

# Lesson 4: Honor Your Parents

## Introduction

This week we're talking about the fourth commandment: "honor your father and mother." This commandment is about respecting your parents, but it's also about respecting the wisdom of others. We're going to learn about this commandment in three ways.

1. We'll hear the story of King Solomon, how he was famous for his wisdom and how valuable wisdom was to him.
2. We'll learn about what it means to honor your parents and other authority figures, and how we gain wisdom from listening to what they tell us.
3. We'll learn that honoring parents and authority figures helps us grow in wisdom and understanding so that we can be the people God wants us to be.

## The story of King Solomon's Wisdom

Let's start with the story of King Solomon. King Solomon was a really important king in the history of Israel. He was the son of King David, who we heard about last week. His mother was a woman named Bathsheba, who we'll hear about later. And King Solomon was one of Israel's greatest kings.

He's remembered as being great for all the usual reasons kings are called great: he was incredibly rich, he was successful at keeping peace with all of Israel's neighbors, he was a powerful commander in the army, and he built great buildings, including the Temple in Jerusalem. But he was also remembered as being great for another reason. Solomon was wise. He was wiser than any other king before or after him.

When Solomon was first crowned king, God asked him what he wanted most as king. God would bless him with anything; he just had to ask. So Solomon asked for wisdom. He chose wisdom over power, or wealth, or reputation. Because he asked for wisdom, God gave him a mind that could make good decisions that were good for the people and good for the kingdom. Solomon was famous for his wisdom. He ruled the kingdom well because he was wise, not because he was powerful. He knew the right decisions to make because he paid attention. And as long as he listened to others, he continued to rule wisely.

He's so well known for being wise, in fact, that there are three books in the Bible dedicated to talking about wisdom that people say he wrote. One is the book of Proverbs, that's filled with short, easy-to-remember phrases to help you in your life. They're a bunch of little nuggets of wisdom like "One who is quick-tempered acts foolishly," or "like a maniac who shoots deadly firebrands and arrows, so is one who deceives a neighbor and says 'I am only

joking,” or “if you have found honey, eat only enough for you, or else, having too much, you will vomit it.”

Another book people say he wrote is Ecclesiastes, which is all about recognizing what is good in life. You may know the phrase “to everything there is a season, and a purpose for everything under heaven,” and this book is where it comes from. It’s a book of wisdom all about how trying to run in the fast lane isn’t going to be as rewarding as you may think it will be.

And one last book he is said to have written is the Song of Solomon, which is less wise sayings like the other two and more a poem about love. It has some amazing words of truth about what love looks like, like “love is strong as death, passion as fierce as the grave...many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it.”

Solomon spent his life seeking wisdom, because he knew what it was worth. Wisdom is what happens when you train your mind to know how to make good decisions. Wisdom isn’t something that just happens to you; you don’t naturally become wise. You have to learn to become wise by paying attention to the world and especially to wise people. Solomon saw the value in that, and that’s why he’s remembered as being so wise. He paid attention to others and learned what was really good and valuable in the world.

## **What it means to honor your parents**

Solomon may be an odd place to start when talking about the commandment to honor your parents, right? After all, I never mentioned Solomon’s parents except to tell you their names. But that’s what honoring your parents comes down to: recognizing the wisdom they have to share with you.

See, “honor your parents” means more than just listen to them when they tell you to do something. It means more than love them no matter what. It goes deeper than just tolerating their rules and expectations, or doing things that will make them proud. To honor your parents means realizing that your parents have lived a whole life before you showed up. Your parents have experienced the world and learned from that experience. You honor your parents by valuing the wisdom they can give you because they’ve been through things already.

And that looks like paying attention when they tell you what you need to do. They already know that driving stupidly on your ATV or snowmobile is dangerous because they’ve already gotten the broken bones, and they want to keep you from that hard lesson. They already know that caring too much about what other people think doesn’t make you happy, and that being made fun of for being unique won’t last. They already know the signs of an unhealthy friendship or a toxic relationship because they’ve been there. You honor your

parents by realizing that what they are telling you and how they are guiding you comes from a place of actually knowing where that kind of behavior or decisions goes.

It goes beyond parents, too. Elders and authority figures have wisdom they can share with you—whether that’s your teachers, your coaches, your aunts or uncles, or even your pastor. One of the hard things to realize when you are the age you are—and believe me, I was your age once, too—is that older people have something worth listening to. There’s a lot of stored up wisdom in other people, and by paying attention to their life experience, you won’t have to go through the pitfalls they had to take to get that wisdom. It’s like how Solomon gave us all those little nuggets of wisdom in the Proverbs, or shared his experiences of finding meaning in Ecclesiastes, or celebrating love in the Song of Solomon.

This is the reason this is the only commandment with a promise at the end: “so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.” There’s this promise that if you listen to your parents and your elders and pay attention to the wisdom they’re sharing with you, it’ll help you live a long and prosperous life. You won’t have to waste time learning the lessons your parents have already learned if you listen when they’re trying to teach you something.

### **How does it affect the real world?**

Well, simply, it’s exactly what the commandment promises. By honoring your parents, you will live a long and prosperous life. If you pay attention to the wisdom your parents and other elders give you, you’ll be able to avoid getting trapped in those difficult circumstances they had to take time to get out of, and you’ll be able to make decisions that will lead you to live the way God is calling you to live. Hearing their wisdom and knowing how to apply it to your life is kind of like a shortcut that you can take, if you only listen to the person giving you directions.

So you honor your parents by trusting that when they tell you something, it’s important for you to pay attention. Listen to teachers and pastors and other authority figures, not because everything we say is right, but because if you listen, you’ll be able to process our lived experience and wisdom into your life. Honor your parents by honoring their love for you, and honoring their store of experiences and wisdom that they want to share with you.

When you listen to your parents and other authority figures, it becomes easier to see how God is calling you to act in your life. Parents are usually the people who know us best, and their advice and wisdom can help us see how God is calling us to love others, care for creation, fight for justice, and make the good news of God’s kingdom known in the world. Wisdom that we gain from our parents and other authority figures can help us figure out what we are good at, how we are called to act in the world, and what a life led by God looks like.

Sometimes that's complicated and we have to sort out the good wisdom from the bad advice. That, too, is something we can learn from listening to the wisdom of others. But that, too, involves honoring your parents and other elders by letting them share their wisdom with you, and seeing if it works in your life.

## **Closing**

Let's review what we learned tonight.

1. We heard the story of King Solomon, how he was famous for his wisdom and how valuable wisdom was to him.
2. We learned about what it means to honor your parents and other authority figures, and how we gain wisdom from listening to what they tell us.
3. We learned that honoring parents and authority figures helps us grow in wisdom and understanding so that we can be the people God wants us to be.