

Honor Your Father and Mother  
Tony Blair  
May 10, 2020 (Mother's Day)

Much of what we have learned about parenting has been from TV shows. 😊 My generation included some of the best TV parents.... The Brady Bunch, The Waltons, Little House on the Prairie, Home Improvement, Bill Cosby!... which just shows that one can play a role but not live it. But the shows of classic TV also showed more than that. There was a lot of single parenting... Diff'rent Strokes, My Three Sons, Courtship of Eddy's Father, and Family Affair... and a lot of dysfunctional parenting... Archie Bunker, Roseanne. My dad's favorite was Sanford and Son, which maybe should have been a warning. 😊 Fred Sanford was a widower who loved his grown son... but called him "dummy" all the time!

The good news is that the Bible has that same mixture of awesome parents and single parents and really screwed up parents... perhaps with a leaning toward the latter. 😊 So when it encourages us to "**honor your father and mother,**" in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, it doesn't assume that we all live in a tidy, two-parent, everyone is wonderful, perfect parenting kind of world, as some people sometimes interpret it. The people of the Bible didn't!... and neither do we. To honor our parents is as complex and challenging as it to honor anyone, or everyone... as our theme for the year suggests we do.

So let's talk a bit about honor today, and particularly the honoring that involves parental figures and children, very broadly defined. To do that, though, let's first remember what we mean by honoring. The Greek word used in the NT means to see the worth in every person... worth that is not dependent on what they've done but on the image of God in them... no matter how shiny or tarnished. And that's cool all by itself. But the word translated into English as "honor" in the Ten Commandments is Hebrew, not Greek... it's a much older word and a bit more complicated. It literally means to make weighty.

To carry honor is to carry some gravity... some recognition that you have earned some respect, that experience has given you wisdom, and that wisdom is hard won... not light and fluffy. A person of honor is heavy, in the way of the old slang phrase. Can you think of someone in your life like that? Someone you listen to? Someone you respect? Someone who gets it? Okay, hold that in mind as we explore further what it means to honor, particularly because the first encouragement I have for you today is to...

Be honored (yourself). God doesn't ask us to do what God does not do. If God wishes for us to honor everyone, then God must also honor everyone, right? And, more specifically, If God wishes for us to honor parents, then God must also honor parents, right? Yes, indeed!

Especially now, when young parents in particular are feeling "the weightiness" of their role more powerfully than usual. This quarantine has been very hard on parents. For one thing, they're stuck at home with their kids more than most have ever been. And most other activities in life have been cancelled as well. Except, perhaps, for Mom and Dad's work! Parents don't want their kids to get sick but they also don't want them to miss out on birthday parties, family gatherings, graduation, time with friends... and the kids are struggling with that. And parents are already stressed like the rest of us are, because the world has changed a lot on us all at once. And let's not talk about how many parents are also trying to

care for their own parents, many of whom are in the vulnerable ages. Yikes! So maybe it's good to know... and remember... and cherish... the realization that God honors parents. Especially now!

God even honors us when we don't do it right. Most parents, even in later life, experience a degree of guilt about our mistakes, failures, or imperfections as parents. I see a lot of young parents struggling with guilt these days and, as a pastor, I've had many conversations with older parents over the years, particularly parents whose kids are struggling a bit, wondering "what did I do wrong?" ... or having decided what they did wrong and then carrying the weight of that throughout life. What if God would want to lift that weight from us, and substitute another kind of weightiness?... the weightiness of honor? God's in the habit of doing that, you know...

***Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*** (Matt. 11:28-30 NIV). That doesn't mean that we can just flip off our responsibilities as parents. Most of us never would... we take those very seriously. But we're not perfect. In fact, most of us become parents before we're even fully grown up ourselves! Throughout most of history, it's been assumed that as soon as your bodies are old enough to reproduce, you should go at it! It's been only recently that young people have been encouraged to slow down a bit, wait a bit longer, grow up a bit more.... And it's a good trend. Even then, however, we don't get it all right. We won't. We'll mess up. We'll worry that our kids will suffer because of our messing up. Maybe so.

And God honors us anyway! It's astonishing, isn't it? God understands. God's in this with us. And God honors every good intent, every night awake, every tear cried, every regret we carry, and every resolve to try again. Each of those things creates in us a weightiness that God sees, God honors, and God acknowledges. So here's a question for you to reflect on this morning... How might God be honoring your parenting today, even if you aren't? You can stop the video for a bit if you want.

Second, in our desire to honor our fathers and mothers, let's honor all kinds of parents. The video we encouraged you to watch before the message was getting at this, and could even go beyond it. So let's suggest some kinds of parenting...

- There's biological parenting... conceiving and giving birth to children. Often this turns into raising and nurturing those children, but not always, and not always alongside the other parent.
- There's step-parenting, foster parenting, and adoptive parenting. These are people who choose to parent other people's children, which is one of the greatest sacrifices one can make, one of the greatest responsibilities one can take on, and, from what I understand, one of the greatest joys one can have. Sometimes. 😊
- There's grandparenting and great-grandparenting... which still has "parenting" in the title and often includes a lot of it. In fact, even parenting can become more involved at this stage, as young parents might turn to their own parents in ways they haven't before, to help deal with the challenges of raising kids. And many kids are raised by their grandparents, for one reason or another. I knew one man who raised a family, then his wife died and he married a younger woman and raised more kids, a generation younger, then one of them left her kids in the care of their grandparents, so at age 80 he was raising teenagers again... for the third time!

- There's mentoring, teaching, and coaching... Most of us, I hope!... have been blessed to have had someone like this in our lives somewhere along the way... someone who cared for us who didn't have to... someone who invested in our formation simply because they chose to... someone who showed us or taught us how to do life better than we would have on our own. This is one of the reasons we have a healthy children and youth ministry at Hosanna, by the way.
- There's spiritual mothering and fathering. The apostle Paul told the Corinthians, **I became your father through the gospel (I Cor. 4:15)**. I've had quite a few spiritual mothers and fathers through the years, particularly when I was younger, and I guess I've been a spiritual parent to a number of others. We receive it and we pay it forward to those who come after. These are often not our biological parents, by the way, as we're more open to this kind of input from others.

Why are there all these different kinds of parenting? Because one of the gifts God would give biological parents is removing from some the heavy weight of responsibility... of thinking that it's all up to us. And this is particularly true among Christians. Back in the 1990s politicians were fond on quoting the old African proverb that "it takes a whole village to raise a child." The truth behind it is valid... parents can't do this all on their own. They were never intended to. And for those who are in Christ, I like how someone has said it, "it takes a church to raise a parent." 😊 We're not alone... YOU are not alone. We're in this together...and the "this" isn't just a pandemic. It's all of life. So, for reflection again... Who has God put in your life as a parental figure to you, even if not a biological parent? How might God be inviting you to parent someone today, even if they're not your biological offspring?

Third, let's honor all seasons of parenting. It's different when one's children are infants than when they're elementary aged, than when they're youth, than when they're young adults, than when they're mature, than when they're parents themselves, than when they're grandparents themselves! Our role as parents changes as our children change. Or at least it should. If we're still trying to manage our children's lives when they're 50, we probably missed a signal in there somewhere that it was time to change. But let's admit that it's hard to do... how we do trust responsibility to a 17-year old... to drive a car?... to care for his/her siblings?... to manage money?... when it feels like just a couple of weeks ago that 17-year-old was an immature 11-year-old... and might be again next week? 😊

And maybe that's how we seem to God. 😊 God as parent seems to want to regard us as a parent their regards GROWN children... not necessarily interfering or saving us from our mistakes, but helping us learn from them, and guiding us in our own responsibilities as parents. Many churches treat God's people as children, but God doesn't want to do that. Jesus said it, using somewhat different language, this way: ***I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you (John 15:15 NIV)***. There is a mutuality in friendship, a respect, even a bit of equality... and it's one of the ways God honors us still... by treating us as his friends, and inviting us to do the same.

Admittedly, sometimes we're not ready for that. Paul complained to the Corinthians, ***I have fed you with milk and not with meat, for you are not yet ready for it (I Cor. 3:1-2)***. He sounds like a parent scolding an older child, doesn't he?... I'd like to give you more freedom, I'd like to treat you more like a grown-up, but you can't handle it yet. You're still acting like a child, so I'll treat you like a child. On the other hand, sometimes parents don't want their kids to grow up and are afraid of them maturing. God isn't. He wants

us to be mature... to be weighty... which is why we spent all last year talking about the seasons of faith... a whole life faith. And so God invites us into whole life parenting, where we recognize that our parenting of others changes as we grow... and they grow....and that God's parenting of us does as well. 😊 So...more questions: How might God be encouraging you to notice more keenly the change of seasons in your parenting of others? And in God's parenting of you?

Let's honor all seasons of parenting, and also honor all kinds of parenting. I'm not referring here to the kinds of parents I mentioned earlier, but to the various ways that parents parent. There are as many different ways to parent as there are people, and there's no "one size fits all" approach to this. "One size fits all" is hardly ever true! 😊 How to parent best depends a lot on the personality of the parent, but also the personality of the child, and the personality of the other parent, if there is one... often there are very different parenting styles in the same family!... and, of course, the context... particularly the culture in which one is raised. Now, don't get me wrong... there is bad parenting... I'll get to that in a minute. I'm talking about all the ways that good parents parent that are different than how other good parents parent... and honoring those various ways. 😊

My mother and father parented differently from each other, and Carol and I parent differently from each other, and we parented together differently from the way my two sisters and her two sisters did... and you know what happens when people do things differently? We judge. Most people are pretty insecure, so we feel the need to defend ourselves, or to declare that we're doing it better... which means thinking... or even telling... someone else that they're not doing it as well.

This gets trickiest when we're the kids growing up and begin to not like the way their parents parent. We did it. We see their flaws, their mistakes, their inconsistencies... and every parent has them. And we decide that they're wrong, or bad, or screwed up...and perhaps we rebel. Perhaps we determine that we will NOT be like them when we get to be parents. And maybe we're not. Some kids turn out to parent very differently than their parents, for better or worse. Or maybe we discover, eventually, that sometimes they knew what they were doing. Either way, we can honor them. We can recognize that each one was doing what they could, given who they were, given who we were, given what was going on in the world and in our lives at the time... and honor the effort, the intent, the sacrifice, the love.

But!... what if they didn't try hard? What if they didn't sacrifice? What if they didn't even love? This is harder... much harder. Some parents abuse their kids... and some of us have been on the receiving end of that. Maybe some of us have even been abusive... and carry the weight of that. What does it mean to honor parents, or even ourselves, who have dishonored that role? I don't mean here the occasional act of bad parenting that we regret and learning from; I'm talking now about those who do or have done serious injury to their children and themselves. The answer is easier said than done... and I will not minimize the pain and trauma of this, and it deserves a much longer conversation. But the answer takes us back to our teaching earlier this year... we can honor the image of God in any person, without having to pretend that their actions or even intentions have been honorable, without even having to be in relationship with them, particularly if they continue to dishonor you or others. We can honor them by seeing what God honors in them... no matter how tarnished... and agree with God on that.

My father was not a bad parent... not intentionally. But I didn't know that for a long time. About 10 years ago I went away on retreat to figure out what to do with him... I was tempted to write him a letter expressing my feelings but he was already deep into dementia and would not recover from that. He couldn't understand. He probably wouldn't have understood, even without dementia. Instead, I felt a prompting to write a letter FROM him... to me. And in that process I got inside his own mind and heart a bit... and I discovered what it was like for him. And when I was done, my anger had been replaced by compassion. That didn't excuse certain behaviors, but when I spoke at his funeral, I was able to honor him in ways I wouldn't have just a few years earlier.

So... whether they have been honorable or dishonorable in their parenting role, how is God inviting you to give honor to a parental figure in your life?

If we can honor all kinds of parenting, maybe we also honor all kinds of children. Just as parents need to express their parenting love in different ways, because of who they are, so children need to be honored for their own individuality, so each one can grow up to be who God has created them to be. This, by the way, is exactly how God parents us... God honors us as we are, treats us as individuals, each worthy of honor in our own unique path through life. This may be one of the reasons Paul encouraged the Ephesian parents to **not exasperate your children (Eph. 6:4 NIV)**. There are many ways parents exasperate their children... and some of them are well-deserved! I know. 😊 But it was common in the ancient world for fathers, in particular, to use anger and authority as the primary means of raising their children, with predictable results. We still struggle with that today sometimes, don't we?

And it was common to make all the children in a family to fit into the same mold... usually the mold established by the oldest child. I'm an older child, and I remember my youngest sister complaining about how hard it was to follow in my footsteps.... Because she wasn't me, and didn't want to have on her the same expectations that my parents had of me. And that was fair. I was an over-achiever at school and at work but was very socially awkward... whereas my sisters were much more comfortable with people and not as worried about getting straight As or winning approval all the time. We could have learned much from each other... and now in midlife can honor those different ways of doing life.

But... and this "but" is important... in honoring each child's individuality we must be careful to balance that with mutuality... to remind them, and show them, that we do live in relationship with each other, that we **MUST** live in relationship with each other. Our culture does much better with individualism than we do with mutuality... much of our public discourse is about "my rights" to do this or that... and we end up disagreeing on who has the right to do what. But we talk less about my responsibilities in relationship, much less the joys of those relationships. Even in church. 😊

I love that God brings both individualism and mutuality together in God's own self, as a trinity. There's three, but the three are one. They are individuals, but they are bound by common love. They always work together, but they work differently. They honor each other. **And as they are, so are we to be (1 John 4:17)**... this is how God intended us, made in God's own image, to live our lives with each other. This is what we parents get to model to our kids... through our relationships with our spouses, our own parents, our brothers and sisters in church, people in public, etc. So... whoever you parent, How is God inviting you to honor those you parent in a way that honors both individuality and mutuality?

Finally, one last kind of honoring... let's honor God our parent. I've been alluding all along to the fact that God parents us. And here's something cool about that that you probably already know... that God represents both the kind of behaviors traditionally associated with fathering and those traditionally associated with mothering. God is our example in both. He is the merciful, nurturing, caring, and intimate father that Jesus talked about... and all those adjectives are qualities that our culture has often associated with mothering. 😊 And we know that God is also strong, protective, directing, and providing... qualities that our culture has often associated with fathering. So, for purposes of understanding God fully, let's just appreciate that everything we associate with good parenting is something that God is, and does. And it's important that we do so, lest anyone be afraid to approach God, or think God is somehow not enough, because we mistakenly think that God acts completely out of one set of behaviors and don't recognize that God covers the whole gamut.

In fact, God is our model of parenting. **Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children (Eph 5:1).** We see this again in the trinity, and the ways the various members act differently as parents to us:

- God the father is the kind of parent who steps back and sees the big picture, and reminds us to not freak out.
- God the son is the kind of parent who steps in and gets involved in the messiness of life with us, taking on some of the heavy load. And then **prepares a place for us (John 14:3)** in the household of his parent.
- God the spirit is the kind of parent who steps ahead and shows us what direction to go...and then goes there with us, guiding us. God the spirit is actually the love, the bond, that holds us and our relationships together.

Parenting requires all three, and therefore we need to trust God to show us in any moment how God is parenting in whatever situation we're in... or how we might follow God's example in how we're parenting in whatever situation we're in. So.. In which way of parenting is God showing up for you now? How are you invited to follow God's own example?

Well, I've given you a lot of reflection questions along the way, so I want to close simply by honoring you... as parents of one sort or another, as children of parents, as children of God... who loves you and honors you too. The video we posted had its own prayer, but you might also find this one also helpful. I'm not only praying it over you here, but also posting it to the webpage with the message, in case you'd like to download it and hold onto it, or to pass it along... maybe to a parent of any kind who's struggling a bit right now... as a blessing of your own. 😊

### **A Prayer of Blessing for All Kinds of Parents Everywhere**

Dear God,

Bless every parent with the finest of your spiritual blessings today. Honor each one daily so they have no reason to doubt whether they are loved, valued, and cherished in your own eyes. Create in them a deep sense of your protection and trust, so that worry and fear will disappear as they place their loved ones

into your care. Whisper deep within their spirit the words they long to hear from You—that nothing can ever separate them from your love.

Remove any guilt, false or real, and replace them with Your amazing grace. Calm every doubt, and strengthen their confidence in the One who can bring good out of any situation. Teach them that they cannot meet every need of a child's life, but that you can. Help them to acknowledge their inadequacies, yet recognize and accept Your sense of pleasure in having them as your own beloved children.

Where prayers may still seem unanswered, and dreams are not yet realized, open their eyes to see beyond this world to a hope that never disappoints, and to a God who will never leave or abandon them. Give them courage to persevere even in the most difficult moments of their lives.

In Jesus' name,  
Amen

--adapted from "A Prayer of Blessing for Mothers & Grandmothers" by Rebecca Barlow Jordan  
([www.rebeccabarlowjordan.com](http://www.rebeccabarlowjordan.com))