



small groups

Discussion Guide



GRACE FOR PARENTS

Ephesians 6:1-4

Front Porch

(Ice Breaker – 5 minutes)

Note For Leaders: For purposes of this lesson, “parents” refers to those who raised us. Acknowledge that, for members of your group, “parents” might mean grandparents, aunts, foster parents, adoptive parents, etc. The lessons and questions below are meant to apply to the adults who took responsibility for us as children.

The Bible is full of genealogies — lists of parents. It was important to ancient peoples for one to be able to name his parents, his parents’ parents, and so on. As our own Barry Jones says in his new book,

To be called a “son of” something or someone was a way of saying that your character bears a resemblance to that thing or that person. For example, the disciples James and John are given the nickname “sons of thunder.” In the book of Acts, Barnabas is given his name because it means “son of encouragement.” (We occasionally speak to a person’s character by using a crass “son of a . . .” idiom today, but that’s another story.)

—Barry D. Jones; *Dwell: Life with God for the World*

Discuss

- Most of us can name our parents and probably grandparents, but can you go farther back than that? Name as many generations of your ancestry as you can.

Sitting Room

(lesson review – 45 minutes)

Read Ex. 20:1-17

Discuss

- The fifth commandment is the first commandment that comes with a promise. What other observations can you make about the fifth commandment?

Read Eph. 6:1-4

Andy said there are two ways for us to love our parents: to honor them for helping us and forgive them for hurting us.

HONOR THEM FOR HOW THEY'VE HELPED YOU

Andy put together a list of God's parenting attributes. Look up each of these verses and identify what it says about the way God parents us.

Zeph. 3:17

Ex. 6:5-8, 12:51

Luke 18:16

Jer. 22:15-16

Ro. 8:31-32

Ps. 145:8-9

2 Chron. 19:7

Deut. 33:12

Matt. 7:7-11

Heb. 12:9-11

Gen. 1:28

1 Tim. 1:15-16

Deut. 6:20-23

James 1:17

Eph. 1:4-8

Ps. 145:17

2 Cor. 1:3-4

Josh. 23:14

God created a system in which parents begin as godlike characters in the eyes of their children. Just the way we are meant to “icon” God to the world around us, we are meant to “icon” God to our children. We are good parents only to the extent that our parenting reflects the character of God.

But God’s system also involves movement in the parent’s role. Over the course of their child’s life, a healthy parent moves from a position of “demigod” to that of a peer. Healthy parenting is a process of replacing oneself with God in the eyes of our children, of saying, with John the Baptist, “He must become greater; I must become less.”

Discuss

- Look at the list of God’s character traits from the scriptures above. Which of them did you see most in your parents?

FORGIVE THEM FOR HOW THEY’VE HURT YOU

The generational system of blessings passed down can also work as a curse. Hurt people hurt people and, often, abused children grow up to become abusive parents. We are cracked icons.

Discuss

- How did your parents hurt you?
- What baggage did they leave you with?

Note To Leaders: These are heavy questions that may stir deep waters in the hearts of your group members. It may be appropriate to stop and pray for members of your group that expose particularly hurtful wounds from their parents. Be sensitive to your group and to the Holy Spirit here.

Andy said that obeying the fifth commandment means forgiving those hurts. He said that holding onto our anger at our parents “doesn’t hurt them, doesn’t fix us, and only locks us into the perpetual place where we can’t grow up.” Our bitterness traps us more than it traps those we’re embittered toward. It extends generational curses. And it refuses to “icon” the character of God.

Discuss

- Have you forgiven your parents for the ways they hurt you?

Andy suggested three steps to embracing forgiveness for our parents: have compassion for them, let go of anger, and find ways to show them love. Let’s add a fourth step: find your identity outside them.

Read Ro. 8:15-17

The message of the gospel is that we don't have to be defined by the scars and shortcomings of our parents. God offers us a new family, a new Father, and a new identity. We don't have to be defined, for instance, as "daughter of an alcoholic," "son of a workaholic," or "child of a single mom." Instead, we can say, "I am a child of the King. I am a co-heir with Christ."

Kitchen

(application — 10 minutes)

Discuss

- Last week, Andy recommended three steps to get our families on the road to healing: serve others in your family wholeheartedly, forgive others in your family completely, and love others in your family consistently. Report your progress to your group. How did you serve, forgive, and love your family this week?
- If your parents are living, commit to showing them honor this week. Call them, visit them, send them a card, or find some other way to obey the fifth commandment.