ll figure it out on their own.” *That* is an abdication of the office.

When a child senses - because this is the way God invented the family, to be a learning institution – that the parents really believe what they’re teaching them, the child learns to trust the parent and actually begins to grow up and become mature and eventually gets to the place where they can even, in some ways, reject many of the teachings the parents gave them. That’s ok. Mission accomplished. It’s the parents who teach the kids *nothing*, the parents who *abdicate* their office, who really destroy their kids.

The foundational study of suicide – dating back to the 1890’s - the French sociologist Émile Durkheim demonstrated that suicide was tied to social factors as well as mental health.

He identified **anomic suicide** which comes from a sense of disconnection from society and a feeling of not belonging resulting from weakened social cohesion. And he showed that young people were especially susceptible to taking their own life when they are experiencing “anomie”, which literally means lawlessness, a sense of, “I don’t really know what is right and what is wrong...” It’s better to give kids a *bad* set of instructions than *none*, because when you give them none, then the parents are abdicating their office. It’s chaos. This is the reason *why* children are supposed to honor their parents: to give their parents the platform from which to do this important job.

If fathers and mothers do not raise their children up, it provokes them to wrath. Now I know some of you watching almost for sure have been through this. If your fathers and mothers don’t raise you up, you experience anger. You become a sullen person, a bitter person, a broken person. Well, how can parents fail to raise up? Take a look at these two words in verse 4: “training and instruction.” It’s unfortunate it’s a lousy translation in this sense. The word “training” literally means “to discipline.” It means to hold someone accountable. It means to hold their feet to the fire. It means to punish. That’s a necessity.

But the word translated “instruction” is a wonderful word. It’s the word *noutheteo*, which actually means “to counsel”. And if you want to know how to exasperate your children, you do it this way. You can over-discipline. That means put *all* the emphasis on training with no instruction: all discipline, all rules, and not the personal. Or you can under-discipline, and that’s where you’re always talking to the kid, always being personal, but you never come down on them. You’re always reasoning with them, you see. “Did that make you feel good to smash daddy’s laptop?”

You can over-discipline or you can under-discipline. Or another way to put it is you can *raise* your children but not *up*. There are plenty of parents who raise their children to keep them dependent. If you do that, you’re disobeying what the Word of God says parents are supposed to do. On the other hand, there are other parents who never *raise* them; they just let them out on their own.

Some of you know what that means. Your parents were too messed up. They had too many conflicts between themselves. They had too many personal problems, and as a result, they couldn’t teach you. They couldn’t do the very thing God says all parents are supposed to do, and that is to tell your kid stories and say, “This is what I believe. This is what is right

and what is wrong. This is what is valuable. This is what is worth doing in life, and I want you to see it, too.”

If your parents were too lazy, if your parents were too undisciplined, if your parents were too troubled, if your parents were too messed up to do that, you weren’t raised up; you were basically on your own from the beginning. If you’re on your own from the beginning or you’re kept too dependent, you see, if there is over-discipline or under-discipline, if there is too much training without the instruction and too much instruction without the training, in all these ways you can fail the office and you can harm your child and put anger in that child’s life.

Now we come to the last issue. **Number three, *How do we obey the required command?*** If honor is so important, how do you give your parents honor? It’s Mother’s Day – and a lot more of you *have* mothers than *are* mothers. I want the Mother’s Day message to apply to men as much as to women. So let me close with this, what does it mean to honor your parents? *How* specifically can we do it? Here are some very important ideas and rules.

First, you honor your parents by finding the **culturally appropriate** ways. There are all sorts of ways to show your parents the courtesy. It means remembering their birthdays, it means the place of honor, it means calling them when you don't feel like it. There are just tons of ways, and I don't even know what they are in your case, because everybody comes from a different culture.

The ancient historian Herodotus tells a story about the Persian King, Darius the Great. At one point, he was trying to find out the best way to honor the dead. He'd conquered so many diverse peoples and he wanted to explore their different cultures. So he brought in the Greeks who he knew cremated their dead, and he said, "How much reward would I have to give you in order to get you to *eat* the bodies of your fathers and mothers when they died?" And the Greeks said, "No amount of money in the world would ever bring us to eat the bodies of our fathers and mothers. How could you even say such a thing? We cremate them."

Then he brought in some folk from an Indian people-group who were cannibalistic – they *ate* the bodies of their dead. That was considered respectful because their essence literally became a part of you, their life-force became one with yours and they lived through you. And Darius says to them, "How much of a reward would I have to give you to get you to *burn* the bodies of your fathers and mothers?"

And they said, "No amount of money in the world would ever bring us to burn the bodies of our fathers and mothers. How could you say such a thing? How could we dishonor our parents like that? We eat them." Which just goes to show how customs differ. Gives new meaning to having your parents over for dinner! Look, all I'm trying to say is you have to figure out what makes *your* parents feel honored. You think, "Well, the only way my parents are ever going to feel honored is if I *agree* with them." But there are all sorts of ways to honor your parents without agreeing with them.

You *can't* sit there and nod your head and agree with everything your parents say – that doesn't honor the spirit of truth - but one of the ways to show honor is *not* to argue with them over every little thing. You've got to let *some* things slide. My goodness, they're old! It's hard to be woke when you're sleepy all the time. Show them respect. Show them honor, but find all sorts of culturally appropriate ways.

Secondly, another way to honor your parents is to respect their need to **see themselves in you.** Unless you actually have kids as well as have parents, you won't quite understand this, so let me put it this way. There is a place in the Bible where it says about Jerusalem, **(Isaiah 49:18)** "...you will wear [your children] as ornaments..." What does that mean? My daughter, Anika, is a senior, so I've been doing a lot of nostalgic reflecting recently. And when she was in 5th grade, they held a reading competition at her elementary school.

And at the end, they gave out awards in the cafeteria during morning assembly to the kids who had read the most. I'm going to make up a point system, because I don't remember, but in essence they said "these kids got 1,000 points" and a dozen kids came up to the stage. And then they called out the names of those with 2,500 points, and those kids came forward. And then the principle said, "and only one person in all of Baldwin Elementary earned 5,000 points, Anika Scoma". And my daughter got up and walked the middle aisle all alone to the raucous cheers and applause of every person in that cafeteria.

Now that was an awesome moment, and I was very excited for her. But I'm going to tell you, there was something in *me* that felt honored by that. Why did I feel so good about that? Because I'm a big reader too. She got that from me. That's *my* DNA getting those applause. See, why did I feel if my daughter looks successful to the world she is telling the world what *I'm* like? And for maybe the first time in my life, I suddenly realized my heart and reputation were bound up in her, and its part of the mystery of how God created the family to operate. "This is my child in whom I am well pleased."

Now until you begin to understand that, you won't realize the need for *your* parents to see themselves in *you*. And that means, especially since in many cases

you have to disagree with them or even oppose them in certain areas, you don't realize how important it is to give them credit where you can. You don't realize how critical it is just to say, "You know, everything I really ever learned about saving money I learned from you." To say, "You know, Dad, Mom, that was one thing you always taught me that I really, really appreciated."

In fact, let me pass it on, I got that love of reading from *my* mother. Love of music too. She's the reason I'm good at talking to people. I got my level-headed, consider all angles, leadership style and my ability to keep my cool while challenging wrong-minded authority, no matter the personal cost, *that* I got from my father. I got a lot of *junk* from both of them as well, just as my kids have from me. But give honor where honor is due.

You may have the kind of relationship with your father and mother that they would just about fall over and faint if you said something like that. Why can't you? What makes you think because in some of these major issues you can't find ways to show there *is* something of them in you and to say, "This is what you're like," and "This is the good thing you gave me?" They *need* to see themselves in you. Don't be afraid to let them see it. Don't be afraid to point it out. That's a second way to honor them.

Another way to honor your parents is to not use every negative thing they ever did as a sermon illustration. Don't air their mistakes for the whole church so you feel better...especially when you know that your parents use videos of those same sermons in their Sunday School class back home. But that point is probably *too* specific to benefit most of you! So...

A third way to honor your parents is to **forgive them**, and here's a mystery. In many cases, the thing you most need to do is you have to be free from your need to please them in order to honor them. One of the reasons and this is the last but most important thing I have to say, is due to the great mystery of parenting. If you remember from the marriage series, at the end of the passage on marriage just before this one, Paul sums up his teaching with, (**Ephesians 5:32**) "*This is a **profound mystery**—but I am talking about Christ and the church.*" That marriage is but a concrete metaphor for the cosmic relationship between Christ and his bride, the church.

Well, in the same way, parenting also is a great mystery. And the gist is, the relationship between your parents and you is a **picture** of your relationship between **God the Father and you**. Put it this way: Every human being was built for family love. Do you know what family love is? Unconditional love, a love you can be absolutely sure of no matter what you've done. And I don't know that I can say "most", but in a tremendously high number of families, parents are unable to give that

to their kids. In some cases, they try, but what comes out is, "You haven't measured up. You've disappointed us. You haven't gone into the career we wanted. You haven't married the person we wanted. You're not religious enough. You're too religious."

What has happened is what you wanted more than anything else is family love, and family love is unconditional love. And you've been looking for it like crazy, and your parents, in many cases, were not able to give it to you – probably because they never got it from *their* parents - and therefore, you can't believe you're lovable, and you are driven by the need to prove yourself to them. Because they never, ever, ever can be pleased, and therefore you are angry at them and you can't forgive them.

Now here's what the secret is: The only way to really honor your parents is to be **free to displease them**, and the way to be free to displease them is to go get what you've always wanted from them **from God** and stop **blaming** your parents for not being able to be God. The Bible says the only place you can get true Fatherly love is in your true Heavenly Father. If you want to understand what Father-love is supposed to be, go look at the parable of the prodigal son again. There in Luke 15, you have a son who rebels and goes off and takes his inheritance and squanders it in wildly irresponsible living. Talk about giving his father a bad reputation.

But he hits rock bottom and he comes crawling back, and what do you see? The first thing you see is the father runs and pounces on him, and loves him. He won't even let his repentant prayer get out before he says, "Let's celebrate!" You see, the true father's love is unconditional. The Heavenly Father's love is completely unconditional. It's based not on *your* perfection; it's based on *His* perfection. And so the mark of real Father-love, is you suddenly realize for the first time, I have *nothing* to prove! Do you realize that? Nothing to prove.

The day you rest in *that* is the day your relationship with your parents will be transformed. The day that you stop letting them be god in your life, is the day you'll finally be able to forgive them and honor them, because, you see, "I've met the *real* Father and I have nothing to prove anymore to anybody. I have access to the *real* Father, and therefore, I have confidence in prayer. I know He's in charge of my life, and therefore, I'm not afraid no matter what happens to me." Is that true of you?

Until that's true of you, until you can say to your parents - not probably to their faces but until you can say in your heart - "You used to be God to me. And that's the way it's supposed to start. You stand in the place of God. You show me something about the order and authority in the universe. But the trouble is I've been looking for you to *still* be god to me...but no

longer. I am done being upset about the meanness and the lack of love in my family. I am done letting you still be an angry god I've fallen into the hands of and I'm continually experiencing your wrath. I'm going to the *real* Father, and I'm going to experience His love until I have nothing to prove to you or anybody else, and then finally I'll be free to honor you."

The reason a lot of you can't honor your parents without agreeing with them is because you're so ticked, you're so mad, at having to prove yourself to them. Until you're free from their judgment through an experience of the love of the Father, you're never going to be free to honor them. Are you to that place yet? Have you experienced the Father's love like that? Have you really seen through Christ you can belong to the Father?

"Honor your parents, for this is right." And the only way to honor your parents is to receive the unconditional family love of God. Do you hear that? Sure, I could give you a bunch of how-to parenting tips - meh, *this* is what you really need. Until you've gone to your Heavenly Father, you're going to have a lousy relationship with your earthly parents - unless your parents were those rare people, who by God's grace, really did give you essentially unconditional love. Some of you have received that, and that's wonderful. I'm glad you had, in a sense such a scar-free life, but I suggest to you that even *they* cannot really forever be a source of warmth in your life.

When Jonathan Edwards - one of my spiritual heroes – died, only one of his daughters was there with him. His wife and all the rest of his children were not there. And realizing he would not live through the night he turned to his daughter, Lucy, and give her some instruction for the rest of the family. He said first, “Give my kindest love to my dear wife, and tell her, that the uncommon union, which is so long subsisted between us, has been of such a nature, as I trust is spiritual, and therefore will continue forever...And as to my children, you are now like to be left fatherless, which I hope will be an inducement to you all, to seek a Father who will never fail you.”

You know, Jonathan Edwards was a great man, but not a perfect man and in some ways his children went further than he did. Most visibly, Edwards was a slave-holder and always had a blind-spot to the evil of that practice. But his son, Jonathan Jr., became an outspoken abolitionist. Edwards was wrong on race, but give him some credit for raising a son who could see clearer. He was a great father, and his children were strong people, and his grandchildren were strong people, and yet he had to charge them at the end: “Repent. I am not the real Father you need. I have just been a channel for the love that comes from the Heavenly Father. Now that the channel is gone, you have to go to the source.”

Listen church, some of you have had lousy parents. Some of you have had great parents. The command of the Lord is, “Seek the real Father, or you will not *really* be able to honor your parents. You’ll either hate them or you’ll idolize them. You have to be free from your need to please them so you can truly honor them. Go to the source...go to your Heavenly Father.”

And how do you get to the Father? Through the Son. Here’s what John the Disciple says about Jesus, (**John 1:12**), “*Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.*” Honor your father and your mother...this is right...but the only way to really do it is to first become the child of the ultimate parent. A father...and a mother...who will never fail you.

Let’s pray...