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Chapter Twenty Two
Honor Your Father and Mother
Learning God's Ways in Relating to Authority

- 1 - God is a social being. Created in his image, I am also a social being. Through the circumstances of my birth God placed me in a specific social setting.
- 2 - My social setting includes the authority structures of family, religion, school, work, government, etc. God ordained that there be human authorities.
- 3 - God's purpose in providing these authorities is good. They offer stability, protection, preservation of collective memory and integration into broader society.
- 4 - Human authorities are established by God and to serve as extensions of his authority. To live well I must learn how to relate effectively with them.
- 5 - Of course these human authorities in my life are not entirely as God intended them to be. Like me they have been damaged by sin. This causes them to dysfunction.
- 6 - The effects of sin cause human authorities to malfunction as they exercise their authority and cause me to malfunction as I relate to their authority.
- 7 - Parents were designed by God to be my initial human authorities. Disorders in how I relate to them can set in place disorders in how I relate to other authorities.
- 8 - God made the choice as to who my parents would be. Dishonoring them will negatively affect my relationship with God. I will be unable to trust him fully.
- 9 - To mature toward wholeness I must be able to trust that my Heavenly Father has done well by me in all things, including his choice of my parents.
- 10 - We must show mercy to our parents. There are no perfect people. There are no perfect parents. There are no perfect children. As a parent I too will need mercy.
- 11 - Sometimes we can be very hard on our parents, only to discover years later that we have hurt or wronged our own children in similar ways.
- 12 - To honor my parents is not to be in denial about their imperfections. I learn to honor them in spite of imperfections—theirs and also mine.
- 13 - All human authorities are flawed. They are human! I am to honor them and respond in healing ways to their neediness. Jesus teaches me how.
- 14 - In relating with authorities, I can be wounded far more by my own wrong responses to their actions than by the wrong actions themselves.

15 - Responses that wound: anger, pay-back, evil speaking, rebellion. Responses that honor, protect and heal: patience, understanding, forgiveness, love.

16 - When feeling inner pain, I may need to admit that I sometimes do not respond in Christlike ways. I need the inner healing only Jesus can give.

17 - Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up into Christ (Ephesians 4:15). Immaturity speaks the truth in anger; maturity speaks the truth in love.

18 - Honoring my parents does not mean I must be passive in the face of habitual hurtful behaviors. I can honor them while establishing appropriate boundaries.

19 - Wise boundaries offer me protection against the hurtful behavior of others toward me, and/or my own hurtful behavior toward others.

20 - Boundaries become necessary when parents (or others) act in ways that are abusive physically, emotionally, sexually or spiritually.

21 - Establishing boundaries with parents can be sensitive, even painful. But done in God's way it can support maturing and healing for everyone.

22 - Taking appropriate initiative to prevent abuse is an act of love. "Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good" (Romans 12:9).

23 - Godly boundaries combine love and truth. We face the truth about abuse, but we don't condemn. We respond with respect, but also with wisdom.

How Can I Understand Boundaries?

24 - We often carry pain caused by past experiences, especially in personal relationships, where the underlying issues have never been resolved and healed.

25 - We may be unaware of, or misunderstand, the underlying issues. Our easiest responses are to live in denial and/or to blame others.

26 - Unresolved inner pain easily surfaces (we feel it) in specific situations. Family settings involving our parents are prime candidates.

27 - When feeling unresolved pain, there is increased likelihood that we will "act it out"—express our negative emotions in words and/or actions.

28 - Expressing unresolved pain easily takes the form of words and/or actions that are intended to retaliate—to blame, shame or condemn.

29 - Blaming, shaming and condemning are hurtful to those who experience them, but also to those who express them. They are acts of violence (Matthew 5:21-22).

30 - All this exposes the bondage sin causes. Those whose lives are ruled by unresolved pain are trapped in immaturity, unable to negotiate life effectively.

31 - Christ's way is for us to be healed and released from this cycle of destructive words and behaviors. But we may need to take intermediate steps along the way.

32 - In circumstances where harmful behaviors have a high likelihood of surfacing, it may be wise, perhaps for a season, to establish boundaries that offer protection.

How Do I Go About Setting Boundaries?

33 - We establish boundaries by making arrangements beforehand to avoid situations where, based on past experiences, hurtful behaviors are likely to surface.

34 - We respectfully tell our parents (or others) that we are choosing not to be present in such settings. We are prepared to tell them why.

35 - We do not argue. We do not defend ourselves. We do not blame or condemn. We simply communicate our decision in a respectful, honoring way.

36 - This does not mean we withdraw emotionally from a parent or anyone else. To "cut someone off" is not like God. God doesn't cut people off!

37 - It does mean that actions in the past can affect the present. Relating to other people in hurtful ways, even close family members, carries consequences.

38 - We arrange to interact with parents, or others, in settings where the likelihood of hurtful behavior is low and protective ways for responding are at hand.

39 - We keep our hearts affectionately open to our parents, but we act responsibly by taking steps to pre-empt hurtful behavior—on our part as well as theirs.

Case Study #1

40 - Whenever an adult son came home for a visit, his father would receive him warmly. But after 2-3 days the father would begin to express hostility.

41 - The father, deeply wounded in his sense of self-worth, became jealous when the mother and sisters expressed esteem for the son.

42 - The son came to realize that shorter home visits—perhaps for a meal or a 2-3 hour talk—worked fine. Hurtful behaviors took longer to surface.

43 - He related well with his father by mail and phone. He respectfully shared that when in town he would stay with friends and come home for shorter visits.

Case Study #2

44 - A daughter's out-of-town parents would come to visit and stay in her home for days. Their relationship was laced with hostility toward each other.

45 - She told them that angry outbursts toward each other were hurtful for her and asked them to stop. But anger was so normal for them; they could not recognize it.

46 - So she told her parents that, from now on, rather than the parents visiting her, she and her husband would visit them. And they would stay in a nearby motel.

47 - This allowed them to be with the parents, but excuse themselves politely and return to their motel when angry exchanges took over.

48 - The daughter had learned to honor her parents while telling them the truth and establishing a way to remove herself from abusive behavior.

49 - Anger is abusive—to those against whom it is directed, to those who express it, and to those who witness it. Nobody enjoys being around an angry person.

Case Study #3 (Other family members)

50 - A brother found that his sister would erupt in anger toward him. He knew this partially stemmed from hurtful ways he had treated her in childhood.

51 - He asked her for forgiveness, and received her assurance that she had forgiven him. Yet the outbursts of anger continued.

52 - The brother came to realize that these events typically happened in family settings, especially when their mother was present.

53 - After difficult interactions on the mother's birthday, he invited her for dinner in another city. Away from family dynamics, they shared a mutually blessed evening.

Conclusion

54 - When allowed to do so, Christ heals the pain that causes dysfunctional behavior. We don't give up on people. We trust the Lord's work in them and in us.

55 - We pray for our parents. We honor them. We keep the doors of respect and communication open. We give God time. He is making all things new.