

Honor Your Father and Mother—a Forgotten Commandment

Twenty months ago this week, my 88-year-old father was weeding in his backyard when he slipped off an embankment and fell four feet onto his concrete driveway. My mother found him a few minutes later. He was lying in a pool of blood. He had no idea he had sustained a brain injury that would sap his mobility, speech and most of his memories.

The next day, I drove the familiar eight hours from Florida to Georgia to sit by my dad's hospital bed. It was painful to watch him struggle. I knew he'd never be the same. I called my wife, and we quickly decided to sell our house and move to my parent's town to take care of Daddy.

We then began what I call the long goodbye. My father went from the hospital to a rehab facility to a nursing home, then back to the hospital. Then we brought him to his home for a while, employing two caregivers, because Daddy had to be watched 24 hours a day. Finally, after another hospital stay, he went back to the nursing home for seven months.

My wife or I visited him every day, usually at lunchtime. My mother—who has been married to my dad for 67 years—was always by his side. She brought him clean clothes every day, cut his hair, patted his head, listened to his ramblings and mourned his declining health. Daddy didn't know where he was (he often told me he was in a hotel), and he didn't always know me (once he told me I was a baseball player), but he had the brightest smile on the third floor of his nursing home.

Last week, after a bout with the flu, he stopped eating. His pastor came to visit on Tuesday and sang two hymns to him while my dad gasped for breath. My mom, my sister and a few

other relatives sat in his room on Wednesday and talked while he lay almost motionless.

I went back to Daddy's bedside on Wednesday night and played more hymns for him on my phone. Before I left, a night nurse told me that a few months ago, she found my dad sitting up in his bed praying loudly. Then I prayed for him and told him it was OK for him to go to heaven.

Daddy died before sunrise on Thursday morning. He was 90. The long goodbye was finally over.

Nobody prepared me for what I experienced these past 20 months. I never read a book about how to care for aging parents, how to talk to a person with dementia or how to process the pain of seeing your own father forget who you are. And now, for the first time, I am learning how to handle grief.

There was one principle that guided me through this ordeal. I first heard Exodus 20:12 when I was a kid in Sunday school: "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God is giving you."

I later learned that this commandment, first given by God to Moses, was reaffirmed by Jesus in Matthew 15:5-7 and by the apostle Paul in Ephesians 6:2. Honoring our parents is not some antiquated rule that was later set aside because we live in the smart-phone era. It is timeless. And our culture seems to have forgotten it.

There is nothing sadder to me now than to see neglected old people. Some of the patients in my dad's nursing home sit in the corner of the dining room every day and never get visitors. Maybe they don't have children? Have their children died already? Or were their children too busy with their own lives to care about parents who had lost their memory?

In our materialistic culture, we worship youth, athleticism,

sexuality and popularity. People are valued when they are young, healthy and employable. When they get old and sick, they are often discarded or ignored.

I don't think God is too happy about that.

Exodus 32:16 says God Himself engraved the Ten Commandments on two stone tablets. That holy list is the only part of the Bible not written by inspired human agents. God wrote those words with His own hand! How foolish we are to flippantly ignore them.

Honoring parents is so much more than caring for them in their old age—although this is something you may need to carefully adjust your priorities to obey. God calls us to think generationally. The fifth commandment cuts to the core of our selfishness and calls us to care beyond the here and now. It calls us to cherish those who have gone before us and to value their legacy.

The fifth commandment tells us that there are more important things than personal ambitions, financial goals and momentary pleasures. It tells us that if we will honor those who have invested in us, no matter the sacrifice required, we will end up with more to invest in others.

Let God examine you. Allow the Holy Spirit to write the fifth commandment on your heart so you can be blessed.