

Love Your Momma

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

Last in a six-part series

May 13, 2018

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Proverbs 2:1–5 (CEB)

My son, accept my words

and store up my commands.

² Turn your ear toward wisdom,

and stretch your mind

toward understanding.

³ Call out for insight,

and cry aloud for understanding.

⁴ Seek it like silver;

search for it like hidden treasure.

⁵ Then you will understand

the fear of the LORD,

and discover the knowledge of God.

Proverbs 15:20 (CEB)

²⁰ A wise child brings joy to a father,

but fools despise their mothers.

Luke 2:41–52 (CEB)

⁴¹ Each year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Passover Festival. ⁴² When he was 12 years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to their custom. ⁴³ After the festival was over, they were returning home, but the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents didn't know it. ⁴⁴ Supposing that he was among their band of travelers, they journeyed on for a full day while looking for him among their family and friends. ⁴⁵ When they didn't find Jesus, they returned to Jerusalem to look for him. ⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the temple. He was sitting among the teachers, listening to them and putting questions to them. ⁴⁷ Everyone who heard him was amazed by his understanding and his answers.

⁴⁸ When his parents saw him, they were shocked.

His mother said, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Listen! Your father and I have been worried. We've been looking for you!"

⁴⁹ Jesus replied, "Why were you looking for me? Didn't you know that it was necessary for me to be in my Father's house?" ⁵⁰ But they didn't understand what he said to them.

⁵¹ Jesus went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. His mother cherished every word in her heart. ⁵² Jesus matured in wisdom and years, and in favor with God and with people.

It's Mother's Day Weekend!

So we come to the end of this series, *When You Grow Up*. The theme has been to find the most important things we want to teach our children, drawing from the Bible's wisdom literature, especially the book of Proverbs. So far we've got:

- Listen to Jesus,
- Ignore Fools,
- Do the Hard Thing,
- Learn Your Bible,
- Be Like Jesus,

and this week:

- Love Your Momma

Love your mother. It sums up much that we want to teach our children about love, honor, respect, family, and more. When we remember that sacred, holy love is about what we do, much more than we say or feel, we can see that our relationship with our mother is a training ground for all the rest of life. Learn what it really means to *do love* toward your mother and you will be a long way to learning God's way. Of course, motherhood and family have changed from the biblical days. It is in the context of the ancient world that we have to consider the Bible's depictions of mothers and its teaching on the place of mothers among God's people. Lynn Cohick writes about motherhood in the first century:

Childbirth was treacherous; medical knowledge of both pregnancy and delivery could be harmlessly inexact or dangerously wrong. Given the risks, legal incentives were enacted, including freedom from tutors to those mothers who qualified by having three or four live births. The infant mortality rate was very high, thus even a successful pregnancy could not promise a healthy baby. Grief was an unwelcome but frequent guest in many homes. If the mother and child beat the odds and both lived through the delivery, either the mother or a wet nurse took over the care of the infant, assuming the father agreed to raise it. Infanticide and infant exposure were practiced to varying degrees across the centuries and among various social groups, except among Jews. . . . Roman families were generally small, due to a number of factors, including the relative health of the mother and child, as well as the family's financial situation. Poor families might not be able to feed another mouth; wealthy families might want to keep the estate together or might feel unable to sponsor several children through their political careers or to offer enough dowry in keeping with their family's prestige. If the children grew to adulthood, the mother could exercise some influence, such as finding suitable spouses or using her dowry to further her children's careers.¹

Honor your mother

The Jews had, for centuries, taught their children to honor their parents, as it was part of the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments, given by God to his people at Mt. Sinai after their flight from Egypt. The Ten Commandments can best be understood by seeing that they begin to set forth what it means to love God (the first tablet) and to love our neighbor (the second tablet).

In a way, the fifth commandment, honor your mother and father, bridges the two tablets, for honoring our parents is derived from our honoring of God. We are children of God and of our parents – we are given life by both. We are nurtured and cared for by both. We will always be God's and we will always be our parents' children. Martin Luther wrote:

If we had no father and mother, we should wish, on account of the commandments, that God would set up a block or a stone which we might call father and mother. How much more, when he has given us living parents, should we be happy to show them honor and obedience. For we know that it is highly pleasing to divine Majesty and all the angels, that it vexes all the devils, and, besides, that it is the greatest work that we can do, next to the sublime worship of God described in the previous commandments. . . . For God has exalted this estate of parents above all others; indeed, he has appointed it to be his representative on earth. (*The Large Catechism*, 26)²

Biblical stories, such as the tale of Ruth and Naomi, teach us much about the fifth commandment. This commandment, like the others, is given to God's family and is meant to shape our lives within that family. With respect to this commandment, the Apostle Paul writes, "As for children, obey your parents in the Lord, because it is right. The commandment 'Honor your father and mother' is the first one with a promise attached: 'so that things will go well for you, and you will live for a long time in the land.' As for parents, don't provoke your children to anger, but raise them with discipline and instruction about the Lord" (Ephesians 6:1-4). Thus, Paul reminds the Christians that the commandments are given to those who are "in the Lord" and need to be lived out in the light of Christ.

However, God does not command blind submissiveness to one's parents. For many Christians who desire to honor their parents, it is very hard to know what that really entails. Do we just do what they want us to do? What about when our parents grow less able to care for themselves? The well-known Old Testament scholar, Walter Brueggemann, helps us in this:

¹ Cohick, Lynn. *Women in the World of the Earliest Christians: Illuminating Ancient Ways of Life* (pp. 156-158). Baker Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

² Quoted in Hauerwas, Stanley; Willimon, William H. (2010-08-01). *The Truth About God: The Ten Commandments in Christian Life* (p. 68). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.

The fifth commandment concerns the struggle between the generations, a struggle that is inherently filled with tension (v. 12). On the one hand, there can be a kind of traditionalism that submits excessively to “the way we were.” On the other hand, there can be a one-generation narcissism that imagines nothing important happened until “us.” That intergenerational tension requires a seriousness that does not simply capitulate but that honors in freedom and response. In the angel’s announcement to Zechariah, a remarkable transposition of the relation of the generations is anticipated: “With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:17 NRSV).

Here it is not the children who submit to the parents, but the parents who are “turned” to the children. This assertion of the angel does not override Moses’ command. Rather, the two statements are in tension, and adjudication requires that both parties, parents and children, must be engaged in the process. The commandment precludes a new generation that disregards the parents and does not give them due weight. The angel’s poem precludes a blind, mechanical submissiveness of children to parents. “Honor” is a more delicate, transactive maneuver, whereby both parties grow in dignity through the process.³

This intergenerational tension Brueggemann speaks of is well illustrated in the only story we have where Mary, Jesus’ mother, is in full mother mode.

Jesus and mom

In Mary’s day, it was customary for Jewish men to go to Jerusalem at least three times a year for religious festivals. Entire families would accompany the men at least once a year for the Festival of Passover in the spring. One spring, Joseph, Mary, and their children are part of a large group of Galileans making their way to Jerusalem. The journey might have taken them ten days or more. After the festival was over, everyone headed back north to Galilee. You can picture a large group making their way up the dusty road, with packs of children and teenagers doing their own thing while the adults tend to the work of the journey. It is certainly no surprise that Mary and Joseph expected Jesus to be running around with cousins and friends. But, actually, Jesus took it upon himself to stay behind in Jerusalem.

Having raised several sons myself, I’d bet Mary and Joseph headed back to Jerusalem both anxious and angry. Sure enough, when they find Jesus, who is only twelve, at the temple, Mary angrily asks Jesus how it is that he could treat his parents in such a manner. I’m sure she didn’t know whether to be angry with him or to hug him . . . probably both. After all, it had been several days. Whether you’ve had a teenager or simply been one, most of us can identify with the parents in this story.

During the days away from his parents, Jesus amazed all the adults (Pharisees, scribes, and priests) in the temple with his understanding and his answers to their questions. But Jesus’ responses to his mother’s questions are the center of this story. Jesus wonders how she couldn’t know that it was “necessary” for him to be in “in my Father’s house” (v. 49). *Necessary*. What an interesting choice of words. Not “ought to be” or “want to be” . . . but “necessary.” Even at this young age, Jesus knew that his life would be driven by the divine imperative. He would do what he did because that would be the vocation laid out for him by God. His life would not be controlled by fate. He was not working toward some impersonal destiny. No one would coerce him into anything. He would simply *do* as he must, regardless of the consequences. God was revealing the boy’s vocation to him and Jesus would be 100% faithful to that vocation, even if it took him to death on a cross. We can only imagine the challenges this would have presented to Mary and her relationship with her son. But in a way, perhaps this story isn’t so different from the challenges faced by all mothers then and now. Happy Mother’s Day, indeed!

³ Brueggemann, W. (1994–2004). The Book of Exodus. In L. E. Keck (Ed.), *New Interpreter’s Bible* (Vol. 1, pp. 849–850). Nashville: Abingdon Press.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

The discussion questions for this study are drawn from the curriculum for our Connection Groups, which will be meeting throughout the series. The questions were written by Rev. Allison Jean.

1. How does your view of the book of Proverbs change when you consider it is a collection of wisdom from a community, rather than one single person? What other instances have you seen of communities coming together to offer wisdom or guidance in the world? How have these experiences impacted you personally? In your faith?
2. How was wisdom passed down in your family, from your parents, grandparents, aunts or uncles? When have you had an experience of passing down wisdom (this could be in your family, at work, at church, anywhere)? What was that like? Are you more comfortable receiving wisdom from others or sharing wisdom with others? Why?
3. Do you feel you have wisdom to share with others? Why or why not? Do you feel you have the ability to share wisdom with others? Why or why not?

Daily Bible Readings

This week: More on mothers

Monday, Genesis 27:1-45 The treachery in Isaac's own household; Jacob and his mother scheme to steal his brother's blessing

Tuesday, Exodus 20 The Ten Commandments

Wednesday, Mark 7:9-13 Here, Jesus lifts up the importance of honoring parents, including economic support in their declining years.

Thursday, John 19:25-27 Just before his death, Jesus gives his mother over to the care of the disciple whom Jesus loved.

Friday, Proverbs 15:20 & 20:20 Warnings about despising one's mother

Saturday, Proverbs 19:26 & 23:22 Yet more warnings!

Scott Engle's Bible Classes

Monday Evening Class

We are studying the gospel of John.

Meets from 7:00 to 8:15 in Piro Hall

Tuesday Lunchtime Class

We are studying the book of Samuel.

Meets from 11:45 to 1:00 in Piro Hall

About the weekday classes:

Join us whenever you can. Each week's lesson stands on its own. This is very "drop-in." Bring something to eat if you like. Bring a study Bible.

On occasion Scott must cancel class, so if you are coming for the first time, you can check www.scottengle.org to make sure the class is meeting.

Scott's 10:50 Sunday Class in Smith Worship Center

This is a large, lecture-oriented class open to all ages.

Our current series: *Jewish History*, with faculty from UTD's Ackerman Center for Holocaust Studies.

Beginning next week, May 20: *Razing Hell??*: We'll look at the history of hell as a Christian doctrine and consider current beliefs from several, often contentious, viewpoints.