

The Christian Home, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 9: Honor Your Father and Mother: Children, Parents, and Aging Parents

Ephesians 6:1–3; 1 Timothy 5:3–8

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Ephesians 6:1–3 and 1 Timothy 5:3–8 together trace the fifth commandment across an entire lifetime, and the teacher should help students see both its breadth and its seriousness. The doctrinal core has several strands. First, Scripture distinguishes obedience, which belongs to childhood and ends with maturity, from honor, which never expires; a grown adult is no longer obligated to obey a parent, but is always obligated to honor. Second, this honor is grounded not in sentiment but in God's own command, the first of the Ten with a promise attached, signaling its centrality to human flourishing. Third, the qualifier 'in the Lord' establishes that obedience to parents operates under obedience to God; a child is never bound to follow a parent into sin. Fourth, honoring parents matures, in adulthood, into the concrete duty of caring for aging parents, which Paul calls 'godliness' and which he treats with grave seriousness in verse 8.

The teacher should give particular weight, and particular care, to 1 Timothy 5:8, where Paul says that failing to provide for one's own household is a denial of the faith. This is a strong word, and it teaches that genuine faith expresses itself in the practical care of family, not merely in religious profession. At the same time, the teacher must handle the whole subject with pastoral sensitivity, because parents are imperfect and some are worse than imperfect. Honor does not require pretending a parent's sins away, nor does it require submitting to abuse or following a parent into wrongdoing; 'in the Lord' and the believer's higher allegiance to God set real limits. The teacher should help students hold the genuine, lifelong obligation of honor together with the truth that honor can take wise and varied forms, especially where a relationship is painful or a parent is dangerous, and should be ready to point toward godly counsel in hard cases.

This lesson forms the disciple by pressing faith into one of its most practical and revealing arenas: how we treat the people who gave us life. It calls children to glad obedience, adults to recover an honor that may have cooled, and grown sons and daughters to take up the often costly care of aging parents as an act of godliness pleasing to God. It exposes the gap between professed faith and neglected family, and it dignifies the unglamorous, exhausting work of caring for the elderly as something God notices and rewards. The example of the Lord Jesus, who from the cross saw to His mother's care, stands over the whole lesson. The disciple being formed here is someone whose faith reaches all the way home, honoring father and mother from the nursery to the nursing home.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul writes, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother’ (this is the first commandment with a promise)” (Ephesians 6:1–2). Why does Paul call obeying parents simply ‘right,’ and what weight does it add that he grounds it in one of the Ten Commandments, the first one that comes with a promise?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul gives children two grounds for obeying their parents, and both are worth drawing out. First, ‘for this is right.’ Obedience to parents is not merely useful or culturally expected; it is morally right, woven into the created order. A child rightly ordered toward parents is learning, in the safest of settings, the larger lesson of glad submission to legitimate authority, and ultimately to God. Second, Paul anchors it in the Decalogue: ‘Honor your father and mother.’ He lifts a child’s daily obedience out of the realm of mere house rules and roots it in the eternal moral law of God.

Note the weight Paul adds by calling this ‘the first commandment with a promise.’ The fifth commandment is the hinge of the Ten, the first that turns from our duty toward God (commandments one through four) to our duties toward one another (five through ten). And it is the first to carry an explicit promise of blessing. By citing it, Paul tells Christian children that honoring their parents is not a small or optional matter but stands near the center of God’s moral will.

Help students feel how counter-cultural this is. A society that prizes self-expression and suspects all authority finds the call to obey and honor parents quaint at best. Scripture treats it as foundational. The teacher can observe that the family is the first school of character, where a person first learns whether the world revolves around self or whether there is a rightful authority to honor. Get this wrong at home, and it tends to go wrong everywhere.

For children present in the study, this is a direct and tender word: obeying and honoring your parents is right, it pleases God, and it is one of the first ways you learn to love and obey God Himself. For adults, it sets up the larger arc the lesson will trace, from obedience to lifelong honor.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Obedience to parents as morally ‘right,’ woven into the created order
- Children learning submission to authority, and ultimately to God, in the home
- Obedience grounded in the Decalogue, not mere house rules
- The fifth commandment as the hinge of the Ten and the first with a promise
- The family as the first school of character

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Paul call obeying parents simply ‘right’?
- What weight does it add that he grounds it in the Ten Commandments?

- How is the home the first place we learn to honor authority and God?

Question 2

Student Question:

Whether your parents are living or gone, God's command to honor them remains. If they are living, how well do you actually honor them in your words, your attention, and your respect? If they have passed, how do you honor their memory and the good they gave you? Where is there room to grow in honoring them?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-application makes the command personal across every stage of life, since everyone has a father and mother, whether living or gone. The question deliberately includes both situations, so that no one is left out and no one imagines the command no longer applies to them.

For those whose parents are living, press gently on the concrete arenas the question names: words (do I speak to and about them with respect?), attention (do I give them my time, or only my leftovers?), and respect (do I treat them as honored, or as a burden?). Many adults are surprised to realize how little honor actually marks their interactions with parents they nonetheless love.

For those whose parents have died, honor takes the form of grateful memory, speaking well of them, passing on the good they gave, and living in a way that would not shame their name. Even a difficult parent usually gave something worth honoring, if only life itself. The teacher should make space for those grieving and those for whom the relationship was hard, without forcing a sentimental gloss.

Move toward one area of growth. The aim is not guilt but a single honest step: a call made, a word of gratitude spoken, a habit of criticism laid down, a good memory honored. Invite each student to name one specific way to grow in honoring their parents this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The command applying at every stage, with parents living or gone
- Honoring living parents in words, attention, and respect
- Honoring deceased parents through grateful memory and a worthy life
- Space for grief and for difficult relationships, without forced sentiment

Discussion Prompts

- How well do you honor your parents in words, attention, and respect?
- If they have passed, how do you honor their memory and their gifts?
- What is one way to grow in honoring them this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul tells children to obey 'in the Lord,' and he commands honor without any expiration date. What is the difference between the obedience that belongs to childhood and the honor that lasts a lifetime, and what does the phrase 'in the Lord' teach about the one limit on a child's obedience to a parent?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question draws out a distinction that resolves much confusion: the difference between obedience and honor. Obedience, 'children, obey your parents,' belongs to the season of childhood, when a son or daughter is under the parents' authority and care. It is appropriate that this obedience comes to an end as the child matures, marries, and establishes a household of their own (recall the 'leaving' of Lesson 1). A forty-year-old is not obligated to obey a parent as a ten-year-old is.

Honor, by contrast, has no expiration date. 'Honor your father and mother' is commanded to all people of all ages. The grown child no longer obeys but never stops honoring. This honor matures in form: from the obedience of a dependent child to the respect, gratitude, consideration, and care of an adult son or daughter. Failing to grasp this distinction leads to two errors, the adult who thinks honor ended when obedience did, and the parent who expects obedience long after the child has rightly grown up.

The phrase 'in the Lord' supplies the crucial limit on obedience. A child obeys parents 'in the Lord,' that is, within the bounds of obedience to God. Where a parent commands what God forbids, or forbids what God commands, the child's higher allegiance to God governs. This protects children from being bound to follow a parent into sin and, importantly, means the command to honor never requires participating in evil. Honor and obedience both operate under the lordship of Christ.

The teacher should hold these together carefully. The limit 'in the Lord' is not a loophole for rebellious self-will; the default posture toward parents is glad obedience (in childhood) and genuine honor (always). But it is a real limit, and it matters greatly for those with ungodly or abusive parents, whom Question 9 will address more fully.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Obedience belonging to childhood; honor lasting a lifetime
- Obedience rightly ending as the child matures and leaves
- Honor maturing in form from a child's obedience to an adult's respect and care
- 'In the Lord' as the limit: obedience to parents under obedience to God
- The limit as a genuine boundary, not a loophole for self-will

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between childhood obedience and lifelong honor?
- How does the form of honor change as a child becomes an adult?
- What does 'in the Lord' teach about the one limit on a child's obedience?

Question 4

Student Question:

Many of us obeyed our parents as children but quietly stopped honoring them as we became adults, letting respect cool into criticism, distance, or neglect. As an adult, where has your honor for your parents faded? What would it look like to honor them well now, as a grown son or daughter, even where your relationship is complicated?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-application targets a common and quiet failure: the adult who obeyed as a child but stopped honoring as a grown-up. As we gain independence, it is easy to let respect curdle into criticism (cataloging a parent's faults), into distance (rare calls, perfunctory visits), or into neglect (treating parents as an obligation rather than a gift). The command to honor presses against all three.

Help adults examine where honor has faded. Often it shows in tone, the impatience or condescension that creeps into how we speak to aging parents; in priorities, the way parents fall to the bottom of a busy schedule; or in the heart, the lingering resentments we nurse over old wounds. The question invites honest naming without either excusing real grievances or wallowing in them.

Address the 'complicated' relationships directly, since the question raises them. Honoring a parent with whom one has a strained or painful history does not require pretending the pain away, restoring trust that was never earned, or exposing oneself to ongoing harm. But it does call for honor in some form, perhaps courteous respect, freedom from bitterness, prayer for them, refusal to speak contemptuously, even where warmth is not yet possible. Invite each adult to name one concrete way to honor a parent now, suited to their actual relationship.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Honor cooling into criticism, distance, or neglect in adulthood
- Honor fading in tone, in priorities, and in the heart
- Honoring complicated relationships without pretending pain away
- Honor in some form even where warmth is not yet possible

Discussion Prompts

- As an adult, where has your honor for your parents faded?
- What does honoring a parent look like in a complicated relationship?
- What is one concrete way to honor a parent now?

Question 5

Student Question:

The fifth commandment is, as Paul notes, ‘the first commandment with a promise,’ ‘that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land’ (Ephesians 6:2–3). Why do you think God attached a promise of blessing to this particular command, and what does it suggest about how central the honoring of parents is to a healthy life and a healthy society?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Paul highlights what was already remarkable in Exodus: this is ‘the first commandment with a promise,’ ‘that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.’ The teacher should help students think about why God would attach such a promise to this particular command, of all the ten.

One answer lies in the social fabric. The honoring of parents is the thread from which the whole tapestry of a stable society is woven. A people who honor their parents learn to honor authority, to value the wisdom of the past, to care for the weak and the old, and to pass on what they have received. A people who despise their parents unravel: authority collapses, the elderly are discarded, tradition is scorned, and each generation starts from scratch in contempt of the last. The promise ‘that it may go well’ reflects the way honoring parents undergirds a flourishing common life.

Another answer lies in the heart. Learning to honor parents is, in miniature, learning to honor God. The child who honors a father he can see is being trained to honor the Father he cannot see. The attitudes formed toward parents, gratitude, submission, respect, tend to become the attitudes carried toward God. So the command is central not only socially but spiritually.

The teacher should be careful, as with the Psalms in Lesson 6, not to turn the promise into a mechanical guarantee that every honoring child will enjoy a long, trouble-free life. It is a proverbial promise describing the general way blessing flows, and supremely it was tied to Israel’s life ‘in the land.’ The deeper point stands: God regards the honoring of parents as so important to human flourishing that He marked it with a promise.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The fifth commandment as the only one of the ten with an attached promise
- Honoring parents as the thread of a stable, flourishing society
- Contempt for parents as the unraveling of authority, tradition, and care
- Honoring a visible parent as training to honor the invisible God

- The promise as proverbial blessing, not a mechanical guarantee

Discussion Prompts

- Why might God attach a promise to this particular command?
- How does honoring parents undergird a healthy society?
- How is learning to honor parents also training to honor God?

Question 6

Student Question:

Honor is expressed not only in actions but in attitudes, in how we speak to our parents and about them, in patience with their weaknesses, in gratitude for their sacrifices. What attitude or habit toward your parents most needs to change? How can you honor even imperfect parents without either pretending their faults away or withholding the honor God commands?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-application moves honor from action into attitude, where it truly lives. We can perform the outward motions of honor (the dutiful visit, the obligatory call) while harboring contempt, impatience, or resentment in the heart. Real honor includes how we speak to parents and about them, our patience with their decline and their quirks, and our gratitude for sacrifices we may have long taken for granted.

Help students name the specific attitude or habit most in need of change. For one it is a sharp, impatient tone with an aging parent who repeats himself. For another it is the habit of complaining about parents to a spouse or sibling. For another it is a buried resentment that colors every interaction. Naming the specific thing is the start of changing it.

Address the tension the question raises: honoring imperfect parents. The two errors are pretending the faults away (a false, brittle honor that denies reality) and withholding honor because of the faults (disobeying God's command until the parent earns it). The biblical path honors the office and the person as God commands, while being truthful about real failings and, where necessary, maintaining wise boundaries. Honor is owed not because parents are perfect but because God commands it and because they are our parents. Invite one concrete change of attitude this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Honor living chiefly in attitude, not only in outward action
- Honor in speech, patience, and gratitude
- Naming the specific attitude or habit most needing change
- Honoring imperfect parents without denial or withholding

Discussion Prompts

- What attitude or habit toward your parents most needs to change?
- How can you honor imperfect parents without pretending faults away?
- What is one concrete change of attitude you could make this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

Writing about widows, Paul says that children and grandchildren should 'first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God' (1 Timothy 5:4). How does this passage extend the honoring of parents into the concrete duty of caring for aging parents, and why does Paul call this 'godliness' and something 'pleasing' to God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

First Timothy 5 brings honor into its most concrete adult form: the care of aging parents. In context, Paul is instructing the church about supporting widows, and he insists that where a widow has children or grandchildren, the family bears the first responsibility. They should 'first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents.' The church helps the truly destitute, but it does not relieve families of their God-given duty.

Two phrases reward attention. 'Make some return to their parents' frames the care of aging parents as a kind of repayment. Our parents poured out years of labor, expense, and sacrifice to raise us; in their old age, the flow reverses, and grown children have the privilege of giving back some measure of what they received. This is not charity but justice and gratitude combined. 'This is pleasing in the sight of God' tells us how He regards such care: it delights Him. The unglamorous, often wearying work of caring for an aging parent is noticed and treasured by God.

Paul calls this 'godliness' (literally, showing piety toward one's own household). This is striking: caring for one's parents is not a distraction from the spiritual life but an expression of it. True religion shows itself at home. The teacher can connect this to James 1:27 and to the whole biblical insistence that faith proves itself in love for those nearest us. The care of the elderly is holy work.

Set up the seriousness that verse 8 will intensify. Already Paul is teaching that the family, not merely the state or the church, bears primary responsibility for its own. In a culture that increasingly outsources the care of the old, this is a pointed and counter-cultural word, and a deeply humane one.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Honoring parents maturing into the concrete care of aging parents
- ‘Make some return’: care as repayment of years of parental sacrifice
- ‘Pleasing to God’: He treasures the wearying work of caring for the elderly
- ‘Godliness’: caring for parents as an expression of true religion
- The family’s primary responsibility for its own, alongside the church

Discussion Prompts

- How does caring for aging parents flow from the command to honor them?
- What does it mean to ‘make some return’ to our parents?
- Why does Paul call this care ‘godliness’ pleasing to God?

Question 8

Student Question:

Caring for aging parents can be costly in time, money, and emotional energy, and it often falls hardest on the very people most stretched by their own families and work. If your parents are aging, how are you preparing to care for them, or already caring for them? If that season is still distant or already past, how can you support others in your church family who are carrying it now?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-application brings the duty of caring for aging parents down to the practical and personal. It is a season many will face, and it is genuinely costly, in time, money, and emotional energy, often falling on adults already stretched thin by their own children and work (the so-called ‘sandwich generation’). The question invites honest reflection and practical preparation.

For those whose parents are aging, encourage forethought rather than crisis reaction: honest family conversations, planning for care and finances, coordinating among siblings, and spiritual preparation for a demanding season. For those already in it, offer encouragement that the wearying daily labor is ‘pleasing to God’ and a real form of honor, even when it goes unseen and unthanked. Caregiving can be lonely; the teacher can remind the church that this is a body that bears one another’s burdens.

Include those for whom the season is distant or past, as the question does. They are not exempt from the subject; they can support the caregivers around them, the church members quietly carrying an aging parent, with meals, respite, encouragement, and prayer. This makes the lesson a matter for the whole congregation, not only those currently caregiving. Invite each student to name one concrete step: a preparation to make, a way to serve a parent now, or a caregiver to support.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The real cost of caring for aging parents in time, money, and energy
- The 'sandwich generation' stretched between parents and children
- Forethought and family planning rather than crisis reaction
- The church supporting caregivers as part of bearing burdens

Discussion Prompts

- How are you preparing for, or already carrying, the care of aging parents?
- What would help you face that season with godliness rather than resentment?
- How could you support a caregiver in your church family right now?

Question 9

Student Question:

Paul states it with startling force: "If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Timothy 5:8). Why does God regard the care of one's own family, including aging parents, as so serious a matter that neglecting it amounts to denying the faith? How does this passage show that genuine faith is proved not merely in words or worship but in how we care for our own, and how should we honor even difficult or ungodly parents while never being bound to follow them into sin?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block, anchored in one of the strongest statements in the New Testament about family responsibility: 'If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever' (1 Timothy 5:8). The teacher should let the force of this land. To neglect the care of one's own family is not a minor lapse; Paul equates it with a practical denial of the faith and says such a person is 'worse than an unbeliever,' since even those without faith commonly care for their own.

Draw out why God regards this so seriously. Faith that does not express itself in love for those nearest us is exposed as counterfeit. A person who professes to love God while neglecting the parents and family in front of him has a religion that does not reach the ground. 'If anyone says, I love God, and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen' (1 John 4:20). The care of one's own household is one of the surest tests of whether faith is real, because it is concrete, costly, and unglamorous, with no audience to applaud it.

This means genuine faith is proved not merely in words or worship but in deeds, in how we actually treat the people God has placed in our care. The teacher can connect this to the whole biblical pattern: true religion visits orphans and widows (James 1:27); love is shown 'in deed and

in truth' (1 John 3:18). A Christianity that sings on Sunday but neglects an aging mother on Monday has missed something essential. Provision here includes material support where needed, but also presence, attention, and honor.

Now address, with care, the hard question of honoring difficult or ungodly parents. The command to honor and care for parents is real and binding, but it is not unlimited, and the teacher should say so clearly to protect the wounded. Honor never requires following a parent into sin (recall 'in the Lord'), never requires submitting to abuse, and does not always mean restoring trust or proximity that would cause further harm. A person estranged from a parent for serious cause is not thereby denying the faith. Honor in such cases may take limited and wise forms: ensuring basic needs are met from a safe distance, refusing bitterness and contempt, praying for the parent, speaking of them without slander, and remaining open to reconciliation should genuine repentance come. The teacher should be ready to point those in painful situations toward the elders and godly counsel rather than offering a one-size answer.

Hold the two truths together. On one hand, the strong word of verse 8 against any casual neglect of family that genuine love and faith would never permit. On the other, the recognition that honor is owed to God first and can take wise, varied, and even distanced forms where a parent is dangerous or unrepentant. The default is generous, costly, faithful care of one's own; the exceptions are real but must not become excuses for the very neglect Paul condemns.

Close this question by lifting students' eyes to the Lord Himself. Even in His agony on the cross, Jesus saw to the care of His mother, entrusting her to the beloved disciple (John 19:26–27). The Savior who was dying for the sins of the world did not consider the care of His mother beneath His attention. If the Lord honored His mother with His dying breath, His disciples can hardly count the care of their own families a small thing.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- 1 Timothy 5:8: neglecting family as a practical denial of the faith
- 'Worse than an unbeliever': even those without faith care for their own
- Faith proved in deeds toward those nearest, not merely in words or worship
- Provision as material support, presence, attention, and honor
- Honoring difficult parents without following them into sin or enduring abuse
- Wise, limited, distanced forms of honor where a parent is dangerous or unrepentant
- Christ from the cross providing for His mother (John 19:26–27)

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God regard neglect of one's family as so serious a matter?
- How does this show that real faith is proved in deeds toward our own?
- How can we honor difficult parents while never being bound to follow them into sin?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across both passages, from the child's obedience, to the lifelong command of honor, to the promise attached, to the grown child's care for aging parents. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth about honoring your father and mother that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone gathers the long arc of the fifth commandment: the child's obedience, the lifelong duty of honor, the promise attached, and the grown child's care for aging parents. Ask each student to name one specific way Jesus is forming them, resisting vague generalities, since students stand at very different points on that arc.

Different truths will land differently. A young person may be called to glad obedience and respect. An adult may need to recover an honor that has cooled into criticism or neglect. Someone may need to begin honest preparation for caring for aging parents, or to take up that care now as godliness pleasing to God. Someone carrying wounds from a difficult parent may need to find the wise form honor can take without bondage to sin. Someone may need simply to make a call, speak a word of gratitude, or release a long-held resentment. Let the Spirit choose the door.

Close with the example of Christ and the heart of the command. To honor father and mother is among the most concrete ways our faith reaches all the way home, and the Lord who provided for His mother from the cross both commands it and models it. Send students out resolved to honor their parents across the whole span of life, knowing that such honor pleases God and that He has tied to it a promise of blessing.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Synthesis of obedience, lifelong honor, the promise, and care of the aging
- Formation meeting students at every point on the lifelong arc
- Honor as faith reaching all the way home
- Christ's example of honoring His mother as model and motive

Discussion Prompts

- What single truth about honoring your parents do you most need this week?
- Where on the arc, obedience, honor, or care, is Jesus forming you now?
- What one concrete act of honor could you offer this week?