

'HONORING OUR PARENTS'

Oct. 6, 2018

How many people here have seen the 2002 classic movie "Big Fat Greek Wedding"? The movie tells the story of the courtship and marriage of Tula, whose family is Greek, and Ian Miller, whose family is not, but who are the most WASPish couple you could ever imagine! There is a scene in the movie where Ian and Tula arranged for Ian's parents to come to meet Tula's parents for a nice quiet dinner in order to get to know each other, except of course Tula's parents have invited the whole extended family, since they love having big family get togethers! As Ian's parents pull up in their car to Tula's family's house, you can see the shock on their faces as they look out and see a lamb being roasted on the front lawn and 40 people or so surrounding it, many of them dancing and singing! Tula's father greets Ian's parents warmly and introduces one of his brothers and his children, Anita, Diane and Nick, and another brother and his children Anita, Diane and Nick, and another brother and his children Anita, Diane and Nick. And then he says my name is Gus, and he gives both of Ian's parents a big bear hug that practically knocks them over!

The movie certainly highlights how different parents can be from one another, and sometimes how they can embarrass their kids! One thing we all share as people here today is that we had parents, and we are continuing our sermon series today on the ten commandments by taking a look at the fifth commandment, which says "Honor your parents, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you." This is the actually the only commandment of the ten that has a promise attached to it, that we will live long in the land if we honor our parents, so we know this commandment must be important. Now why did God give us this commandment instead of for instance, "Honor your children". Maybe it is because most people are very easily drawn to and committed to their kids, but it can be tougher to honor your parents. So what does it really mean to honor my parents? I think the answer to that question depends on what stage of life you are in.

First of all, if you are a young person living under your parent's roof, you honor your parents by obeying them. Ephesians 6:1 says "Children, obey your parents; this is the right thing to do because God has placed them in authority over you." Since you are dependent upon your parents for food, clothing, shelter, etc., they have the right and the responsibility to guide and direct your life. When you are out on your own, that is a different story. But as long as they are providing for you and you are dependent on them, the Bible says you are to obey them.

Now as you get older, you do start seeing the faults of your parents. You become more aware of their hang-ups and their character flaws. It becomes important for you to honor them in spite of their weaknesses. Now when you are no longer living underneath their roof, you do not always have to obey them anymore, but you do need to honor them. You can disagree with your parents without being disagreeable. After I graduated from college, I wanted to go to Egypt for a year to serve as a teacher. My parents were very much against this, because like any parents, they were concerned for my safety. Yet I knew that this was a great opportunity for me, so I did go over their objections, and it ended up being one of the most wonderful transforming experiences of my life. Because of my time in Egypt, I met my wife, which is something my parents were much happier about! However, even during the time

that my parents and I disagreed about what I should be doing, I still sought to honor them by being as respectful as I could and keeping in touch with them about my plans.

Now I do want to stress that honoring your parents also includes forgiving them for their faults. Some of us here today were blessed with wonderful parents, who we have nothing but love and appreciation for, and if that is the case for you, I am so grateful-it just comes naturally to you to honor them. But for others of us, this was not the case, and yet we do need to forgive our parents before God. They may be dead now, but we are still holding onto our bitterness towards them. We need to remember in their defense that we often hurt those we love the most-intentionally and unintentionally. If you live together for any length of time in a family, there is a good chance that you are going to be hurt by your family members. You know, parenting is a difficult, time-demanding, energy draining job, as you learn if you become a parent. Have you ever considered how much easier your parent's life would have been if they hadn't had you? When was the last time you thanked your parents for just putting up with you? Honestly, who else would have?

Now all kidding aside, how do I go about honoring a parent who was dishonorable to me? Pete Graham talked so powerfully last week in his sermon about the sexual abuse so many of us have suffered at some point in our lives, and some of that abuse happened because our parents did nothing to stop it. Indeed, they may have even caused it. There are strongholds of evil in every family, many, many different ways our parents may have hurt us deeply, and I know that just thinking about this can bring tears to your eyes and a pain to your heart. I want to make it clear today that God is not asking you to gloss over this, to deny it, or to make excuses for your parents. What happened to you was real. But I do want to also stress that if you are still angry with a parent years later, then you're still letting them control your life, and you may be venting your anger on your husband or wife or kids or friends because you have never really resolved things with your parents.

So it takes courage to really deal with your relationship with your parents, and you want to pray about it and ask other people to pray with you, but perhaps what you need to think about doing before God is to sit down with your parents if you can and say, "I want to appreciate today the good that your parenting brought about in me, but I can't do that until we talk about the pain that I have felt in our relationship and that I continue to feel. I want us to talk about it, so that we have a chance to forge a new relationship together." If you can't talk to your parents-maybe they have already passed on, or maybe they won't or can't listen, then I would encourage you to share your pain with a therapist or Christian friend or counselor. But I beg you before God today, do not keep it to yourself-do not act as if nothing ever happened-take action.

Now let me say a final word to those of you who do not have your parents in your lives, for whatever the reason. You may have been forced to take sides in a divorce, and lost touch with one parent or another, or had a parent abandon you for one reason or another, or had your parents die. I just want to say to you today that in God's eyes, you are a special person. God loves you unconditionally and will never ever leave you or forsake you, because you are part of the family of God. Praise be to the living God!

But if you do still have a parent or parents living, and you are in touch with them, you honor them by affirming them and not abandoning them. The reality in our culture is that the older people get, the less respect they often receive. And as we get older, friends sometimes die or move away, and we find that we are no longer wanted in the marketplace for our skills and wisdom. Our grown children are busy

with their own lives, and sometimes life can get pretty lonely. So it is important for you to know that your parents have a great need to feel that they made some kind of positive contribution in your life, and God wants you to honor your parents for the rest of your life as long as they are alive. Now please note that God did not say that you have to love them. Maybe you can't love them, or at least some of the time, that is difficult. But you can honor them.

So how do you do that? First of all, stay in touch with them. Share the details of your life with them as best as you can. They are very interested. Do the right thing by them while you have time to do it. All the flowers in the world at their funeral won't do them a bit of good. Honoring them now means listening to their wisdom, even if you may not follow it all the time. And for those of you who are married, I think this goes for your in-laws too.

And honoring your parents means taking care of them when they may not be able to take care of themselves. In I Timothy it says, "Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith." (5:4) In our Scripture passage this morning, we remember that when Jesus Christ died on the cross, dying for all of us, one of the things He did not forget to do was to care for His mother after He was gone. Writhing in pain, one of the last seven things He said was to ask His disciple John, his most beloved disciple, to take care of His mother. Taking care of our parents at this stage of life is very challenging, but important to God. And we should know that others will be watching us at these times to see whether we really do honor our parents.

I recently read of one middle-aged writer who told about a conversation he had with his 15 year old daughter. "Elizabeth", he asked, "what will you do if I end up like Granddaddy someday?" Watching my father slowly deteriorate from an incurable disease has been a painful process-one that has raised many such difficult questions in my mind. When I asked this particular question to my daughter, her response gave me even more to think about. "I don't know, Dad", she answered after a moment. I don't know what I will do if you end up like Granddaddy someday. But I'm watching you to find out." As the people we love watch you and me, may they see us honoring our parents, that you may live long in the land that God has given you, and that God may receive the glory, Amen.