

LORD

Our fall discipleship series focuses on the Ten Commandments. Not only what they teach us not to do, but what to do. Jesus is Savior and Lord. Once we know Him as Savior, it's time to begin to allow His lordship in every corner of our lives. I can easily recognize Jesus as "Lord" in some abstract way. He's Lord of the universe. He's Lord of all history. But it gets harder when I think about His lordship in my own life. Is He really my master when I'm thinking about my relationships with my family? Is Jesus my first consult and guide when I'm arranging my finances? So much of discipleship is simply about loving Jesus more—more than desires of the flesh, more than money, more than what my neighbor has. The Ten Commandments are a great measure of our hearts. Do we love Jesus more than these? Jesus is Lord.

Our youngest, Liam, likes to do what we call “shop-around.” He’s the fourth child, he’s watched his older sister and brothers, and now at nine, he has figured out a few things. If he asks for something from one parent and doesn’t get the response he wants, he’ll try the other one. He’ll shop around. Which we forbid. But he knows Mom is firm on some things and Dad is strict on some things and he might get a better outcome if he just shops around. If he can get a grandparent in the mix, all the better. Recently he tried this and Abigail said what we always say, “If your Dad said no, don’t ask me. It’s over.” But he said, “But Dad’s not in charge of Xbox after school is he? Just after he gets home, he’s in charge.” “No, if your dad said no it’s no whether he’s home or not.” “Well, who’s in charge?” See, if you’re going to shop around you need to know who’s in charge. Who’s in charge of Xbox time? Who’s in charge of bedtime? Who’s in charge of fruit snack distribution? I just want to get the best deal. Eventually we always get to the same place. Who’s in charge of this family? Jesus. The Lord is in charge. At least, we try very hard to live in His care and under His loving hand. He is Lord of my family.

This week we take a critical turn. The Ten Commandments are in two parts, the first four about God and the second six about neighbors. When Jesus was asked the greatest commandment in the law, in Matthew, “Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:37–40). Love God; love neighbor. The first four commandments are about our relationship with God: **(1)** I am the Lord, there is no other; **(2)** don’t worship anyone or anything other than Me; **(3)** don’t abuse My name; and **(4)** honor My Sabbath day. If it helps you, you can think of these as internal and external. First, **(1)** know *internally* I am God alone, then **(2)** *externally* don’t make or chase some other God. Then **(3)** receive *internally* My name, what I have shown you of Myself, and **(4)** honor My name *externally*, take the Sabbath and keep it, pray publicly, worship together—let people see you live differently because of My name. Four commandments to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength. Love God. And now, the fifth commandment starts us on the next adventure—love your neighbor as yourself. It begins with family.

Why is this message so critical this morning? Because

every one of us has a family and that means every one of us has a relationship to a family, our family. Even in the most extreme case if that relationship is only to a lack of a family—we all deal with this. And if we don’t start here and get this in order before the Lord, if we can’t love our closest, we will have a hard time loving the rest. It starts at home. How I am doing with my family is my chief and primary engagement with love for neighbor. It’s critical. I can ask a thousand questions about myself at my age in my role, but none of them compare with “How am I doing with Abigail, Ellie, Jack, Peter and Liam? With my parents, my brothers and sisters?” It starts with family. The fifth commandment: “Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you” (Exodus 20:12). Easy.

Let’s dig in. To ‘honor’ here, the Hebrew word, means to give weight to something. So when you use it this way, as a command in human relationships, it’s about giving weight to people. Give your parents their due weight in your life. Kids, your parents weigh a lot. Turn to your mom and say, “Mom...” Never mind. Regard your parents with respect. Give your parents the weight they deserve in your life. It means to treat your parents with care. In an age where youth is valued above all, this commandment, primarily addressed to the adults at the foot of Mt. Sinai, tells us to care for our parents even in old age. This people was emerging from 400 years of slavery in Egypt. These commands were about learning how to be human again. In slavery it’s all about utility—an old person was of no use in a system of slave labor. We still slip into a utilitarian mindset with other human beings. “Well, you’re of an age now where I have no use for you.” God says, “this is not what it means to love one another. Honor your father and your mother. Prize them. Care for them. Respect them.”

Both father and mother are mentioned, not just “parents,” not just “father” assuming mother is included but “honor your father and your mother.” God’s ideal for family is in view here. A man and woman come together in marriage for procreation; children honor their parents even to old age, even to the end of life. This is the model. But parents, grandparents, inherent in this ideal that we all honor our parents is the idea that we should at least attempt to be *honorable*. Eeek. Honor rolls both ways. We see this in our reading from Ephesians, which we preached on just a few weeks ago in our summer series but we see here again: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother’” (Ephesians 6:1–2). Boy, I love that. I could read that over and over! But what’s this?

"Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). I don't know why the fathers are singled out! Honor rolls both ways. Home is a place of instruction, of training, in following the Lord. Family is a place of security and safety. A place where the deepest and most foundational sense of self is developed, where confidence is grounded, where love is sure and faithful, where a child is nurtured, kept safe, trained, encouraged, grown up. Family is meant to be a little church. That's the ideal.

The fifth commandment comes with a promise. Paul points out it's the only one that does. This is where the fifth commandment truly stands as an introduction to society, to neighborly love, to community living together in the right ways. Honor to parents is also honor to authority itself. Family ties are the fabric of society. Dr. John Stevens wrote a small booklet for our church years ago on the Ten Commandments he called "The Fine Art of Living" and on the fifth he wrote this about the promise attached: "It is not a promise of personal longevity—honor your parents and you will live a long life, but rather it is a promise which has to do with the very survival of civilization itself. The verdict of history is clear for all who have eyes to see; whenever the place of the family is downgraded in a society, then the seeds of destruction are sown and the harvest will be the collapse of that society ... If there is ever to be a better world, it will be forged out in the intimacy of the family." God gives us family to be a building block of society, a schoolhouse of neighbor-love, a little church with honor running both ways and, in so doing, running straight up to God. That's the ideal God gives us. That's the ideal. And we are grateful for it. We live toward it as best we can. It's the ideal and it promises blessing, peace, good things.

Now, what if we can't make the ideal? See, and hang with me here, I have a sneaking suspicion that some of us are not sure we have ideal and perfect families. Don't worry. I haven't been creeping around peering in your living room windows, but I just wonder if we all have the perfect family thing down or not. And this is a perfect family church, so on the count of three if your family has some imperfections, just hop up and head for the doors. 1-2- ... can you imagine? Your pastor would be first out the door, folks. But why does it feel that way? Why do all of us, each of us with imperfect families, feel like we need to pretend perfection? We don't. Nor do we need to walk away from God's ideal. But there's going to be some distance. There's some distance between perfect and present. There's some distance between God's law and my practice, my family. What do we do with that distance?

We can't live out the perfect family life, can we? There are so many things that make perfect impossible, starting with me. I'm not perfect. I can't honor perfectly. I can't be honorable perfectly. Maybe there are relationships strained beyond repair. Maybe the people you have the most strained relationship with have already passed away; you can't honor your father or your grandfather because they have passed away, and when they died things were still unhealthy. You can't honor your parents because they are still devastatingly toxic for you to be around, they've hurt you instead of nurturing you. Maybe the child you have raised and nurtured and loved and prayed for has still turned out hell-bent on self-destruction, running headlong into disobedience. What now? Where's the perfect family now? Maybe you tried getting everything balanced and squared before the Lord, but a tragedy came along—a sudden death. Maybe the death of a child. I think there is no greater agony. What now? Abuse. Divorce. Shattered promises. Broken vows.

What now? I know stories of pain in the family life, and I know you do too. Stories that make you think, "you know, no one would blame you." If you just said, "I'm walking away from God. I tried God and it didn't work." No one would blame you. But is that what you want to do? Or can you still say, "Lord, be Lord of *this* family?" We're not perfect. Loss will come. Grief is hard work. It's a long walk through a dark forest. That's why we hold grief workshops at First Pres, and they are always well attended, not because we expect perfect, but because we expect grief and loss and we'd rather walk through it together than alone. Divorce is hard and painful. Nobody comes to the altar and says "I hope to create a wonderful divorce." It's imperfect. That's why we have the Divorce Recovery Workshop. We expect a distance between perfect and practice. Family is never perfect. Folks like Focus on the Family know that and want to help. I love how Jim Daly says, "there are no perfect dads and I'm certainly not one." It isn't about some secret system, do it right and guarantee perfection. No. It's about something else; it's about something more.

Yes, there is the confidence and boldness to say with Joshua 24:15, "as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." But there's also a verse I love in Isaiah, "Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the Lord has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem" (Isaiah 52:9). It is from the ruins we sing. It is from the ruins we watch for the Lord to come. It is from the ruins we say, "Lord, be Lord of my family." What does it mean for Jesus

to be Lord of my family? Does it mean perfect obedience in every direction, perfect honor, military precision as the orders are followed from Jesus straight on down? Or is something more like, He is Lord because He is Savior?

In what way is Jesus Lord? He's God. That's enough. But the Bible graciously gives us more. "In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:5–11). Jesus is Lord of my family because Jesus is Savior of my family. Jesus went to the cross. He humbled Himself and went lower than death to save me, and to save my family. What I cannot do, Jesus satisfied. The honor I could not give—Jesus honored the Father. Jesus the Son honored the Father God fully, even to finish the errand to save humanity at the cost of His own life. The law I could never satisfy, Jesus fully satisfied.

Let me be careful here, because I don't want to give you the wrong idea. God the Father isn't some angry, sick father who couldn't find happiness and peace until He saw His own son tortured and killed. That's not the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. In the mystery of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit agreed to the work of salvation. Jesus, who is God the Son, agreed with God the Father to the joining, the emptying, the entering into a fallen and sinful humanity to pay the penalty of death on behalf of all of us. God lovingly agreed to rescue us from sin and death, and Jesus honored the Father to the full satisfying the requirement that you and I could never satisfy. He is Lord. He is Savior. We have a God who knows the pain. We have a God who knows the struggle. He is acquainted with suffering. And Jesus has satisfied it all. Turn to Him. He is the Savior. He is Lord of your family, in all its challenge and imperfections. Honor your father and mother. I try. I know the blessing promised. I know the requirement of the law—and I am fully acquainted with my failure. I can't do what the law requires. But Jesus can. Jesus did. Jesus satisfied the law. Jesus has paid the full cost to bring you fully into His own family by His grace.

STUDY GUIDE

LORD • EXODUS 20:12

UP: Connect With God Through Spending Time in God's Word

Read aloud the passages for the week: Exodus 20:12 and Ephesians 6:1–4. Silently reflect on what you heard. Underline phrases that seem meaningful.

- What does it mean to honor someone? Does "honoring" involve action? Or is it more like a state of mind or opinion you have about someone?
- The Israelites and Ephesians are called to honor their parents so they may "enjoy long life on the earth." What kind of relationships exists between honoring parents and long, enjoyable life?
- Many people have difficult relationships with the people who raised them. How can they "honor" these people? If your parents have passed away, how can you continue to, or begin to, honor them?
- Part of submitting to Jesus as "Lord of my life" is recognizing my responsibility to submit to other authorities like parents, government, a boss, etc. What "authorities" currently exist in your life?
- How do you currently "honor" your parents and these authorities? How do you struggle with honoring parents and other authorities?
- In Ephesians, Paul warns not to agitate children, but to raise them in the Lord. How did the people who raised you "agitate" you? If you are a parent, when have you agitated/frustrated your children? Is there anyone you need to forgive or ask forgiveness from?

OUT: Connect With the World Around Us by Joining God in God's Mission

As you have thought about being outwardly focused this fall, has anything risen up that you could follow up on? CityServe is around the corner (October 6). Consider serving at a site!

IN: Connect With the Family of God

Take time to pray for the parents in our congregation. Pray for patience, wisdom, etc.