

“Looking to the Future Without Losing Your Soul”

Theme: Values and Yearnings - The Keys to Life

Sermon Scripture: Proverbs 22:6; Mark 10:13-16

Family Activity for the Week: Love is one of the many fruits of the Spirit found in Galatians 5:22-23. This week discover verses on love in Scripture and find Bible stories about God’s love. Share God’s love with one another and your community through your word and actions. Remember growing love doesn’t have to be practiced in big, fancy ways. Find small, yet meaningful ways to share God’s love with others. When we are open to God growing us through the Holy Spirit, everyday acts will help produce love! Pray daily, asking God to grow love in your heart and lives!

Monday, October 28 – Read Exodus 20:12, Ephesians 6:1-4. The letter to the Ephesians quoted the fifth commandment as “the first one with a promise attached,” directing God’s people to respect and obey parents. It added an important qualifier, which was at least implicit in the Exodus commandment: “obey your parents in the Lord.” It also differed from Greek and Roman “household codes” in a key respect: “The remarkable thing about this passage...is that the children and slaves evidently have, in Paul’s eyes, what we would call ‘rights’ as well as the parents and masters.”

- Are there dimensions to “honoring” your father and mother that go beyond the one idea of “obeying” them? How do increasing levels of maturity and independence affect both “honoring” and “obeying”? Do parents ever make demands their child cannot obey “in the Lord”? How important, at various ages, is it to obey your parent(s) when what they ask goes against your wishes, but not against God’s teachings?
- In practical, everyday terms, what does it look like when parents “don’t provoke your children to anger, but raise them with discipline and instruction about the Lord”? What factors have you seen make the difference between healthy parent/child connections, and those that cause pain on both sides of the relationship? How can you more fully honor your parents and/or your children?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, I give you my allegiance above all human allegiances, even family ones. But I also ask you to help me be the most loving, caring family member I can possibly be. Amen.*

Tuesday, October 29 – Read Matthew 21:28-32. Jesus often used parent/child examples to cast light on how God and we relate. In this story, he asked which is better: giving a parent nice words while ignoring his or her wishes, or expressing your inner resistance and then doing what the parent asked you to do? The answer seemed obvious—but it’s not always simple in real life. Jesus also taught that loyalty to God was the only relationship more important than the relationship to parents (cf. Matthew 10:37-39).

- Jesus’ story contrasted a son who (insincerely) talked a good game with a son who ended up doing what his father asked. Which son, he asked, more authentically honored his father’s will? In what areas, if any, are you aware of a need to grow toward greater authenticity in your family or spiritual life? Ask God for the courage to speak the truth in love to yourself, others and God.
- In Jesus’ day, people didn’t just dislike tax collectors. They despised them—often rightly—as traitors who abused the poor. In Jesus’ day, prostitutes were, well, prostitutes (though often, then as now, out of economic desperation). How could Jesus say prostitutes and tax collectors were entering God’s Kingdom before the religious leaders? For what reasons does God prefer honest interactions to pious words about changes we don’t intend to make in real life?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, as you show me the kind of life you are calling me to lead, I want to say “yes” to your call—and I want to mean it, to live out the “yes” that I say. Amen.*

Wednesday, October 30 – Read Psalm 71:14-18, Proverbs 17:6. As we age, we can become keenly aware of the advantages younger people tend to have in energy, ambition and drive. But God doesn’t despise age. Psalm 71 named one spiritual advantage for older servants of God. This Psalm talks uses “always” three times. No other psalm makes more use of this word. We find it in the past tense, “my praise has always been of you;” In the present, I need you to be, “a shelter to which I can always come;” in the future, “I will hope always.” One benefit of a longer life with God is a larger set of reasons for praise and faith.

- The fifth commandment specifically mentioned “father” and “mother.” Do you believe the principle behind the commandment extended to grandparents as well? Our culture delivers a steady stream of messages about the awfulness of growing older. Are there ways that signs of age lead you to think less, even subtly, of yourself or other people? In practical terms, what might it mean to honor your grandfather(s) and grandmother(s)?
- Psalm 71 saw old age differently from investment company ads that picture a kind of constant, self-indulgent vacation. The psalmist sensed a lifelong call to share God’s love and power. He wrote, “I’m still

proclaiming your wondrous deeds! ...even in my old age with gray hair, don't abandon me, God! Not until I tell generations about your mighty arm, tell all who are yet to come about your strength."

Prayer: *God of the ages, teach me how to honor older family members. And if I am an older family member, teach me how to guide younger family members to know and love you. Amen.*

Thursday, October 31 – Read Mark 7:5-13. The criticism about "unclean" hands was not about germs, but about a Jewish ritual tradition. People could cleanse their hands to remove ritual impurity contracted in the public markets. They would pour water over the hands or immerse them as far as the wrist. Jesus' reply was to challenge another custom that let people ignore the fifth commandment, a far more serious consequence than eating with ritually unwashed hands.

- Jewish people could vow and dedicate property to the temple. One could thus render property forbidden for others' use. Some exploited the loophole that this practice created; one could dedicate for sacred use what instead should be used to care for aged parents. Jesus clearly took the fifth commandment seriously, even providing for his mother's care from the cross (cf. John 19:25-27). Are you aware of "loopholes" that people today may use to avoid caring for older persons?
- We also know many early Christians faced great hostility from parents and other family members. Sometimes parents disowned them, casting them totally out of the family. Jesus knew this was likely and spoke to it in Mark 10:29-30. He seemed to say that only a person's commitment to God was more important than that to parents. Are there other loyalties that you sense our culture placing ahead of loyalty to honor parents? If so, what does it take to embrace Jesus' values that we honor both children and those who are older?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you know I like "loopholes" that let me do whatever I wish. Deliver me from the urge to look for loopholes that allow me to ignore your command to honor my parents. Amen.*

Friday, November 1 - Read Isaiah 49:8-15, Matthew 23:37. The Bible's use of father images to portray God is common knowledge. Many people don't realize that the Bible also used "mothering" images to communicate the depth of God's love for us. Isaiah said God is less likely to forget us than a mother is to forget her nursing child. Jesus compared his concern for the people of Jerusalem to that of a mother hen. (Psalm 131 was yet another example.) These images were even more striking because they came from a highly patriarchal world.

- It is easy to overlook one significance of the fifth commandment's call to "honor your father and your mother." In patriarchal societies (and at times in today's divided families), children may want to honor one parent while ignoring or even trying to tear down the other one. How, when parents do not agree, can children still seek to creatively and honestly honor both parents, even when they may disagree with one (or both) of them?
- Isaiah 49:14 showed Israel's wary, guarded response to God's promises. Have you ever let down another person, perhaps a child? When have parents or others let you down? In what ways, sometimes gradually, has opening yourself to God's nurturing love begun to heal any gaps left by the way your parents treated you, and in your parenting of your children?

Prayer: *Lord, I praise you for being not only a God who watches over us with the strength of the best fathers, but one who loves us with the tenderness of the best mothers. Amen.*

Saturday, November 2 – Read Psalm 68:3-5. In ancient times, nearly all legal and financial status came from a connection to a close living male relative. "Orphans and widows" had no such links, so the phrase became a shorthand expression for all powerless or oppressed people. The psalmist extended the thought in verse 6, listing "the lonely" and "prisoners" as others about whom God cared. God, the psalmist wrote, is the uniquely reliable presence with all people, and has particular concern for the hurting and oppressed. In ancient Israel, the victorious divine warrior (Judges and Kings) fought not just to gain land or power, but to protect the most vulnerable in society. Even those whose parents have failed or abandoned them, or who have lost their parents through disease or accident, can turn to God for the kind of dependable love the best parents provide to children.

- As we note when we baptize a child, God wants earthly parents to model God's love and goodness for their child. Sadly, in the ancient world, and still today, that doesn't always happen. When, in either a brief time of crisis or over a longer time (even a lifetime), have you needed to turn to God as your primary source of nurture and comfort? Are there ways in which God has provided you the "family" you needed? Being Jesus Christ to the World is about living with the conviction that we are God's voice, God's hands and feet, in a hurting world. In what ways can you join in God's work of caring about orphans, widows, the lonely and prisoners? Do you know anyone who may not be an "orphan" or "widow" in the concrete sense of the term, but whose life you could enrich by extending God's love and care?

Prayer: *God, the psalmist said you are "Father of orphans and defender of widows." Thank you for always caring about me. Give me eyes to see others who are hurting and use me to bless them with your love and caring. Amen.*