

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Honor Your Father and Mother

Learning God's Ways in Relating to Authority

- 1 - God is a social being. I am created in his image. I am also a social being. Through the circumstances of my birth God located 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 wisdom and integration into broader society.
- 4 - Human authorities are established by God and serve as extensions of his authority. To live well I must learn how to relate effectively with them.
- 5 - Of course these human authorities are not entirely as God intended them to be. Like me they have been damaged by sin. This leads to dysfunction.
- 6 - The effects of sin cause human authorities to malfunction in exercising their authority and cause me to malfunction in relating to their authority. Pain hits pain.
- 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 chose my parents for me. 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 does not mean I must be in denial about their imperfections. I learn to honor them in spite of imperfections—theirs and mine.

13 - All human authorities are flawed. They are human! I am to honor them and respond in redemptive 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. (see Chapter 7)

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 Christ'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 and love, 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 comes to the surface (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 “hurt back”—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 only cause more pain. They don't work!

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, especially close family members, carries consequences.

38 - We arrange to interact with parents, or others, in settings where the likelihood of hurtful behavior is reduced 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 behaviors—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 her 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.

