

Can't Pick 'Em, but Ya Gotta Love 'Em

All Christians are called to love and respect our parents

BIBLICAL REFERENCES

Ephesians 6:1-3; Exodus 20:12; 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

This lesson's scripture passages focus on the command to honor our parents and treat them with respect in light of Christ's great love for us.

Ephesians 6:1-3 instructs children to obey and honor their parents. While it is probable that this instruction was directed to young children, it could also include adult children, because in that society fathers maintained their position of authority at least into their 60s. Paul assumes that the instruction from the parents is in harmony with godly character and thus does not leave room for any evaluation on the part of the child. A simple yes in attitude and action is the right response.

Children are to obey their parents "in the Lord." This does not mean to only obey parents who are Christian. "In the Lord" is to be understood "as to the Lord" (5:22). Thus the verse might read, "Obey your parents as you would obey God."

To honor a person means to recognize the inherent value of that person and to treat that person with proper respect. If we value our parents as we should, we will have no problem honoring them by the way we live our lives.

Exodus 20:12 is cited within the Ephesians passage. It's the first of the Ten Commandments with a promise—"so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you."

In **1 Corinthians 13:4-7**, Paul talks to the people of Corinth who had questions regarding the faith. Paul specifically focuses on the issue of love and the differences between worldly love and godly love. These character qualities of love illustrate the type of love parents should have for their children, and children for their parents. When we love with this type of love, we make it easier to deal with the various problems that inevitably arise in families. We see all these qualities in Christ, the ultimate Example of love.

LIFE NEED

Take a teenager in the throes of adolescence, and mix in one father in midlife crisis and/or one mother in the early stages of menopause, and BLAM! High emotions, feelings of frustration, and fear—all combine to make life a powder keg waiting to blow the lid off our idealized concepts of "family."

Teens are aware that Mom and Dad don't really know everything. What do parents know about fitting in, the pressures to drink, try drugs, and have sex? They always say, "Well, in my day . . ." But it's NOT their day; things have changed. Life is tougher. They never had to worry about being shot or knifed in school. AIDS wasn't an issue. Times have definitely changed. But still, every decade's teens wonder how to express what they're feeling to their parents, when they themselves don't understand what's happening.

The Bible gives us guidelines on all relationships, which can be applied to the relationships of parents to child and child to parents. Use this lesson to explore some of the parent-child relationships found in the Bible. As Christians we are called to live at peace with all men, as much as is possible—and that includes children and parents.

RESOURCES

- Bibles, pencils
- Copies of the *Love Is . . .* handout
- Copy of the *Meet Jesus, the Adopted Kid* handout

PREPARING THE TEACHER

Think about your childhood:

- ☞ How well and in what ways did you relate to your parents and siblings?
- ☞ What were some of the frustrations you had with your parents? How did you deal with those frustrations?
- ☞ How was your communication with your parents?

Now think about yourself today:

- ☞ How well do you relate to your parents? If you are a parent, how well do you relate to your kids?
- ☞ How are you like your parents? Different from them?
- ☞ What are the stresses your family faces?

Think of the specific teens in your class:

- ☞ What kind of families do your teens come from? Traditional? Split? Remarried?
- ☞ What are some of the pressures they face in their families?
- ☞ How can you best minister to those who are struggling with family issues?

Let's take a trip back to when you were a teen. If you are in your 40s or 50s, chances are you and most of your friends came from two-parent homes. Divorce was usually mentioned in hushed tones. *Father Knows Best* and *Leave It to Beaver* were pretty close to how most families wanted to live. Dad worked from nine to five; Mom stayed home to take care of the house and kids. School and church were safe, nurturing places.

What about today's teens? What do their families look like? Many students come from single-parent homes where divorce or death has occurred. There can be tremendous baggage or hurts on their shoulders—anger at one or both of the parents because of the split or even death; worry of being the cause of the divorce or that a remaining parent

Jesus was the only kid who knew more than His parents—yet He obeyed them!

will die prematurely. With a little sensitivity you can minister to these needs and encourage your senior highers through prayer-

ful love and acceptance.

Other students will come from families who have experienced not only divorce or death but also the uniting of two different families through remarriage. They are often asked to do the incredibly difficult double task of accepting the new family members as well as letting go of some of their personal rights to birth parents and siblings.

Above all, in any family, *relationships take work*. No one can expect any relationship to grow if the members are unwilling to take time to be with each other, unwilling to talk openly about their feelings, or unwilling to bend or compromise for the sake of others. Christ has called us to go the extra mile, to love the unlovely, and to even lay down our lives for our brothers (and sisters, parents, and friends).

In these next four lessons you may see yourself or your family or both. Take time to let God bring healing and a sense of unity to

Just as diversity in the Body of Christ is desirable and God-given, so also is diversity in families.

—Jim Brawner

your own family life. It may mean you will need to work through some personal issues, ask forgiveness of a family member, and open your mind and heart to the feelings of others. Remember, we are told that before we present our gifts to God—even the gift of teaching—we are to go to our brother (or sister or parent) and make things right. But the exciting thing is that God desires wholeness and love in the family—your family and your students' families!

TEACHING THE LESSON

LIFE

Student Goals: Think about current relationship with parents; understand that parent-child relationships take work from both sides.

Conflict Resolution ⌚9

Say, **Parents—everyone’s got them. Sometimes you can really love them! Sometimes they are difficult to live with. Even the best family has times of struggle and conflict. However, it is important to work through those times.**

Listen to this situation:

Bob was excited about the big party that was going to be held on Friday at the home of Greg, one of the coolest kids in school. The best part was that Greg’s folks were going to be out of town, so there would be no adults around. It was supposed to be the biggest bash of the year. Everyone was going to be there! When Bob told his folks about the party, they talked about it and decided Bob shouldn’t go, since there were no adults attending. They were afraid things could get out of hand. Bob was upset and tried to change their minds—without success. Finally, Bob stormed out of the house. That Friday he snuck out of the house after everyone went to bed, and went to the party. When he got home, his folks were waiting. They were upset that Bob disobeyed their decision. They said Bob was grounded for the next month. At that, Bob became angry and told them they weren’t being fair. He went to his room yelling that they were unreasonable and that he hated them.

- 1. What things do you think Bob and his parents could have done to resolve this conflict?**
- 2. How should Bob have responded to his parents’ decision?**

(Wait for responses to each of these questions.)

Now think about some of the experiences you’ve faced with your parents. What were some of the conflicts you’ve had with your folks, and how have you been able to work through them? Would anyone be willing to share an experience with the class? (Please let the students talk freely. Life situations can be tough. Help them to realize that everyone has to work at these relationships.)

What My Folks Did Right ⌚6

Say, **So often it’s easy for us to pick out areas of weakness in others—things we don’t like or things that are different. But in most relationships there are good things mixed in with the not-so-good things. I want you to take a moment and think about your parents. Don’t think about the negative things, but think about the good things! Try to pick out at least two things you think your folks**

Special Note for Those Working with Teens

This lesson is ultimately about loving your parents. For some of your teens (hopefully the fewer the better), you will need to make a clarification regarding loving an abusive parent. For students who may come from abusive families, there must be a distinction between loving the parent and accepting the abuse. Often abusive parents will bait the child by saying, “If you love me . . .” Any inappropriate requests or demands from the parent on that level are not issues of love. They are issues of manipulation, deception, and power. Teens wanting change so desperately may confuse this lesson’s message and feel obligated to comply with the parent’s request or, at the very least, try to hide the abuse from others: “If you love me, you won’t tell anyone.”

With that in mind, make clear to all your students that in abusive situations, the most loving thing a teen can do is to make the abuser accountable for his or her actions. Telling the other parent; sharing the situation with another trusted adult, pastor, or guidance counselor; and even calling the authorities are entirely appropriate and loving! This is one of the most significant acts of love, which takes courage but will be the beginning of the healing process for all involved.

As a teacher, be sensitive to students who may be in this situation. Regardless of your legal obligation (most states require even Sunday School teachers to report abuse), remember that you have a moral and spiritual obligation to become involved in this situation if you become aware of it.

Additional Teacher Help:

Parents Are People Too!

Changes in life are not confined to the teen years. Since this lesson focuses on the teen-parent relationship, it will be helpful for you to begin thinking about what parents are experiencing while their children are teenagers (especially if you yourself are not currently the same age as the parents of your students). Most parents of teenagers are in their late 30s and 40s. Things are happening in their lives.

Dads. Many men experience what has been termed midlife crisis, which is a time of personal reevaluation. Fearing he is getting old, when he looks in the mirror, he sees someone very different from the person he once saw. For any number of reasons he may be considering a career change and be worried about the future. (The fear of being able to put a child through college escalates as children enter the teen years.) Dad's body is changing too. His waist is thicker, and his hair gray and thinning. Where there were muscles, now there's flab. Life's scary for him too.

Moms. Some teens report to teachers, friends, and youth leaders that living with Mom sometimes feels like living with someone with split personalities. One moment she's happy, and the next she's crying. She's opening the windows at a moment's notice, complaining that it is too hot, when it's really pretty cold! Many moms of teens may be beginning to go through the early stages of menopause. This is a time of great change hormonally for the mother. Just as in the teen, hormones play havoc with her emotions and physical body. She may begin to question her worth as a person. The children are growing up—she may not feel as needed or important as she was when they were little. She, too, has questions about her future. And life is scary.

are doing right. It may be a vacation you took or the way they dealt with a particular issue. Let's have a couple of you volunteer to share your thoughts with the class. As the teacher, you may want to share something your parents did that was particularly touching.



Student Goal: Explore God's reasons and expectations for parents and children.

It's in the Book! ⌚15

Have Bibles, paper, and pencils available to the students if they do not have their own. During this section divide your students into two groups. (Remember, one student can be a group.) Say to your group: **From the first parents, Adam and Eve, all the way down to your parents and even my parents, there are times when conflicts come up between parents and kids. But we have to work through the tough times and work at developing strong relationships. The Bible gives us some guidelines on how we are to interact with our parents.** Have students take a Bible and a pencil and paper.

Assign one group the scriptures from this list: Ephesians 6:1-3; Exodus 20:12. Assign the other group 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. Say to the class: **Now that you have your scripture, I want you to read it and then rewrite it in your own words. Think about and be ready to say how you think that scripture relates to you personally and even teens in general today.** Give the students sufficient time to read and write their responses; then ask volunteers to read their responses to the class.

After both groups have responded, ask these questions:

- **What is most frustrating to you about your parents? Why?**
- **If you could change one thing about your current relationship with your parents, what would it be? Why?**
- **What are some of the characteristics of a healthy parent-teen relationship, according to the Scripture?** (As students list these characteristics, write them on a chalkboard or marker board so that students will be able to see them for the next activity.)

It's one thing to know what we should be doing. It's another thing to actually make the changes we need to make. Let's examine how we can apply today's scriptures to our lives.

VISION

Student Goal: Plan creative ways to show the biblical call of respect and obedience to parents.

Love Is . . . 🕒 **15**

Say, **The Bible gives us some basic principles for living. These principles are true in our relationships with friends and acquaintances, but they also apply to the way we deal with our family members—including our parents.** Distribute copies of the *Love Is . . .* handout, and say: **Earlier, we listed some of the characteristics that Scripture said should be present in our relationships with our parents. Now that you've looked at those characteristics, how do you think you measure up? How do you see your relationship with your parents in light of this scripture? Sometimes it's difficult to live up to the "ruler." What can you do to build that relationship or maintain a good relationship?** Ask for students to volunteer suggestions.

Allow students a couple of minutes to fill out the handout. When finished, close in prayer.

NOTES

CREATIVE OPTIONS

Group Singing

“Step by Step,” “His Strength Is Perfect,” “Lean on Me,” and “He Will Carry You,” all from the *All the Best Songs for Youth* chorus book (MB-748, Lillenas Publishing Company, available at www.barefootministries.com).

Perfect Parent/Perfect Teen

As an alternative activity for the LIFE section, draw two stick figures on a chalkboard or flip chart, and say to your students: **Everyone dreams of having the “perfect parents,” and every parent dreams of having the “perfect teen.” On the right is our perfect parent and on the left, our perfect teen. Take turns coming up and labeling parts of these persons with descriptions that fit with their perfections. For example, the mouth could be labeled “a source of words of encouragement and wisdom,” and so on. Remember to be honest in what would be perfect!** Have students complete the pictures, and then review their work with the class.

Jesus, the Adopted Kid

A week before class, make a copy of *Meet Jesus, the Adopted Kid*, which is printed at the end of this lesson. Ask a student to be prepared to read this to the class. It’s important to give this student several days to read through the monologue so it can be presented well.

At the appropriate time, say, **Let’s look at a teen from the Bible and see how he dealt with his parents.** Have the student read *Meet Jesus, the Adopted Kid*. Then ask the following discussion questions:

- How would your life be different if you knew you were adopted?
- Do you think your family would treat you differently from nonadopted brothers or sisters? How?
- What are some of the special challenges adopted children experience?
- Read what Ephesians 1:3-6 says about being adopted into God’s family. What does this passage tell us about the response we should have to individuals who have been adopted?

Christ was one Child who knew more than His parents—yet He obeyed them!

Drama

Have the teens write their own script for a skit dealing with parent-teen conflicts, and have them perform it for the congregation.

Art

Make banners with “LOVE is . . .” statements. Banners can be made with paper or with felt, then displayed in the classroom or sanctuary.

Parent-Teen Night

Allow your class to design a special night of fun and inspiration for them and their parents. Plan to have food and some fun times (possibly play a version of *Family Feud*). Close the evening by having teens and parents involved in a roundtable discussion regarding parent-teen communication.