

Are Everyone's Parents as Clueless as Mine?

Leader's Guide

Rev. Russell Herman

Part 1: Introduction

All of us are influenced by our backgrounds and experiences. Some of us have been raised in fairly “normal” homes; others have been raised in homes in which things might have been a little outside of the norm. In my own experience, I was raised in a Christian home, but not a perfect home. My parents had some pretty intense disagreements and things could get a little tense in the home. I didn’t doubt that my parents loved each other, but I would not call my home from my childhood a haven.

Things did substantially change when I was five years old. It was at this time that my mom was diagnosed with cancer and would die when I was ten years old (she was only 42). My dad tried to be a good father, but he was not a great communicator. He would eventually remarry when I was 14 years old, and so my teen years were spent with “newly-wed” parents. I love my step-mother dearly; however, she unfortunately has not always been in healthy relationships and so she interacts with others with conditional love (you need to earn and merit love and acceptance from her). All of this has not only shaped me as a person, but also can “color” my lens with regard to parenting.

Fast-forwarding many years...I am now happily married with five children that range in age from 13 to 22. I began my adult life by teaching high school social studies and mathematics for 15 years before going back to school and earning a seminary degree. During seminary and in the five years I have been a pastor, I have also worked with the youth group. So, I have been around high-schoolers the last 20 plus years as well as with my own children.

Does all this make me an expert on this topic? No, but it does give me experience and a perspective that comes from being “in the trenches.”

What matters more than my perspective is the truth of the Word of God. This will be our guide as we work through this topic. So let’s begin our journey and see how we can move to recovering healthy, God-glorifying parent-child relationships.

Leaders: *A couple of items to keep in mind:*

1. We all have unique situations and histories that will affect how we understand the truths of these lessons. It doesn’t change the truth, but it can (and often does) influence how we process and deal with the truths. If you think it might be helpful, maybe tell your own story or have some volunteers share their story as a way to break the ice or add perspective to the lessons that follow.
2. These are not meant to be lectures to young people; rather these are intended to be insights to help bring clarity and a healthy way forward with parent/child relationships.

Chapter 1: Perfection

Leaders: Over the next five lessons, we will look at Parent/Child relationships using five points: Perfection, Problem, Principles, Purpose, and Promise. Each should build on the previous lesson, so it might be necessary to review at the beginning of each lesson.

The goal of this lesson is to consider what the Bible says about the roles and responsibilities of both parents and children.

In this lesson we will answer the question: What would it look like if parents and children interacted how they ought to in a world without sin?

- In other words, what does the Bible say about the roles and responsibilities of both parents and children? What is the ideal for both?
1. Parents are to carry out their responsibilities as parents in an environment of love. Read the following passages that touch on the responsibilities of parents.
 - **Titus 2:4** – train the young women to love their husbands and children
 - **1 Timothy 5:8** – But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.
 - **Proverbs 1:8** – Hear, my son, your father’s instruction, and forsake not your mother’s teaching.
 - **Proverbs 13:1** – A wise son hears his father’s instruction, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.
 - **Proverbs 22:6** – Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.
 - **Deuteronomy 6:6-7** – These words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children,
 - **Ephesians 6:4** – Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.
 - **Proverbs 13:24** – Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.
 - **Hebrews 12:6-11** – For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives. It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are the responsibilities of parents from each passage?
2. Can you put these into three main categories of responsibilities?

Leaders: Take the time to go through each of the passages and maybe highlight the responsibilities you find. As far as the three main categories, here are the three I came up with: 1) Provide for their needs; 2) Provide instruction and teaching; and 3) Provide discipline.

Parents have their authority and responsibilities from God. They are to love their children by providing for them physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. They are to teach them to think Biblically about God and all things. In addition, they are to provide discipline, structure, guidance, and restraint. Depending on the situation, this will be done using encouragement, reproof or chastisement/punishment.

2. Now let's turn to the responsibilities of children. Read the following passages concerning the responsibilities of children.
 - **Colossians 3:20** – Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.
 - **Ephesians 6:1–2** – Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise).

Discussion Questions:

1. What are the responsibilities of children from each passage?
2. Can you put these into two main categories of responsibilities?

Leaders: Once again take time to go through the passages and note the responsibilities of children (these should be a little more straightforward than the ones for the parents). As far as the two main categories, I came up with: 1) Honor; and 2) Obey.

Let's look briefly at both these responsibilities.

First, to obey. Obey comes from the Greek word *hupakouo* which is a compound word. The first part - *hupa* – means to be under; while the second part - *akouo* – means to listen or to hear. So, it means a child is to listen (*akouo*) to their parent's instruction with the intent of obeying because they are under (*hupa*) their parent's authority.

Second, to honor. This means to show respect and submission to another. Matthew Henry writes that “honor is an inward esteem outwardly expressed upon all occasions.” In other words, honor begins in our hearts and minds and is then manifested in our attitudes, words, and actions.

Discussion Questions:

1. How often do you *truly listen* to your parents with the express purpose of obeying them?
2. How does this understanding of obey and honor help with regard to your responsibility to your parents?

*Leaders: Hopefully students will begin to wrestle with the fact that since God has placed them under their parents then obedience cannot be taken lightly. They are called to **truly** listen and then obey. Acknowledge the difficulty of this but encourage them to take to heart the words of Matthew Henry that honor begins within and then is manifested outwardly. This means that honor is really a gospel issue, not simply about trying harder.*

Conclusion:

So, here’s the issue – in all of eternity, there has only been one perfect parent and only one perfect child; and this hasn’t been anyone in this room – it is God the Father and Jesus the Son. So, what does this mean for the rest of us who are not perfect? This is what we will look at in our next lesson.

Chapter 2: Problem

Leaders: The goal of this lesson is to consider what causes parent/child relations to break down and be so difficult.

As Reformed believers we take seriously what the Bible teaches; that “all have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God.” We know that sin now permeates everything – doctrine referred to as “total depravity” (that people are not naturally good; in fact, they are not even pretty good). Remember, this is not saying that we are all as bad as we can be; but that sin affects everything – our thoughts, attitudes, hearts, emotions, and – what we are concerned about today – our relationships.

By nature, we are selfish (Augustine said that we are *turned/curved inward on one selves*; a theological phrase describing a life lived “inward” for oneself rather than “outward” for God and others. Martin Luther expounded on this in his *Lectures on Romans* and described this state as: “Our nature, by the corruption of the first sin, [being] so deeply curved in on itself that it not only bends the best gifts of God towards itself and enjoys them, or rather even uses God himself in order to attain these gifts, but it also fails to realize that it so wickedly, curvedly, and viciously seeks all things, even God, for its own sake.”

What this means is that in relationships, this tends to make us demanding instead of kind; jealous instead of grateful; arrogant instead of humble; and it means we take without giving.

This sinful self-centeredness seems to manifest itself in distinct ways in parents and children (both struggle with different “sins”). We will begin with parents.

Parents tend to struggle in two main ways/areas:

1. Abuse of Authority

- The tendency is to take what God has given as a gift to be used for the good of their children (authority) and to use it to be self-serving. This is probably why Paul speaks of fathers not “provoking their children.”

2. Idolatry (driven by pride)

- Parents can make idols of their children or of their parenting. This can make them overly concerned about their reputation and/or image – want to be seen as a “good” or “successful” parent. It can also mean that they get their identity/worth from their children (accomplishments). It can also mean that they relive their childhood vicariously through their children.
- They can also make an idol out of the control or authority that they possess (relates back to #1).

Discussion Questions:

1. Does the fact that parents have their own issues with their own sinful tendencies help? If yes, how does it help you?
2. Have you seen some of these tendencies in your parents or in parents in general?

***Leaders:** Considerable wisdom and discernment is necessary with these questions. The point is not to create a gripe-fest, but to get young people to think of the brokenness involved in parent/child relationships and that it is unfortunately not unique or uncommon. This is also an opportunity to remind your young people that all people are sinners and so all relationships will contain some “brokenness.” This is not meant to be something that is a discouragement, but a call to live out God’s calling to be humble and patient with those we are called to interact with.*

2. Children tend to struggle in three main ways/areas:

- 1. Struggle with Submission**

- Obeying and honoring
- Accepting instruction and discipline

- 2. Condescending Spirit**

- Develop a proud, condescending attitude towards parents; this usually manifests itself in being disrespectful
- Begin to think that parents don’t know anything
- This is normally when teens roll their eyes, shake their heads with disgust or have exasperated sighs.

- 3. Selfishness**

- Strong sense of entitlement (live as if there is a Christian Declaration of Independence – that we are endowed with certain inalienable rights)
- Usually manifests itself in ingratitude – believe we should have more (stuff, rights, etc.) or we can become dissatisfied with what we do have.

Discussion Questions:

1. Which do you struggle with the most? Why is this so area so difficult for you?
2. When in the midst of a situation when you are manifesting one of these tendencies, do you realize it? If yes, why do you think you still persist in doing it?

Leaders: Answers will vary but try hard to have them be specific in their responses so that they truly struggle with some of their own areas of growth. There truly cannot be any growth or needed changes without some introspection. On the second question, push your young people to grapple with what is going on in their heart and will during these moments.

3. One other problem we should talk about and recognize. In normal development:
 - Born 100% dependent on our parents. Goal should be to become 0% dependent on parents.
 - The problem is the transition – parents have trouble giving control away/children tend to take it too quickly (some refuse to embrace the transition).
 - Born 100% dependent on God (0% awareness). Continue 100% dependent on God (Develop to 100% awareness).

So, where do we go from here? What principles can help us navigate these relationships?



The thick line is how fast parents think children should get to 0% dependent; the thin line is how fast children think it should take to get to 0% dependent.

Discussion Questions:

1. Does this help you understand some of the tensions in your teen years with your parents?

2. What can you do with this information that will be beneficial and helpful?

***Leaders:** Your teens will be all over the board on the first question. The reason is that parents and teens vary greatly in this area. Some parents have a healthy approach to enabling and equipping their children in moving towards adulthood; some never can quite bring themselves to cut the umbilical cord. This also can vary with young people. Some don't want to move towards independence while others have been pushing for independence way before they are ready. Allow for healthy conversation, but continually bring it back to the question of "how does this help with understanding some of the tensions?"*

Also, remind your young people that they are not gaining insights to use as weapons in a battle but as tools to help to build healthy relationships.

Conclusion:

So, where do we go from here? What principles can help us navigate these relationships? This is what we will cover in our next lesson.

Chapter 3: Principles

***Leaders:** Review the ideals from Chapter 1 – what God has commanded. It would be helpful to especially focus on the expectations and responsibilities for young people (to honor and to obey). The goal of this lesson is to give practical principles to help young people live according to the calling of God upon their lives.*

So now the question is, how? What does this look like in the practical details of life to live out honor and obedience? In our time today we will look at five principles.

1. Recognize the need for discipline, training and instruction.

- All of us are born foolish and faulty; we all are in the need for wisdom and instruction.
- More than 2 dozen times in Proverbs the reader is urged to “listen.”
- Whether we want to admit it or not, our parents have knowledge, wisdom and experience and we, as teenagers, have the need for it.
- All of us need boundaries. It is good to be reminded that God gives us rules and boundaries that are for our good.
- Sometimes teens bristle at rules set for them; view it as a lack of trust (technology, dress, outings with friends, etc. From last lesson we know that sometimes rules can be a control issue for parents or they can be made out of fear. But most of the time boundaries are done out of love (true, sometimes parents forget that creating boundaries doesn’t mean eliminating the opportunity to disobey – parents should not micro-manage and dictate every aspect of the lives of their children and remove opportunities for struggle and growth).
- But if you wonder about a rule or think that there is a lack of trust; communicate this respectfully to your parents.
- In addition, it is actually ok to thank your parent for rules and even ask them for boundaries/rules/expectations.
 - ~ Parents can be a resource and help in relationships and other major decisions.
 - ~ Parents can be helpful in setting up guidelines and rules for technology.
- Unfortunately, undisciplined youth tend to become undisciplined adults who struggle submitting to God and His commands
- Supplement if necessary - Godly adults, Bible (esp. Proverbs)
 - ~ Study the lives of godly adults
 - ~ Be a student of the Word of God
 - ~ Seek to always apply the truth of the Word

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you see a need for discipline and boundaries from parents (or adults in your life)?

Leaders: It might be extremely helpful when addressing the first question on the need for boundaries to explain the ongoing need for boundaries in your own life and specifically list the boundaries that are in place in your workplace, home, church, Christian life, etc. Maybe if they know that this is part of life and not a negative side-effect of being a teenager that might help.

2. Respond to the quote from Paul Tripp – “Most teenagers simply don’t have a hunger for wisdom (last point). In fact, most think they are much wiser than they actually are, and they mistakenly believe that their parents have little practical insight to offer. They tend to think that their parents ‘don’t really understand’ or are ‘pretty much out of it.’ Yet most teenagers sorely lack wisdom and desperately need loving, biblical, and faithfully dispensed correction.”

Leaders: With the Paul Tripp quote, specifically watch for how your young people even physically respond (do they bristle, nod their heads, shake their heads, roll their eyes, etc.).

3. Have you ever tried to have a conversation with your parents about a rule/boundary that you were concerned about? If so, how did it go?

Leaders: On the third question, it might be helpful to role play with a couple of leaders what a healthy conversation might look like. Sometimes young people are not meaning to be disrespectful, but they have not been given adequate training on how to have some of these more “adult” conversations.

2. Pray for a humble and teachable spirit

- It’s one thing to know we need instruction and discipline; it is quite another to be willing to take it (to be teachable and willing to receive correction from our parents).
- You have to be willing to admit you need help which takes humility. It is not admitting weakness, it is actually what allows people to grow in any area or pursuit (learning, athletics, music, etc.).

Discussion Question:

1. How teachable do you think you are? How about teens in general?

Leaders: Remember, throughout we have been saying that it should not feel as if young people are being targeted or being lectured. These are moments for them to be reflective so try not to jump in too quickly (or at all). Allow them to talk through this and engage with each other. Maybe the most helpful thing you can do is to continue to encourage specific examples in the dialogue.

3. Embrace true obedience

- In our home, obedience must be right away, all the way, and cheerfully.
- Remember, a parent’s authority is God given; it is a positive thing.
- This means to disobey our parents is to disobey God.
- I know that not every parent is a godly and compassionate authority, and not every parent wants their child to follow Jesus. For the teenagers who are struggling to obey in those kinds of situations, let me encourage you with this plain but painful truth – by submitting to your parents, you are submitting to God.
- But always remember this, we are to obey our parents as much as we can – until you reach a point where you are asked to sin. Your obedience must stop there but not before. Obedience to parents is always subordinate to obedience to God.

Discussion Questions:

1. Have you heard of obedience as right away, all the way and cheerfully before? Do you agree with this framing? Why or why not? Which is the hardest of those three and why?
2. How do we know when to not give obedience to our parents?

Leaders: This is simply how we raised our own children. Maybe you have other phrases – maybe your young people do as well. On the second question there will be a need for sensitivity due to the fact that you might have children who are in an abusive situation and so you will need to be careful and continually be aware of cues being given. It also might be helpful to offer to talk with those that find themselves in that hard situation at a later time.

4. Truly know, honor, and love our parents

- Your parents are real people who have dreams, desires, fears, personalities, and plans. They have interests, activities, and responsibilities that have very little to nothing to do with you and that is ok (even good). You are not, and should not expect to be, the center of their world [you are not the sun that they and everything else revolves around].
- There is also a need to spend time with them (refuse to live life holed up in your room or on technology) – communicate with them. Find out what they like and dislike; what makes them tick.
- Your parents are also due honor and this means that you refuse to be disrespectful or manipulative.

- Also, you need to show honor because of the office they hold; not because of their personality, virtues or parental skills. In other words, they do not need to earn honor. This also means you will need to learn to distinguish between their position and them as a person.
- But you should also strive to love them in spite of their issues. Pray for them, laugh with them, encourage them, and be understanding.

Discussion Questions:

1. How well do you know your parents? Does this have an effect on how you love them?

2. For those in situations where your parents make honor difficult because of their personality, lack of virtue, or faulty parental skills, what can you do to still show honor to them because of their position?

***Leaders:** In many families, unfortunately they are not truly spending any quality time together. Remind them that being in the same location is not the same thing as spending quality time together (think of the example of a couple out on a “date” and they sit in a restaurant on their own phones but never talking to each other – they are with each other but not really). Have them think about specific things they can do that would help them spend time with their parents and get to know them better. Once again, the second question will take considerable wisdom and discernment; try to have them minimize the reasons why honor is difficult and focus on the steps that they can take in showing honor.*

For me personally, I have been under coaches and bosses that I did not respect as people but knew that this could not affect whether I listened to them or my attitude towards them. I realized that I could not control them (how they behaved and how they “led”), but I could control my attitude and responses. God places people in positions of leadership and so I viewed my obedience and honor I was showing these individuals to be what I was showing to God who had placed them over me (sometimes for reasons I never knew).

5. See the teen years as years of growth and opportunity

- Teen years are the final years of transitioning into a productive God-honoring life as an adult.
- I understand that these are not easy years – actually I believe them to be quite challenging years – full of insecurity and change.
- But change is a process that should be embraced.
- Maturing into an adult can be done with grace and wisdom.
- Refuse to buy into the cultural mindset that these have to be years of anger, bitterness and rebellion.
- Instead, embrace the idea that these can be years of joy and delight.

Discussion Question:

1. Do you believe the things said in this section or is it simply unrealistic idealism?

***Leaders:** Be sure to acknowledge the second bullet; these are hard years and can be challenging. However, this does not mean that they need to be years that are feared and that simply have to be “endured.” God wants His children to thrive in all times and circumstances of life (think of the book of Philippians). Really work to have your young people see this reality.*

Chapter 4: Purpose

Leaders: The goal of this section is help young people realize that there is more to the teen years than survival. That their relationship with their parents serves a higher purpose.

The great purpose of our lives is to glorify God. We can do that in a number of ways; in this context of how we live in our relationship with our parents, we will look at three.

1. To have our identity in God and live life in reference to Him

- Remember, we have been made by Him, we belong to Him, and are called to live for His glory.
- This means that we must know who He is, what He has done, and what He wants us to be and do. The primary way to do this is to know the Word and live by the Spirit.
- It is not about willing ourselves into doing the right thing (trying harder); it is through the power of the gospel.
- It is about being found in Jesus Christ and having Him work in and through us (through His Word and His Spirit).
- This also means that we must use the Scripture as the lens for how we view ourselves, relationships, possessions, morality, leisure, learning, knowledge, the past, the future, love, hate, right and wrong, good and evil, success and failure – everything.
- We need a Biblical self-awareness
 - ~ Examine ourselves by the Word of God
 - ~ Know our weaknesses
 - ~ Remember that we are in a spiritual battle
 - ~ Remember Ephesians 6:1-9 proceeds Ephesians 6:10-18

Discussion Question:

1. What are some practical ways to apply the truths from this section? Why is “try harder” not the answer?

Leaders: Often times young people are looking for a “silver bullet” that will instantly make their lives better. This is not the case in our Christian life; God works sanctification often very slowly and always through His Word and Spirit. This means that there are no shortcuts to a life of growth. So, encourage your young people to continuously make investments in the spiritual lives through daily time in God’s Word.

2. Become more like Jesus Christ (grow in sanctification).

- We are to think and act like Jesus; mainly this would be in reflecting His relationship with His heavenly Father in our relationships with our parents. That means that just as Jesus was willing to submit to the will of His father, we are to submit our wills to our parents.
- That we live so that it isn't about me getting my way; that life is not about me and my desires – it is about esteeming others before ourselves. Another way to say this is that we truly live out 1 Corinthians 13.
- The other way to talk about this is through the “put off-put on” principle of the Bible. We will put off behaviors, attitudes, and actions that are not consistent with the character of God (that the Bible speaks of as “being of the flesh”) and we will put on behaviors, attitudes, and actions that are Spirit produced (the fruit of the Spirit – which is the Spirit of Christ).

Discussion Question:

1. What are some things you need to put off and things that you need to put on specifically that can help in your relationship with your parents?

Leaders: Submission is not easy. If you are willing, talk of your own ongoing struggles with this in your relationships (with God or on the horizontal plane).

It might be helpful to remind the teens you are working with that sometimes the things we need to “put off” are not always evil or immoral. There are things in each of our lives that are not “bad” but simply we are giving too much importance, significance, affection, or time to (this would put it in the category of an idol).

3. Make the gospel attractive

- The brokenness of parent/teen relationships that exists throughout society means that if we truly embrace God's will in our relationship with our parents then we will be providing a wonderful witness to the world about the power of the gospel.
- Do you really think people wouldn't notice if you and your parents truly loved one another? You don't think they would notice if your parents provided loving care, instruction, and discipline and you responded with true Biblical obedience and honor?
- People would notice and people would wonder about it and people would ask. This would allow you (or your parents) to bear testimony to the power of the gospel – the transformative power of grace that makes that type of healthy relationship possible.

Discussion Question:

1. Have you ever given any thought that your relationship with your parents can be a means of evangelism (of making the gospel attractive)? What do you think about this idea/thought?

Chapter 5: Promise

Leaders: God graciously also gives a promise (reward) for doing what we ought to do. Stress God's goodness in rewarding the grace He gives in our lives. The goal is to end with the entire teaching on the goodness and graciousness of God. This will be a good opportunity in bringing everything together for your young people.

Ephesians 6:2-3 – “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.”

1. Paul says that if we truly honor our parents, it will go “well with us.” This is actually true of all of God's commands; if we follow what he has laid out in his decreed will it is always best.

Discussion Questions:

1. What does “go well with” you mean?

Leaders: What God is saying is that obedience to parents will be rewarded; specifically, here He is saying with long life in the land. This relates, at least in part, to the covenant blessings and curses we read about in Deuteronomy 28.

Often times the idea of rewards can make Christians uncomfortable; however, it is a teaching that permeates the NT. It is true that rewards are not to be our primary motivation for obedience, but it is a legitimate reason none-the-less.

2. Do you truly believe that what God commands is always best?

Leaders: This is really a question to try and expose what is in the hearts of your teens. Do they truly trust God? How do they view Him? As an authoritarian who wants to ruin their fun or as a gracious, loving, heavenly Father who desires what is best for His people?

2. But the promise is not simply that it will “go well.” If you truly desire to please God and obey him with regard to your relationship with your parents, God will honor that desire and will equip you for the task.

Now, this doesn't mean it will be easy. What I can say is that God will provide the strength, grace, and support necessary for you to live for Him in obedience to His Word. And the wonderful reality is, that as you seek to obey and honor your parents, God will be honored and obeyed at the same time. So, now the hard part. Implementing all that we learned...

Discussion Questions:

1. What do you see as the biggest obstacle to implementing these things?
2. What gives you the most encouragement and hope?

***Leaders:** So, this is when you are tying everything together. Each young person comes with their own unique story and circumstances; allow answers to be as different as the situations. Some obstacles will be quite small (thanks be to God that He has wonderful, healthy, intact families with very little tension) while others will seem insurmountable. Be sensitive to these differences and pray for wisdom for addressing these differences that do not create pride on the one hand and despair on the other. Continually remind them of God's sovereignty and wisdom in orchestrating in all our circumstances. This is where Romans 8:28 must be more than a cliché but a truth that we embrace about God's goodness to His people in spite of our inability to sometimes understand.*

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Student Questions

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Part 1: Introduction

All of us are influenced by our backgrounds and experiences. Some of us have been raised in fairly “normal” homes; others have been raised in homes in which things might have been a little outside of the norm. In my own experience, I was raised in a Christian home, but not a perfect home. My parents had some pretty intense disagreements and things could get a little tense in the home. I didn’t doubt that my parents loved each other, but I would not call my home from my childhood a haven.

Things did substantially change when I was five years old. It was at this time that my mom was diagnosed with cancer and would die when I was ten years old (she was only 42). My dad tried to be a good father, but he was not a great communicator. He would eventually remarry when I was 14 years old, and so my teen years were spent with “newly-wed” parents. I love my step-mother dearly; however, she unfortunately has not always been in healthy relationships and so she interacts with others with conditional love (you need to earn and merit love and acceptance from her). All of this has not only shaped me as a person, but also can “color” my lens with regard to parenting.

Fast-forwarding many years...I am now happily married with five children that range in age from 13 to 22. I began my adult life by teaching high school social studies and mathematics for 15 years before going back to school and earning a seminary degree. During seminary and in the five years I have been a pastor, I have also worked with the youth group. So, I have been around high-schoolers the last 20 plus years as well as with my own children.

Does all this make me an expert on this topic? No, but it does give me experience and a perspective that comes from being “in the trenches.”

What matters more than my perspective is the truth of the Word of God. This will be our guide as we work through this topic. So let’s begin our journey and see how we can move to recovering healthy, God-glorifying parent-child relationships.

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In this lesson we will answer the question: What would it look like if parents and children interacted how they ought to in a world without sin?

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 - **Proverbs 13:1** – A wise son hears his father’s instruction, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.
 - **Proverbs 22:6** – Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.
 - **Deuteronomy 6:6-7** – These words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children,
 - **Ephesians 6:4** – Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.
 - **Proverbs 13:24** – Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.
 - **Hebrews 12:6-11** – For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives. It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Discussion Questions:

1. What are the responsibilities of parents from each passage?
2. Can you put these into three main categories of responsibilities?

Parents have their authority and responsibilities from God. They are to love their children by providing for them physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. They are to teach them to think Biblically about God and all things. In addition, they are to provide discipline, structure, guidance, and restraint. Depending on the situation, this will be done using encouragement, reproof or chastisement/punishment.

2. Now let's turn to the responsibilities of children. Read the following passages concerning the responsibilities of children.

- **Colossians 3:20** – Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.
- **Ephesians 6:1–2** – Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise).

Discussion Questions:

1. What are the responsibilities of children from each passage?

2. Can you put these into two main categories of responsibilities?

Let's look briefly at both these responsibilities.

First, to obey. Obey comes from the Greek word *hupakouo* which is a compound word. The first part - *hupa* – means to be under; while the second part - *akouo* – means to listen or to hear. So, it means a child is to listen (*akouo*) to their parent's instruction with the intent of obeying because they are under (*hupa*) their parent's authority.

Second, to honor. This means to show respect and submission to another. Matthew Henry writes that “honor is an inward esteem outwardly expressed upon all occasions.” In other words, honor begins in our hearts and minds and is then manifested in our attitudes, words, and actions.

Discussion Questions:

1. How often do you *truly listen* to your parents with the express purpose of obeying them?

2. How does this understanding of obey and honor help with regard to your responsibility to your parents?

Conclusion:

So, here's the issue – in all of eternity, there has only been one perfect parent and only one perfect child; and this hasn't been anyone in this room – it is God the Father and Jesus the Son. So, what does this mean for the rest of us who are not perfect? This is what we will look at in our next lesson.

Chapter 2: Problem

As Reformed believers we take seriously what the Bible teaches; that “all have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God.” We know that sin now permeates everything – doctrine referred to as “total depravity” (that people are not naturally good; in fact, they are not even pretty good). Remember, this is not saying that we are all as bad as we can be; but that sin affects everything – our thoughts, attitudes, hearts, emotions, and – what we are concerned about today – our relationships.

By nature, we are selfish (Augustine said that we are *turned/curved inward on one selves*; a theological phrase describing a life lived “inward” for oneself rather than “outward” for God and others. Martin Luther expounded on this in his *Lectures on Romans* and described this state as: “Our nature, by the corruption of the first sin, [being] so deeply curved in on itself that it not only bends the best gifts of God towards itself and enjoys them, or rather even uses God himself in order to attain these gifts, but it also fails to realize that it so wickedly, curvedly, and viciously seeks all things, even God, for its own sake.”

What this means is that in relationships, this tends to make us demanding instead of kind; jealous instead of grateful; arrogant instead of humble; and it means we take without giving.

This sinful self-centeredness seems to manifest itself in distinct ways in parents and children (both struggle with different “sins”). We will begin with parents.

Parents tend to struggle in two main ways/areas:

1. Abuse of Authority

- The tendency is to take what God has given as a gift to be used for the good of their children (authority) and to use it to be self-serving. This is probably why Paul speaks of fathers not “provoking their children.”

2. Idolatry (driven by pride)

- Parents can make idols of their children or of their parenting. This can make them overly concerned about their reputation and/or image – want to be seen as a “good” or “successful” parent. It can also mean that they get their identity/worth from their children (accomplishments). It can also mean that they relive their childhood vicariously through their children.
- They can also make an idol out of the control or authority that they possess (relates back to #1).

Discussion Questions:

1. Does the fact that parents have their own issues with their own sinful tendencies help? If yes, how does it help you?

2. Have you seen some of these tendencies in your parents or in parents in general?

2. Children tend to struggle in three main ways/areas:
 1. **Struggle with Submission**
 - Obeying and honoring
 - Accepting instruction and discipline

 2. **Condescending Spirit**
 - Develop a proud, condescending attitude towards parents; this usually manifests itself in being disrespectful
 - Begin to think that parents don't know anything
 - This is normally when teens roll their eyes, shake their heads with disgust or have exasperated sighs.

 3. **Selfishness**
 - Strong sense of entitlement (live as if there is a Christian Declaration of Independence – that we are endowed with certain inalienable rights)
 - Usually manifests itself in ingratitude – believe we should have more (stuff, rights, etc.) or we can become dissatisfied with what we do have.

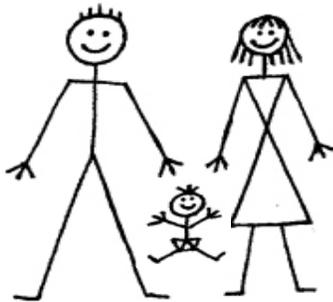
Discussion Questions:

1. Which do you struggle with the most? Why is this so area so difficult for you?

2. When in the midst of a situation when you are manifesting one of these tendencies, do you realize it? If yes, why do you think you still persist in doing it?

3. One other problem we should talk about and recognize. In normal development:
- Born 100% dependent on our parents. Goal should be to become 0% dependent on parents.
 - The problem is the transition – parents have trouble giving control away/children tend to take it too quickly (some refuse to embrace the transition).
 - Born 100% dependent on God (0% awareness). Continue 100% dependent on God (Develop to 100% awareness).

So, where do we go from here? What principles can help us navigate these relationships?



The thick line is how fast parents think children should get to 0% dependent; the thin line is how fast children think it should take to get to 0% dependent.

Discussion Questions:

1. Does this help you understand some of the tensions in your teen years with your parents?
2. What can you do with this information that will be beneficial and helpful?

Conclusion:

So, where do we go from here? What principles can help us navigate these relationships? This is what we will cover in our next lesson.

Chapter 3: Principles

So now the question is, how? What does this look like in the practical details of life to live out honor and obedience? In our time today we will look at five principles.

1. Recognize the need for discipline, training and instruction.

- All of us are born foolish and faulty; we all are in the need for wisdom and instruction.
- More than 2 dozen times in Proverbs the reader is urged to “listen.”
- Whether we want to admit it or not, our parents have knowledge, wisdom and experience and we, as teenagers, have the need for it.
- All of us need boundaries. It is good to be reminded that God gives us rules and boundaries that are for our good.
- Sometimes teens bristle at rules set for them; view it as a lack of trust (technology, dress, outings with friends, etc. From last lesson we know that sometimes rules can be a control issue for parents or they can be made out of fear. But most of the time boundaries are done out of love (true, sometimes parents forget that creating boundaries doesn’t mean eliminating the opportunity to disobey – parents should not micro-manage and dictate every aspect of the lives of their children and remove opportunities for struggle and growth).
- But if you wonder about a rule or think that there is a lack of trust; communicate this respectfully to your parents.
- In addition, it is actually ok to thank your parent for rules and even ask them for boundaries/rules/expectations.
 - ~ Parents can be a resource and help in relationships and other major decisions.
 - ~ Parents can be helpful in setting up guidelines and rules for technology.
- Unfortunately, undisciplined youth tend to become undisciplined adults who struggle submitting to God and His commands
- Supplement if necessary - Godly adults, Bible (esp. Proverbs)
 - ~ Study the lives of godly adults
 - ~ Be a student of the Word of God
 - ~ Seek to always apply the truth of the Word

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you see a need for discipline and boundaries from parents (or adults in your life)?

2. Respond to the quote from Paul Tripp – “Most teenagers simply don’t have a hunger for wisdom (last point). In fact, most think they are much wiser than they actually are, and they mistakenly believe that their parents have little practical insight to offer. They tend to think that their parents ‘don’t really understand’ or are ‘pretty much out of it.’ Yet most teenagers sorely lack wisdom and desperately need loving, biblical, and faithfully dispensed correction.”

3. Have you ever tried to have a conversation with your parents about a rule/boundary that you were concerned about? If so, how did it go?

2. Pray for a humble and teachable spirit

- It’s one thing to know we need instruction and discipline; it is quite another to be willing to take it (to be teachable and willing to receive correction from our parents).
- You have to be willing to admit you need help which takes humility. It is not admitting weakness, it is actually what allows people to grow in any area or pursuit (learning, athletics, music, etc.).

Discussion Question:

1. How teachable do you think you are? How about teens in general?

3. Embrace true obedience

- In our home, obedience must be right away, all the way, and cheerfully.
- Remember, a parent’s authority is God given; it is a positive thing.
- This means to disobey our parents is to disobey God.
- I know that not every parent is a godly and compassionate authority, and not every parent wants their child to follow Jesus. For the teenagers who are struggling to obey in those kinds of situations, let me encourage you with this plain but painful truth – by submitting to your parents, you are submitting to God.
- But always remember this, we are to obey our parents as much as we can – until you reach a point where you are asked to sin. Your obedience must stop there but not before. Obedience to parents is always subordinate to obedience to God.

Discussion Questions:

1. Have you heard of obedience as right away, all the way and cheerfully before? Do you agree with this framing? Why or why not? Which is the hardest of those three and why?
2. How do we know when to not give obedience to our parents?

4. Truly know, honor, and love our parents

- Your parents are real people who have dreams, desires, fears, personalities, and plans. They have interests, activities, and responsibilities that have very little to nothing to do with you and that is ok (even good). You are not, and should not expect to be, the center of their world [you are not the sun that they and everything else revolves around].
- There is also a need to spend time with them (refuse to live life holed up in your room or on technology) – communicate with them. Find out what they like and dislike; what makes them tick.
- Your parents are also due honor and this means that you refuse to be disrespectful or manipulative.
- Also, you need to show honor because of the office they hold; not because of their personality, virtues or parental skills. In other words, they do not need to earn honor. This also means you will need to learn to distinguish between their position and them as a person.
- But you should also strive to love them in spite of their issues. Pray for them, laugh with them, encourage them, and be understanding.

Discussion Questions:

1. How well do you know your parents? Does this have an effect on how you love them?
2. For those in situations where your parents make honor difficult because of their personality, lack of virtue, or faulty parental skills, what can you do to still show honor to them because of their position?

5. See the teen years as years of growth and opportunity

- Teen years are the final years of transitioning into a productive God-honoring life as an adult.
- I understand that these are not easy years – actually I believe them to be quite challenging years – full of insecurity and change.
- But change is a process that should be embraced.
- Maturing into an adult can be done with grace and wisdom.
- Refuse to buy into the cultural mindset that these have to be years of anger, bitterness and rebellion.
- Instead, embrace the idea that these can be years of joy and delight.

Discussion Question:

1. Do you believe the things said in this section or is it simply unrealistic idealism?

Chapter 4: Purpose

The great purpose of our lives is to glorify God. We can do that in a number of ways; in this context of how we live in our relationship with our parents, we will look at three.

1. To have our identity in God and live life in reference to Him

- Remember, we have been made by Him, we belong to Him, and are called to live for His glory.
- This means that we must know who He is, what He has done, and what He wants us to be and do. The primary way to do this is to know the Word and live by the Spirit.
- It is not about willing ourselves into doing the right thing (trying harder); it is through the power of the gospel.
- It is about being found in Jesus Christ and having Him work in and through us (through His Word and His Spirit).
- This also means that we must use the Scripture as the lens for how we view ourselves, relationships, possessions, morality, leisure, learning, knowledge, the past, the future, love, hate, right and wrong, good and evil, success and failure – everything.
- We need a Biblical self-awareness
 - ~ Examine ourselves by the Word of God
 - ~ Know our weaknesses
 - ~ Remember that we are in a spiritual battle
 - ~ Remember Ephesians 6:1-9 proceeds Ephesians 6:10-18

Discussion Question:

1. What are some practical ways to apply the truths from this section? Why is “try harder” not the answer?

2. Become more like Jesus Christ (grow in sanctification).

- We are to think and act like Jesus; mainly this would be in reflecting His relationship with His heavenly Father in our relationships with our parents. That means that just as Jesus was willing to submit to the will of His father, we are to submit our wills to our parents.
- That we live so that it isn't about me getting my way; that life is not about me and my desires – it is about esteeming others before ourselves. Another way to say this is that we truly live out 1 Corinthians 13.
- The other way to talk about this is through the “put off-put on” principle of the Bible. We will put off behaviors, attitudes, and actions that are not consistent with the character of God (that the Bible speaks of as “being of the flesh”) and we will put on behaviors, attitudes, and actions that are Spirit produced (the fruit of the Spirit – which is the Spirit of Christ).

Discussion Question:

1. What are some things you need to put off and things that you need to put on specifically that can help in your relationship with your parents?

3. Make the gospel attractive

- The brokenness of parent/teen relationships that exists throughout society means that if we truly embrace God's will in our relationship with our parents then we will be providing a wonderful witness to the world about the power of the gospel.
- Do you really think people wouldn't notice if you and your parents truly loved one another? You don't think they would notice if your parents provided loving care, instruction, and discipline and you responded with true Biblical obedience and honor?
- People would notice and people would wonder about it and people would ask. This would allow you (or your parents) to bear testimony to the power of the gospel – the transformative power of grace that makes that type of healthy relationship possible.

Discussion Question:

1. Have you ever given any thought that your relationship with your parents can be a means of evangelism (of making the gospel attractive)? What do you think about this idea/thought?

Chapter 5: Promise

Ephesians 6:2-3 – “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.”

1. Paul says that if we truly honor our parents, it will go “well with us.” This is actually true of all of God’s commands; if we follow what he has laid out in his decreed will it is always best.

Discussion Questions:

1. What does “go well with” you mean?
2. Do you truly believe that what God commands is always best?
2. But the promise is not simply that it will “go well.” If you truly desire to please God and obey him with regard to your relationship with your parents, God will honor that desire and will equip you for the task.

Now, this doesn’t mean it will be easy. What I can say is that God will provide the strength, grace, and support necessary for you to live for Him in obedience to His Word. And the wonderful reality is, that as you seek to obey and honor your parents, God will be honored and obeyed at the same time. So, now the hard part. Implementing all that we learned...

Discussion Questions:

1. What do you see as the biggest obstacle to implementing these things?
2. What gives you the most encouragement and hope?