

Ephesians 6:1-4

Theme: Worthy of honor

I don't think of myself as a scary person. I'm not intimidating. As a coach, I shouldn't even try to be because it's not me. My #5 Clifton's strength, if you're familiar, is Developer. I like to help and watch people stick to things and make progress. But I've learned that sometimes I can come across as demanding when I think I'm being just enthusiastic by saying the same thing 50 times because I really want this kid to get it. There's a line in every person that's different for every person beyond which encouragement feel like pressure. I don't know always know where the line is until I've crossed it.

You know how that goes. You weren't yelling, did use the firm parent voice with volume higher and tone flatter than usual, "WHO LEFT THEIR SHOES IN THE WALKWAY FOR ME TO TRIP OVER?! AGAIN." Then you saw it, just for a second, not back-sass, real fear. "I wasn't even that loud..." you think. But you're enormous and they're small. You've been one of the most important people defining their world since they arrived in it, so how you say something matters as much as what you say, more so even, because the way we make someone feel is remembered far longer than what we said. We don't always realize when we've stopped treating someone the way they need to be treated. We're told to love neighbor as self. Kids, little extensions of our hearts they are, included of course! They deserve to be loved immensely, in a way they'll feel. Every person is worthy of respect and in our families, honor runs in all directions. That's the setup God in mind for family relationships.

Getting specific about it in Ephesians, Paul says, "*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.*" (**Ephesians 6:1**) Notice that Paul's talking to kids directly as people in their own right. When your parents ask you to do something, they're not being mean. They're handing you skills you'll use your whole life. When they tell you how to conduct yourself, there's something worth keeping in there, even when, as you age, you learn some things not to imitate. Listen and learn. "*Honor your father and mother*" – *which is the first commandment with a promise.*" (**Ephesians 6:2**) Honor is a big word. Not just a thought, it's action. I think of the teens in Medellin, the way they greeted the older people in church and especially an elder woman we took a bus ride to visit and take communion with. They gave her hugs, kisses on the cheek, asked her how she was doing, sat next to her, and one guy held her hand for the whole devotion. Big honor. Honor doesn't always look like that, though. Honor can look like not burying a hard conversation you need to have with your parent(s), but having it with much love and respect. Honor isn't unwavering, cultish loyalty and blind obedience. It's trusting that your parents, even when painfully out of touch and outright embarrassing at times, are a gift from God and have useful things to teach so listen, care for, and yes, obey.

God blesses this. "*That it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.*" (**Ephesians 6:3**) This isn't like God's divine vending machine of obedience in, reward out. Understand it as this: honoring your parents' wisdom and the good guidance they give gives you a leg up on life, and the good habits they pass *tend* to add years to life. That's blessing. This command belongs to the kids, as love for God and love for parents. It isn't ammunition for parents to shout. A parent losing control and waiving this verse around isn't honorable.

That thought leads to the real problem this section is anticipating. Not just sinful and rebellious disobedience from kids, that's like implied and expected, but parental misuse of authority and position. The deep danger is parents who demand honor without living in a way that's worthy of it. "God says respect me, so you have to!" said angrily has in my experience and according to my observation, more often produces the opposite outcome. Better is to live in a way, as God's grace enables, worthy of respect and honor and continues to when it isn't show by addressing disrespect calmly in a restorative manner because the adult is to be what the child is unable to be. You must be the child's prefrontal cortex because

theirs is nowhere close to fully formed yet! When the child is furious, the parent stays calm, patient, understanding and fighting to stay that way, even when the kid's totally out of line! Not easy! But pouring gas on fire doesn't put it out. "*A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger,*" **Proverbs 15:1** says. And, harder to hear, "*A fool finds no pleasure in understanding but delights in airing his own opinion.*" (**Proverbs 18:2**) I'm regularly a foolish dad, not bothering or attempting to understand my kids' heart but sure letting them know my opinion.

We're stressed, overwhelmed, stretched thin enough that we're often quick to scold instead of teach, quick to criticize instead of buildup. We are, sometimes, quick to anger. And I say this not to bludgeon anyone because we're trying our best, but because it explains why honor doesn't always come easy from a kid watching a parent do the opposite of what they tell their kids. That's why it's so important for us to regulate ourselves before we attempt to regulate them. That's what it looks like to take the plank out of our own eye and show repentant humility to our children. That's what it looks like to pay them the honor they're worthy of. Nothing repairs a strained relationship and builds closeness again like a parent being quick to sincerely apologize. What an example for them to follow!

Because all parents are growing alongside their kids, this broad guidance is given in a sentence, "*Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*" (**Ephesians 6:4**) Don't move to anger. Parents have frustrated children to tears by insisting on doing things their way, killing the curiosity that builds real confidence. Leave room for children to explore, experiment, and be unabashedly themselves in your presence as you guide. Never once did Jesus treat kids as interruptions to the big important things the grown-ups were doing. He scooped em up! Showing kids they're loved and that you want them to belong sure opens up their hearts and ears to listen in all situations. As you raise them, you provide for whatever's required for physical, mental, and spiritual wellbeing. That means careful, merciful, discipline and correction aimed at formation. What's that look like? Paul Kretzmann said like a hundred years ago that parents will avoid things that will embitter, irritate, and push kids to anger, to not be too severe, or goad and tease which is likely to prevent the kid from rendering honor to the parent. He also says that parents are more likely to offend on the side of law than be too gracious. We mustn't mistake control for strength and a raised voice for authority, but model Christ as we teach him which is by far the most important thing for parents to do.

When I think about being a parent, I'm struck by two things. First, what an incredible honor it is that God would entrust two of his precious children to my care. Second, how often I'm not at all worthy of the honor. Maybe that's where you are, too. Maybe today fills you with gratitude. Maybe it's regret. Maybe it brings up wounds that still ache. Whatever your story is, your worth isn't and has never been determined by the kind of parent you have or had or the kind of parent you are or were. Your worth is determined by Jesus. From eternity, God looked at you and decided you were worth giving his Son for. Christ walked into our mess, carried our failures, our harsh words and impatience, our rebellion and shame to the cross. He walked out of the tomb with forgiveness, life, and salvation for everyone.

Out of deep respect and love for Christ, children, honor your parents. Out of the same, parents, be worthy of that honor by loving, teaching, repenting and serving. Every time you look across the house or table at one another, remember that the person looking back at you is someone Jesus thought was worth dying for. Rejoice to live accordingly. Amen.