

Teen Lesson Seven

Honor One Another

Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you (Exodus 20:12, NRSV).

SCRIPTURE

- Exodus 20:12
- Ephesians 6:1-4
- Luke 2:41

WHAT YOU NEED

- A copy of Handout #7.1 for each student
- Honorable Mom & Honorable Dad bags (see Gettin' Goin' section)
- Bibles
- Paper
- Pencils/pens

PURPOSE

To Know: This commandment is a call to receive life as a gift.

It is a reminder of who we are and what it means to live in community.

To Value: In honoring our parents we are expressing honor to God.

To Apply: Take some time this week to meet with an elderly person in your community. Offer any assistance that you can give and then take some time to ask questions and share life stories.

WHAT'S GOING ON?

In looking at this commandment we must ask ourselves about the central audience. Who is being directly addressed? The answer seems clear; everyone in the community. This is true, but there is more. While the commandments are generally directed to all of those within the community, they are specifically spoken to the head of the households for implementation throughout the community. What does this mean? The typical application made from this text is that children need to acknowledge the place that God has given their parents. We often think that this commandment is primarily directed toward the young in our community. This commandment, however, stretches well beyond an admonition for children to listen to their parents. In fact, the adults of the community are just as responsible to this commandment as the youth. This would at first seem to be a peculiar statement for a youth curriculum, but if understood correctly, it could revolutionize the worldview of our teens. If this text is a command to honor your father and mother, but is just as much directed to adults as children, what is it saying about honor within the family structure? To answer this question we must first understand the context from which this commandment came.



The Israelites lived within a subsistence economy. This meant that everyone's survival was dependent on each person pulling his or her own weight. The community was indispensable. Men had their roles. Women had their roles. There was no such thing as a "teenager" as we understand the term today, because when children were old enough to work they were considered adults. Everyone's well being literally depended on others fulfilling their obligations to the family. In a setting like this it was easy to neglect and mistreat those that were unable to contribute to society. The elderly could easily be tossed aside since they were not contributing to the system that supported them.

In this setting the force of this commandment is understood. The fifth commandment is a call to honor and value the family system which includes all members, even those unable to contribute to the economy. The father and mother have authority over the child. They have given life to the child and are responsible for his or her well being. They are given the most serious task of all, to instruct and teach the child how to live. When the parent ages and is unable to contribute to the family, they are still to be honored and respected.

This is a wonderful picture of God's grace and vision for authentic community. The parent who takes care of the vulnerable child is in turn taken care of by that same child when he or she is vulnerable. Here we have honor in its truest sense: we acknowledge and respect those responsible for shaping our lives by bestowing to them the fruits of their labor through ours.

Our attitude toward the family system is a direct reflection of our attitude toward God. Parents are to be honored and respected. Children must value the system and community into which they have been born. Even though as we mature we cease being dependent, we must never cease to revere and honor our parents.

WHAT'S IT MEAN?

How is this relevant? If this commandment is primarily concerned with adults taking care of the elderly within their families, how does it speak to our teens? First of all, it would be a mistake to separate children's responsibilities to their parents and parent's responsibilities to the elderly. The wonder of this commandment is that it is concerned with all members of the community. Parents have a responsibility to their children to teach them how to live as God intended. Children must respect and honor their parents for they have been placed in their position by God. It is important that teens gain a sense of the full scope of this commandment.

Our society (much like ancient Israel) has a tendency to gauge value by what individuals produce. We pride ourselves in self-autonomy and often find identity in competition with others rather than in community with one another. Sadly, personal worth is often perceived according to the material things we have attained. This is dangerous. We must not fall into the trap of seeing people only for what they have and what they can do for us. The fifth commandment provides the bridge between our relationships with God to our relationships with each other. It teaches us that value and honor are relational terms and that to receive honor we must first bestow it upon those whom God has entrusted to care for us.

Life is a gift. One of the great lessons of this commandment is the simple reminder that life is a gift. It is the wonder of creation rather than mass manufacturing. One only needs to glance down at his or her belly button to realize this point. We all have been parented. We all have received life from another. Someone fed us when we were unable to feed ourselves. Someone changed our diapers and taught us about the world. It is clear that we were made to need each other. We were not designed to stand alone. When we understand and embrace life as a gift rather than a right, our natural response is gratitude. And how do we express our gratitude? Through honoring God and our parents through the gift of our lives.

What happens when the parents are not worthy of respect? There seems to be an underlying stipulation within this commandment. The child is to honor the father and mother as the father and mother honor God. The child expresses obedience to his or her parents in the same way that the parents obey God. These two actions are interconnected. But what happens when the parents are not obeying God? Are the children to continue expressing honor? Here we must look at the commandments in light of the other commandments. The first four commandments establish the type of relationship we are to have with God. The last five commandments discuss our relationships with one another. This fifth commandment is where we see most clearly how the first four commandments are lived out in relationship to one another. It is intentionally positioned as the bridge from the previous four to the next five. When we are unable to live in right relationship with God, it will have ripple effects into all other relationships and aspects of life, especially the family.

In looking at the fifth commandment in light of all the others, we first realize that honoring God is first and foremost. Parents have been given the unique privilege and responsibility to model and instruct their children into the type of life God has designed for his people and because of that they are to be honored. When they no longer model this life, however, they run the risk of forfeiting the right to receive honor. This is not to say that parents should not be obeyed or respected if they are not in line with God's desires for his people. What it does say is that God is to be honored above all and when there is a conflict of interest the child must obey God. The story in Luke 2:41 of Jesus leaving his family to spend time in the temple is a good example of this point. He was not disrespectful or abrasive. He was not intentionally going against his parent's wishes. In fact, it is not even that he wasn't honoring them. For Jesus, when the conflict of interest arose between what his heavenly father had desired and his mother, he chose to follow God. It's important to realize that this commandment is not simply to justify the family structure and prevent anarchy against the parents. This commandment is directed towards the greater good-right relationship with God and humanity. It is within the family structure that children gain their first concept of who God is and how life ought to be lived. When the parents do not fulfill this obligation, it must be filled by another.

The role of the church. Usually when a child is dedicated or baptized the pastor or priest will hold the child before the congregation and charge them with the responsibility of the child's life. Training the child is not simply left to the father and mother. The larger "Christian" family plays an integral part in the child's development. When biological parents are not doing this or when they are not actively involved with the child's life, the church must take on this role.

Interactive Lesson Guide

GETTIN' GOIN'

Divide class into two groups and give each person Handout #7.1, Top Ten Reasons to Honor Parents, and a pencil or pen. Ask each group to develop a list. Tell the students that some of the reasons can be humorous. When both groups have completed their lists, have the students share them with the class.

For a more active introduction to the lesson, divide the teams into two groups. Give one group a grocery sack filled with "Honorable Mom" items like an oven mitt, sunglasses, slippers, etc. Give the second group a sack filled with "Honorable Dad" items like a wallet, shorts, baseball cap, etc. Have each group decide what each item in the bag represents for an "honorable" Mom or Dad. Each group reports to the class by "dressing" a member of the team. For example, the "Honorable Mom" group might say the oven mitt represents the love Mom expresses by baking birthday cakes, the sunglasses represent her presence in the bleachers at a soccer game, and the slippers represent quiet nights when we sit in the family room and talk. When

both groups have finished the report, you might take a photo of each "model," paste the photo in the center of an 11x17-inch sheet of paper, then label each item and say what it represents. The posters could be displayed for a few weeks.

DIG IT

Read Exodus 20:12. Ask **Why do you think this is a commandment?** Spend some time walking the students through the history of this text. To grasp the significance of this lesson, they must first understand the context from which this command came. (See the section titled What's Going On?)

Ask **Who was the primary audience of this commandment? Say We usually see this commandment being targeted directly at the young members of a family. Ask If this command is also directed to the adults, what does that say about honor? Do you think this command is a call to honor anyone beside parents or are parents the only concern of this command? How can we express honor to the marginalized and overlooked members of our family and broader community?**

Read Ephesians 6:1-3. Ask **Why does Paul say that it is "right" to obey parents? What might be included in the promise that if parents are honored things will "go well?"**

Is there any significance to the phrase "in the Lord" in verse one? What are we to do if our parents are not "in the Lord?" Read Ephesians 6:4. Ask **What does it mean to "exasperate?" Is every disagreement I have with my parents because they have "exasperated" me?**

Ask **Are all parents worthy of honor?** This is a complicated question for many teens. Some of your students may come from broken homes or have a difficult relationship with their parents. Allot some time to discuss this issue. Keep in mind that this discussion must be handled very delicately. You might begin by reading or summarizing the material printed above, What Happens When the Parents are not Worthy of Respect? Use the story of Jesus in Luke 2:41 to talk about the relationship between obeying God and obeying parents. We are called to honor parents, but this does not mean that children must endure abusive behavior or any treatment that contradicts God's commandments.

Ask **Who are the adults in the church (besides your parents) that help you grow in a positive, healthy manner? How might you honor those people?**

TAKE OUT

Divide the class into two groups to plan a recognition dinner for the adults in the church. One group will discuss the meal time, including seating arrangement, menu, and service. The second group will plan the program to be held after the meal. Emphasize that the purpose of the dinner is to honor and thank the adults. Check the church calendar for a time when the teens can host the dinner.

In closing, ask the teens to come up with at least one way they can fulfill the fifth commandment this week. Ask **How can you express honor to your parents this week? How can you express honor to someone who is sometimes ignored?** Help the students create a simple, doable plan in response to these questions.

One option might be for the students to take some time this week to meet with an elderly person in the community. Suggest that they offer any assistance that they can give and take time to ask questions and share life stories.

Close with prayer.

Top Ten Reasons to Honor Parents

List ten reasons why children should honor their parents.

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