

HONOR YOUR PARENTS???

A 7-DAY BIBLE DEVOTIONAL



WRITTEN BY SUSAN NARJALA

What does honoring parents look like when we're adults? Is it even possible in our fragmented world? How does God expect us to honor our parents when, sometimes, distance seems a wiser, less complicated, option? We'll look at Scripture, with a focus on the Ruth and Naomi story, to discover how we can follow God's command – even when it's impossible in our own strength.

DAY 1

READ: EPHESIANS 6:2-3

Why are we unpacking the topic of honoring our parents in this Bible Plan? Isn't it a "lesson" we left behind at children's church?

Well, not quite.

Firstly, there's the fact that God commands it of all of us. 'Honor your parents' is literally in the Ten Commandments and it's repeated three more times in Scripture - in the books of Deuteronomy, Matthew, and Ephesians. It's evident that this is not just a suggestion or a "nice to have" - but a command from God to us.

Secondly, it's a topic we don't regularly study in adult Christian teaching. In terms of family relationships, we run workshops on Christian parenting. And, of course, blogs about mommyhood and encouragements for dads abound in the Christian world. But we don't hear nearly enough about how to relate to our parents when we ourselves are older.

Getting back to today's verse: there's no fine print in the commandment we read in Ephesians. It doesn't say honor your parents - 'if you're under the age of 18,' or 'as long as they don't get under your skin,' or 'provided they don't give you advice you didn't ask for,' or even 'as long as they're good Christian folk.' **There are no caveats to the commandment to honor our parents.**

Before we move on, though, I want to be sensitive to those of us who may come from homes where there was a toxic environment or abuse. **We can honor our parents but also protect ourselves by incorporating boundaries using godly wisdom. We can honor our parents but also not allow them to manipulate us or our marriages. We can honor our parents but also walk with Jesus even if it displeases them.**

As believers, there's no overlooking the fact that we are still called to honor our parents in the Lord. Obedience to this calling is not easy but, in the power of the Spirit, it is not impossible. And so we pray:

Father God, Today, I want to obey You by dwelling on even the "difficult" and "inconvenient" portions of Your Word. Sometimes, the calling seems impossible to obey. So I say: All to Jesus I surrender. Work in and through me, Lord. Amen

DAY 2

READ: RUTH 1:14-1; HEBREWS 4:15

Naomi has lost her husband and her two adult sons, leaving her and her two daughters-in-law bereaved and helpless.

The older widow urges her daughters-in-law to go back to their hometowns so they could, perhaps, get married again and pick up the pieces of their lives. Naomi, herself, planned to return to her hometown of Bethlehem.

One of her daughters-in-law, Orpah, decides to take Naomi's advice and she returns home, but her other daughter-in-law, Ruth, sticks with Naomi.

Today, take a moment to notice Ruth's loyalty to Naomi. It's almost an unreasonable or illogical loyalty.

Naomi didn't tell her to return home as a casual suggestion. Naomi urges her not once, not twice - but four times.

But here's the thing: Ruth looked beyond Naomi's words to her heart. She saw that her mother-in-law was putting on a brave face. I believe Ruth honored Naomi by demonstrating empathy.

Today, can we honor our parents by choosing empathy over indifference?

Let's look from the principle in the Word to the Person of Jesus. The Bible says that we do not have a High Priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses. Jesus doesn't say that our problems are ours to handle. He took on our problems. He who knew no sin became sin for us. We are called to be imitators of that sympathetic God. But we can't do it on our own and so we pray:

Lord, by the power of the Holy Spirit, transform my bent to selfishness into selfless empathy.

DAY 3

READ: RUTH 1:20-21, PHILLIPIANS 1:6

Naomi didn't exactly make the most pleasant traveling companion or easiest housemate. Understandably so - she had suffered unimaginable loss.

We hear Naomi telling the townsfolk in Bethlehem: "Don't call me Naomi." Instead, she tells them: "Call me Mara (which means bitter) because the Almighty has made my life very bitter." Naomi was going through a season of pain and, perhaps, anger. Maybe, if she were alive today she would have been diagnosed as having depression.

But Ruth sticks with her despite Naomi's fragile emotional state, despite the fact that living with Naomi wasn't easy.

Relating to our parents is, oftentimes, hard work because parents, like us, are works in progress. From 13 years of being a mom myself, I know that this parenting gig is not a walk in the park! After many an unreasonable 'momplosion' (read: mommy explosion), I've wondered if I've scarred my progeny for life.

Parents are far from perfect. As a parent myself, I now better understand the previous generation who raised their children before the word "parent" became a verb in blog posts. **Can we show our parents grace, because we've received grace as undeserving as we are? Can we choose forgiveness because we've been forgiven of much ourselves? Can we remember that parents are works in progress, too?**

We can't do this on our own and so we pray: *Father God, Give me the grace to extend grace to my parents. Help me remember that, like me, they are imperfect people loved by a Perfect God. Amen*

DAY 4

READ: RUTH 2:2-3, MARK 1:35

We dive back into the Ruth story today. We see an industrious Ruth eager to help out. She says to her mother-in-law: “Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor.”

Ruth was fully capable of taking care of things. She was an extremely resourceful woman. But that doesn't preclude her from seeking Naomi's wisdom in this situation. She consults her mother-in-law and then she goes out with Naomi's blessing. Ruth didn't listen because she didn't have a mind of her own or because she was incompetent. She listened because she was honoring Naomi.

Friends, the world feeds us this idea that just because we're independent, it means we don't need the input and the insight of our parents. But here's the thing: **Our independence shouldn't preclude us from seeking the input and insight of others, especially our parents.**

Can we honor our parents by hearing them out not because we are forced to but because we trust that God has sovereignly appointed them in their role and given them wisdom that comes with experience?

Of course, this doesn't mean blind obedience. I'm not advocating becoming followers of our parents. But **can we honor our parents by seeking their counsel rather than discounting it?** Even Jesus looked to His Father and listened to His voice. We see in Scripture how He got up early and withdrew to a quiet place so He could pray and seek His Father. Jesus was equal with the Father – and yet He sought His Father. Can we humble ourselves as Jesus did? Can we seek the wisdom of our parents? But we cannot do this on our own.

We need the Holy Spirit and so we pray: *Lord, by the power of the Holy Spirit, transform my bent to self-sufficiency into a heart that seeks godly wisdom*

DAY 5

READ: RUTH 2:14-15; EPHESIANS 5:2

Ruth is busy working in the field, gleaning behind the harvesters, and, finally, she takes a well-deserved lunch break. She sits down for her meal, and Boaz, the owner of the field and her soon-to-be suitor, offers her some bread and roasted grain.

Ruth has her fill of the food - and then she does the simplest, yet sweetest, thing. She packs a to-go bag from the special food for Naomi.

It's a little detail that we would, perhaps, overlook. But let's consider it for a moment. After all, Ruth was going to take back all the barley she had gleaned and husked which would have been more than sufficient for both her and Naomi. But as she ate the special roasted grain that Boaz gave her, Ruth thought about her mother-in-law.

Today, **let's challenge ourselves to honor our parents by supporting them from a place of gratitude rather than obligation.** Ruth demonstrated this principle with her little box of special food from her lunch.

And Jesus lived that example of giving of Himself throughout His time on earth. He poured out His life even unto death. And He continues to give and give and give some more.

Today, autonomy and independence seem to be the order of the day. But is that how it's meant to be? Can we learn to give as Jesus goes? He gives not because He is even remotely obligated to us but because He is Love. We can't follow His example in our own strength and so we pray: *Lord, by the power of the Holy Spirit, transform my bent to self-preservation into a heart that is supportive*

DAY 6

READ: RUTH 4:13-17; EPHESIANS 1:5

On Naomi's advice and with her insight, Ruth makes Boaz aware of her availability as a potential wife. Boaz is a distant relative of Naomi and, as her kinsman-redeemer, he has the right and the privilege of marrying Ruth.

Eventually, Boaz and Ruth tie the knot and they have a baby boy. If Ruth had an Instagram post up, it might have featured a professionally-shot photo of her little family during "golden hour" with the sun setting behind the barley fields. The once-widowed woman with zero prospects of marrying again or having children is now the wife of the owner of a field and has given birth to a baby. Ruth's life is living the #blessed life.

She doesn't need Naomi. She could have thrown herself into raising her child and into the busyness of keeping home and making hot falafels for her husband when he came back from the fields. Ruth could have excluded Naomi. But Ruth, true to her character, doesn't.

In fact, in Chapter 4 it says: Then Naomi took the child in her arms and cared for him. The women living there said, "Naomi has a son!" Ruth 4: 16 and 17 What a surprising verse. The women didn't say Ruth has a son. They said, "Naomi has a son." While that alludes to the culture of the time, it also speaks volumes about Ruth's nature.

Ruth included Naomi in her new family, even though she didn't have to. **Can we honor our parents by including them rather than overlooking them?** Ruth didn't allow Naomi to feel like a burden but held space for Naomi in her life. We have a God who doesn't exclude us based on our age or qualifications or appearance or utility or any other criterion for "selection." **We have a God who chose us and adopted us into His family simply because of His grace.** Can we include our parents as God includes us? And, again, we can't do this in our own strength and so we pray: *Lord, by the power of the Holy Spirit, transform my bent to forgetfulness into a heart that includes and envelopes others in love.*

DAY 7

READ: EPHESIANS 6: 2-3; JOHN 15:10-11

Our key verse for this Bible Plan has been: “Honor your father and mother”—which is the first commandment with a promise— “so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.” Ephesians 6: 2-3

So that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on earth. I’m not sure if Ruth lived to a ripe old age. But I don’t believe this verse is a promise that if we honor our parents, we are guaranteed to live to a 103. God doesn’t make transactions and petty deals with His creation.

What it does mean is that we will receive the Lord’s favor because there is blessing in obedience. Ruth was rewarded for the way she lived. She became the great-grandmother of David and was included in the genealogy of Jesus (Matthew Chapter 1).

Friends, there is blessing in living God’s way. **We honor God by honoring our parents.** I wrote this tribute to parents on my blog a few years ago, and I’d like to share it again for this devotional:

Let’s celebrate the parents of the previous generation, the parents who unflinchingly went about their tasks of building their children up, without anyone mentioning that they were, in fact, doing the hardest job in the world. They weren’t perfect. Not by a long shot. They said things they shouldn’t have. They didn’t say things they should have. But, they did what they knew. And they did what they thought best.

Let’s take a minute today to say thank you. Thank you to the parents who gave unconditionally, who listened undistractedly, who laughed unreservedly, who disciplined wisely, and who worked tirelessly to make us who we are today.

Let’s pray: *Father God, The calling to honor our parents is high and holy. We can’t ignore or dismiss it. And we simply can’t do it in our own strength. So we call on You. We thank you that when You call us, You also equip us. In Jesus’ name, Amen*