

Honor your father and your mother

Good morning Lambrick.

If you are just joining us, we are in the midst of a study on the 10 Commandments – within a larger journey through the book of Exodus. Which is not just a foundational story in the history of Israel, but a foundational story in ***the revelation of God and the gospel*** – that the God of the Universe not only **cares** about the suffering and injustice of our world, but ***is actively seeking to rescue the world*** – *to rescue us all from the slavery of idolatry to the freedom of life in Him – life as His people...*

Yet another reason why our vision as a church is simply: ***“Life with God for the World”*** – because this is what God is after... all the time, in all things – *to rescue us all from the slavery of idolatry to the freedom of life in Him, with Him, by Him and for Him...*

And today we come to the **5th of the 10 Commandments.**

Does anyone know what it is without looking it up?

“Honor your father and your mother.”

Exodus 20:2 – *“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.”* [therefore]

1. You shall have no other gods before me
2. You shall not make for yourself images to worship
3. You shall not misuse God’s Name
4. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy

And then 5th - **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.”***

Although well-known, this command – similarly to the 4th commandment – the Sabbath command – is often experienced or perceived as having ***a little less gravity*** than all the rest. It feels a little less life-or-death.

I mean, of course, God would command us not to worship false gods, and not to dishonor His Name, and not to murder or commit adultery.

But the 5th Commandment – “*honor your father and your mother*” – doesn’t have the same urgency or gravity, at least not in our ears.

It doesn’t feel like a matter of **life-or-death**.

But it is to God.

Here in the 5th commandment, we discover that God – the God of Exodus – the God who rescues us from slavery – the God who is seeking to put an end to oppression in all its forms – this God considers honoring our parents **utterly essential** – the **weightiest** of matters...

So, before we get any further, **let’s bow before this God & pray.**

“Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.”

I want to acknowledge, right from the start, that for all the seeming **simplicity** or **straightforwardness** of this commandment – it touches on an aspect of many of our lives that is **truly, if not deeply, complicated**... an aspect of many of our lives that is filled with **tension** – ***our relationship with our parents.***

Few things could have – and do have – as much impact on our lives – *for better or for worse* – as our parents – and our relationship with them.

For better or for worse...

The sad reality is that many people (young and old) live with an incredible measure of pain, confusion and brokenness – emotionally, mentally, psychologically, sexually, relationally... an incredible measure of pain, confusion and brokenness ***as a result of their parents*** – whether through neglect or domination, through the destructive fallout of their parents immaturity, self-centeredness or addictions, or through outright abuse (physical, verbal, sexual).

Which isn't to say that our parents are to be blamed for all the troubles in our lives, but it is to acknowledge that few things have as much impact on our lives as our parents and our relationship with them.

I'll never forget speaking on this commandment years ago – and the stories that emerged in the days following – of the most horrific pain that came at that hands of a parent.

And so I know that alongside all the beautiful stories in this room – of loving and attentive, imperfect parents – as we lean into this commandment some of us find ourselves paralyzed with the memory or the ongoing pain of how a father or mother has wounded us or another close to us.

Which makes **this commandment rather complicated.**

For some, it’s the most natural thing. Where a parent has been honorable, this commandment is just common-sense – the natural expression of gratitude from a child well-loved.

But where a parent has misused or abused their influence in the life a child, this commandment could possibly enable or perpetuate suffering. In some instances, it might seem unwise, or even dangerous.

And to get around this, it’s not surprising that many use this commandment as a launching pad to **address parent.** Which makes sense – parents have such an incredible influence in the lives of their children.

AND YET the fifth commandment is not addressed to any of us as parents, but **to each of us as children** (which all of us are).

There is something incredibly universal about this commandment.

For all of our differences (and there are many), one thing that can be said of every one of us is that **we are all children of someone.** We are not all parents, but we are **all children** – whether young or old.

As someone wise said, **"No matter how old we become,** not matter how many children we ourselves may have, **we never get over being children of God and our parents."**

And we need to keep this in mind as we consider this commandment – because I think we’ve often **not** heard or applied this commandment universally – to **all of us**. Some of us have only ever considered it as pertaining to kids or teens – whether our own kids, or ourselves in the days of our youth.

Some of us might have already has the thought, *“Oh, I wish my kids were here today – cause this is really for them!”*

But just as the rest of the 10 Commandments were originally addressed to the whole community of the Israelites – so this commandment is addressed **to all of us** – to every person who has a father or mother... which is **all of us**.

And with that, I think it’s worth acknowledging the powerful **affirmation of women** **in this Commandment.**

Although we often don’t notice the striking distinctiveness of this commandment, in the ANE, in the world of Exodus, where a command like this was spoken, it was only ever in reference to honoring one’s **father**.

In Egypt, only the Pharaoh and his sons were said to be made in the image of God. And so, not surprisingly, in the ANE Code of Hammurabi (1750 B.C.E.), **honor was only commanded for one’s father.**

But just as the Genesis creation account declares that both men and women are created in the image of God, so here, YAHWEH, the God of Creation, the rescuing God of Exodus, commands us to honor both our father **and our mother.**

This isn’t our topic for today, but it’s can’t be missed! *The God of Exodus cares about the honor of mothers as much as fathers!*

So, **what does this commandment mean?**

What does it mean to honor your father and your mother?

And what if your father or mother haven’t been or aren’t deserving of honor?

Well, thankfully, unpacking the meaning of the commandment will itself help us with this more personal question.

And it starts with us making sense of this word “**honor**”.

As most of us know, the Old Testament wasn’t originally written in English, but in **Hebrew**, and so the word translated for us as **honor** is really the Hebrew word **kavod**.

Which means running to Webster’s Dictionary for a definition of honor isn’t going to help us much. We need to make sense of the meaning of *kavod*.

So, what does it mean to ***kavod*** your father and your mother?

Well, *kavod* is actually a word often used in the church and the Christian community – because it’s the same Hebrew word behind our word ‘glory’. When we talk about the ***glory*** of God, we’re talking about the ***kavod*** of God.

And, as one commentary explains, “the basic meaning of the word is ‘heaviness’ in the physical sense, as well as... ‘importance’ in the metaphorical sense...” (Holbert, 64).

It’s opposite then being “‘lightness’ in the physical sense, leading to ‘slightness’ or ‘insignificance’ or even ‘contempt’ in the metaphorical sense” (64).

Are you tracking with me?

Simply put: ***kavod*** means heavy, or weighty.

Hence, my remark earlier – that the 5th Commandment is **the weightiest commandment**. Literally. ***Kavod***.

Beyond the bible, ***kavod*** was a word from the world of commerce, where the **worth** of something (like gold or silver) was determined by its **weight**. We’re familiar with this. ***This is Bulk Barn Economics 101!***

If something was ***kavod*** or ***heavy***, it had **great worth**.

And so throughout the Bible, **GOD** is described again and again as being **kavod** – heavy, weighty – of the greatest worth, importance and significance.

[Years ago, this helped me finally understanding the meaning of C.S. Lewis’ famous reference to The Weight of Glory. It’s the title of one of his most famous sermons, and ultimately the title of a collection of his short works – the “Weight of Glory”.]

Kavod means heavy or weighty – of great worth.

And so, in the 5th commandment, **we are instructed to kavod our father and our mother – in the sense of weighing heavy our father and our mother...**

Now I don’t think either of my parents would be that excited if I start considering them **pretty heavy**. I’m sure I would get a talking to, or at least, a strong text.

But, if I **weighed them heavily** in my life... if I treated them and related to them as having **great worth and significance** (which is what the hebrew word *kavod* means), I’m sure they would be deeply appreciative... maybe even **honored**.

And that exactly what we are commanded to do.

God’s desire, will and command is that every one of us would **weigh our parents heavy and heavily** in our lives – that we would not take our

parents lightly; that we would not treat them as unimportant, insignificant, having no worth, value or substance.

Think about how you have related to your father and your mother in the past, or how you relate to them these days... (And I think this equally applies to those of us whose parents are no longer alive – this commandment matters as long as we are alive...)

Have you ever weighed your parents lightly?

Have you ever treated your mom or your dad as though their life, their presence, their feelings or needs mean nothing to you?

Ever just blown them off, disregarded them, and their counsel, as having no value to you?

I’m not asking if you’ve ever **attacked** your parents (though the other commandments will speak to that), but *have you ever **treated your parents as insignificant, as unimportant** – whether, their opinions or feelings or concerns or needs, or simply just them as people?*

*Have you ever not treated your parents with **kavod**?*

With the 5th commandment, God’s command us to **kavod** our father and our mother – to treat them as having **great worth**; that we would relate to them in a way that conveys that their lives, that who they are, and that their perspectives, and ways, and feelings, and needs weigh heavily in our lives and thoughts.

That they are of **great significance** to us.

Which does not necessarily always mean raising our glass to our parents, deferring to their wishes, or obeying their commands.

The command to *kavod* your father and your mother is not just another way of saying “**obey your parents**”.

Now, **there is a time** in our lives when honoring our parents largely involves obedience – particularly in our childhood and youth.

As Earl Palmer has said,

“The very survival of a small child depends upon the protection and care of parents; therefore, the instructions about streets and medicine cabinets are nonnegotiable and must be obeyed.”

But there comes a time when our obedience to the 5th commandment may not require obedience to our parents, **but it will always require *kavod***.

As one scholar explains: “Kavod is not a question of subordination, but of giving serious weight to parents' concerns and needs.” (Bruckner)

And this is important to grasp – because when we say or hear “honor”, most of us hear “obey” or “submit”. But “Kavod is not a question of subordination, but of giving serious weight to parents' concerns and needs.”

Truth is, treating your parents with *kavod* – with great weight – may, **at some point, mean being** open and honest about the ways that their ways are hurting you, or themselves, or others. It could even mean standing up against their ways – because their life bears so much weight for you!

There comes a time when our obedience to the 5th commandment may not require obedience to our parents, ***but it will always require kavod.***

Why? Why does this matter so much to God?

Why include this in the 10 Commandments? Why not just have 9 Commandments, and leave this one for the appendix?

Well, for one thing, it matters to God because **our parents are always and undeniably our first neighbors.**

And as Jesus says, the whole of the law is summed up in these two commandments – *to love the LORD your God with all of your heart and soul and mind and strength, and to love your neighbors as yourself.* (Matt 22:37-39)

Before anyone else, our parents are always and undeniably our first neighbors.

People whom God loves and calls us to love – *whatever they’ve done to us...*

Just as God loves us – *despite all we’ve done to God...*

But with this – intimately related to this – **God calls us to honor – to *kavod*** our parents because God knows that *we will not murder, steal from or commit adultery against those we kavod.*

In a sense, this commandment is essential to our fulfillment of ***all the commands that follow.***

For where we deny or dismiss the worth of another, the honor of another, the kavod of another – including our parents – we will treat them accordingly.

We heard about this in Monday night’s documentary – where ancient and modern cultures have not affirmed the worth of infants, or girls, or Africans or Natives, or the infirm or the aged – *and as a result, have treated them accordingly*. They exposed unwanted infants, sold into slavery unwanted girls, forced into subjection or utterly displaced whole people groups, or abandon aging parents to the elements, or worse.

But here again in the 5th Commandment, we catch a glimpse of incredible grace of ***a God who treats all of us with kavod***.

All of us...

*Even when **we** don’t deserve it!*

Just as maybe some of our parents don’t deserve it!

Which is **one of the striking dynamics of this** commandment – which is what causes many to wrestle with it.

There is no “**if**” in this commandment.

There is no qualifier.

The fifth commandment does not say, “Honor your father and your mother – **if they are deserving of honor.**”

No. God simply commands us to “*honor our father and our mother*”.

Which may seem hard and unfair to some of us – and yet is exactly the kind of saving grace **that we – and our parents – need.**

All of us.

Once again we discover the grace of the gospel in the 10 Commandments – **honor given to the dishonorable...**

In truth, in the fifth commandment, God is simply commanding us to treat our parents the same way **that God Himself treats us.**

Despite all that we’ve done...

Truth is, we have **all** dismissed God at some point along the way – or *as the very pattern of our lives.* We’ve taken God lightly, messed with the scales and valued other things – or maybe everything – more than God... We have treated God with no kavod – **and we’ve lived accordingly...**

But God in His grace—instead of blowing **us** off as insignificant, dismissing us as worthless, or lacking any real weight—God, in His grace, has chosen to treat us as having **great kavod**, having **immeasurable worth** in His sight.

Which is amazing.

Especially in the light of what the Apostle Paul says in **Romans 3:23**, where he describes all of us – **saying that “All have sinned and fallen short of the glory—the kavod—of God.”**

We were created in the image of God – filled with God’s glory – but we’ve worshipped ourselves instead of Him and ended up empty – empty vessels – lacking any true *kavod* or weight or worth...

But God – **but God, in grace**, has weighed us **heavy**.

So heavy that He gave His life for us.

*God **kavods** us that much!*
*God **kavods you** that much!*

So much that He would give His life for you – die on the cross for you!

Again, as Earl Palmer has put it,

“**At the cross of Christ...** all of humanity is invited to make the ultimate discovery of how **heavy** every one of us has been weighed by God.

*‘**But God demonstrates his own** love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.’ (Romans 5:8).”*

While we were still sinners, *when we least deserved it*, **God honored us** with grace and restored to us ***His honor—bestowed on us His honor – His kavod—His worth.***

That by His grace, we would be led and empowered to extend this same grace to others – including our parents...

Let’s pray.

**Come to Christ today
for the grace you need
– that God would restore your honor
and make you a son or daughter who gives
your parents honor.**