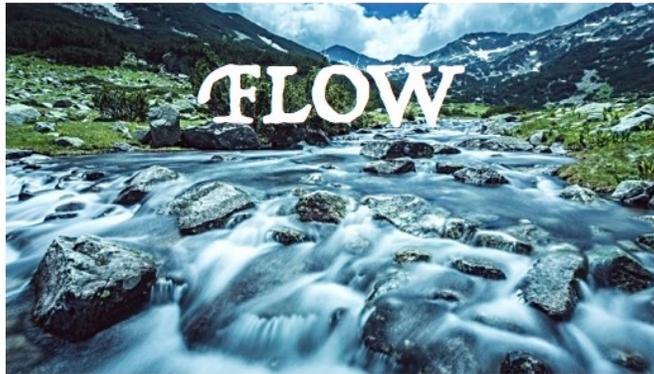


#19 March 27, 2017



*“Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.”*

Exodus 20:12



## **Honor Your Father and Mother**

by Jennie Harrop

I struggled with this verse as a child. While I understood the importance of respect and obedience, the commandment seemed to ignore the nuance of life: What if a father or mother is abusive, unethical, or neglectful? When I taught at Chemeketa Community College, many of my students emerged from the Oregon prison system and childhoods that were painfully difficult to imagine. For

Carrie, childhood was the closet where she and her brother were locked during the day while her parents brewed, sold, and smoked methamphetamines. For Jeremy, childhood was a mother who ignored him and a stepfather who entangled him in a dangerous cycle of abuse and threats. How do we help people like Carrie and Jeremy see the grace and mercy embedded in a verse like Exodus 20:12?

According to the Westminster Larger Catechism, “By ‘father’ and ‘mother’ are meant not only natural parents, but all superiors in age and gifts; and especially such as by God’s ordinance are over us in place of authority, whether in family, church, or commonwealth” (7.234). If we read the verse in the broader light that the Confessions suggest, what then? This commandment is the only one that offers us reward for obedience: As Eugene Peterson writes in *The Message*, “Honor your father and mother so that you’ll live a long time in the land that God, your God, is giving you” (Exodus 20:12). But how do we know what is meant by “honor,” particularly in the face of evil?

As we have heard on Sunday mornings this month, questions like this should bring us back to the primary commandment that Jesus references from Deuteronomy 6:5: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all you **heart** and with all your **soul** and with all your **strength**.” But notice what happens when Jesus recites this portion of the Jewish *shema* in three of the Gospels, declaring to his disciples that everything hinges here: (1) In Matthew 22:37, Jesus says, “**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.**” (2) In Mark 12:20, Jesus says, “**Love the lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.**” And (3) in Luke 10:27, Jesus says, “**Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind.**” Do you see what Jesus adds? In Deuteronomy, we are to love God with our heart, soul and strength; in the New Testament, Jesus adds ***mind*** to the list.

Many of us don’t trust our minds. Some of us were raised hearing the dangers of the fall in Genesis 3, and others of us are steeped in a postmodern skepticism of rules, authority, and the muddle of human emotions. But if Jesus says that we are to trust the Lord with our minds, is it possible that mere intellect is not all he means? Consider Proverbs 3:5-6: “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.” If we interpret *mind* as our faculty for conscious awareness of the world and our own experiences, do you see how Jesus’ addition of mind points us directly to God in all that we do and all that we understand? To “honor your father and your mother,” then, becomes an arrow

back to the Lord and his loving omnipotence over your thoughts, feelings, memories, consciousness, and sense of presence. Later in Proverbs 3, Solomon writes this:

*By wisdom the LORD laid the earth's foundations,  
by understanding he set the heavens in place;  
by his knowledge the watery depths were divided,  
and the clouds let drop the dew.*

Proverbs 3:19-20

What a relief to know that God is our alpha and our omega, the author and perfecter of our faith, the bread of life, the chief cornerstone, the supreme creator over all, and – my personal favorite – our Emmanuel. What does it mean to honor those in authority over us? It means we have yet another opportunity to seek the Lord with our heart, soul, strength, and mind.

**Questions:**

- What does it mean to you to “honor your father and your mother”?
- What does it mean to you to honor those who are over you in places of authority?
- What does it mean to you that Jesus added *mind* to the Deuteronomy 6:5 list?
- How do you worship with your mind, as Jesus has called us to do?
- What can you do today that demonstrates your trust in the Lord rather than your own understanding?

**Videos for Further Reflection:**

[Love the Lord Your God by Shekinah Praise](#) (6 minutes)

[Where Feet May Fail by Hillsong United](#) (8 minutes)