

ARE YOU WORTHY OF HONOR?

From *The Forgotten Commandment*

by Dennis Rainey



JESUS, RESET MY FAMILY LEGACY

Jesus, help me to prioritize involvement with my kids and be "all in" when it comes to their interests and activities. Lord, make me sensitive to times when my child needs my affection and emotional support. Help me take initiative to say "I love you" and give lots of reminders of how much they mean to me.

PREFACE

"Honor your father and mother. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the LORD your God is giving you" (Exodus 20:12 NLT). This commandment is easy for some, challenging-but-possible for others. Yet it stands as God's will for children of every age and all circumstances. So much is lost when we neglect this command — the emotional connection of expressed love, the bonding of generations, the healing of past pain, and the real possibility of family reconciliation.

WORTHY OF HONOR

A good character is the best tombstone. Those who loved you and were helped by you will remember you. So carve your name on hearts and not on marble.

(C. H. Spurgeon)

Years ago I had an unusual speaking opportunity. First I addressed a group of teenagers, exhorting them to heed the command of Ephesians 6:1–3, which instructs children to *obey and honor* their parents. Then I had the opportunity to speak about the same passage to the parents of those teens. But the moment I'll never forget from that gathering was when Dr. Henry Brandt, a psychiatrist from West Palm Beach, Florida, posed this question to those parents: "Are you worthy of honor?"

I remember the room was strangely quiet. Most had never considered the question. And many had to answer Brandt with a sheepish, "No ... I'm really not worthy."

How can you make it as easy as possible for your children to honor you?

It's been fascinating to read through the special tributes that adult children have written for their parents over the years. The memories in these tributes form a mosaic of what a family ought to be. Over and over, the children who wrote tributes considered three things important:

- Their parent's involvement
- Their parent's emotional support
- Their parent's character

Let's consider how we can become a parent worthy of honor by building these qualities into our lives.

PRINCIPLE #1: YOUR CHILDREN WILL REMEMBER YOUR INVOLVEMENT.

Your children need more than your time; they need your attention. They flourish when you focus on them.

This means more than just showing up at soccer games. Children need your heart knitted to theirs as they make choices and hammer out their character. They need you to know what's going on in their lives. They need you to help them think about the clothing they wear, the type of person they date, and the peer pressure they face.

In order to be a parent worthy of honor, you can't just *be* there, you have to be *all* there.

That sounds simple, but it's easy to fill your hours away from work with television shows, the Internet, hobbies, finances, books, shopping, and housework. If you were able to add up how much time you actually spend focusing on your children each week, you might be shocked to discover that your total would be measured in minutes, not hours.

Being all there does not mean you do it perfectly every time, but it does mean that you are keeping the lines of communication firmly open and intact.



LEARN to Encounter Jesus

Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift. (2 Corinthians 9:15 NIV)

Take a moment and reflect on Jesus. His very nature is to be with and give first to us. He is determined to be "all there" for us despite our selfishness and our prideful self-reliance. He gives first in the face of our competition, comparisons,

and division. Jesus was all there even in the midst of our sin (Romans 5:8).

What do you feel as you consider Jesus' response to you? How is your heart stirred by the knowledge of how He longs to be with you? How are you affected as you sense that Jesus is "all there" for you, wanting to love you and give to you?

Express your gratitude for the heart of Jesus that gives first.

Jesus, I am grateful for Your heart of love, a love that gives first especially as You ...

I am overwhelmed by feelings of ...

I want the love that I have received from You to empower my love for my children.

PRINCIPLE #2: YOUR CHILDREN WILL REMEMBER YOUR EMOTIONAL SUPPORT.

I will never forget a counseling appointment many years ago. A mom sat in my office and told the story of her eleven-year-old son's relationship with his dad. The father, a hard-driving and successful businessman, constantly criticized the boy.

"You dummy, you left the door open."

"Look at these grades! That's pitiful!"

"You struck out at the game! I can't believe you did that!"

By my estimate that boy is in his late forties now. And I'll bet he still hears an inner recording repeatedly playing. "You're a failure! You can't do it! Why try?"

Some of you know how painful it feels to hear that inner recording day after day. Is this the type of recording you want for your children?

Reading through tributes, I've also observed how adults do remember the positive emotional support they received from their parents.

I can't remember a time that you didn't accept me. I was always okay. My performance was okay too, as long as I tried my hardest. You encouraged me to develop the talents God had given me. You told me about how it thrilled you to feel me stir within you before I was even born whenever music was being played at church. You were always there to encourage me in my lessons and shine with pride at my success.

How often do you tell your children you love them, or forgive them? Your kids should hear these words so often that they have no idea how often you've said them.

Another way to give your children emotional support is by utilizing the power of the printed word. Letters and notes are tangible reminders to your children that you love and care for them. Young children, especially, will treasure your handwritten notes of affection.

Emotional support is also felt when we physically touch our children. Hugs, tight embraces, and kisses are all the steady practice of a parent who wishes to be worthy of honor.

I've found that if dads give physical and emotional affection when their children are young, it won't be nearly as difficult when they become teens. It's difficult sometimes to hug teenagers, because they act like they don't need it. But that's just a facade.

I'll never forget Barbara hugging our son Benjamin after a rough day at his junior high. She let go; he didn't. He was admitting, nonverbally, "I may be nearly as tall as you, and I may look grown up, and I may act like I don't need affection, but I do!"

By filling and refilling our child's emotional tank, you and I become worthy of honor.



PRAY and Experience Scripture

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth ... love one another deeply, from the heart. (1 Peter 1:22 NIV)

How might you better express Christ's love to your children?

Make plans to show love to your child in one of these four ways. You might write a note or share these words in person:

Appreciation (for things they do)

_____, (name), I appreciate all that you do to make our family great. I've especially noticed how you ...

Thank you for the way you help with ...

Encouragement (in the midst of a struggle)

_____, I know that it's been hard to ... but I know you can ...

I want to encourage you in ... because I believe in you and know that you ...



Celebration (about a positive event in their life)

_____, I am so happy that you ... It makes me smile to know that ... I'm excited that you ...

Comfort (about a painful event/issue in their life)

_____, I'm so sorry that you're going through this ... I feel a lot of compassion for you because ...

Pause now to ask Jesus to empower you to express love to your children deeply and frequently.

PRINCIPLE #3: YOUR CHILDREN WILL REMEMBER YOUR CHARACTER.

As a parent, you have the incredible responsibility of shaping the moral conscience of the next generation. Even though your children will grow up to make their own choices, the character qualities you model and teach will help mold them and give them direction. In fact, I've noticed that many children, after passing through years of rebellion against their parents, settle into adulthood by adopting many of the same character qualities that they once railed against.

Once again, I found these character qualities highlighted often in the tributes I've read:

You taught me through example to honor and respect my elders, to establish a strong work ethic, and to complete a task with excellence. You are a man of your word.

What character qualities do you want to pass on to your children? What do you believe in? What are your core values?

The Roman philosopher Seneca said, “You must know for which harbor you are headed if you are to catch the right wind to take you there.” If you’ve determined what your core values are, then you can find creative ways to teach and model them to your children.

A SPECIAL CHALLENGE TO DADS

Over the last few decades, too many fathers have pulled back from leadership in their families. To a large degree, we who call ourselves “dads” are responsible for this paralysis of character in our homes. Too many of us are passively disengaged, consumed with our careers, preoccupied with our toys and hobbies. We’re too disengaged to get involved with our kids’ lives.

Real men with real character act; they take responsibility head-on. They may not do it perfectly, but they tackle issues courageously. They are men worthy of honor. They step up when faced with tough challenges.

Men, we need to hear and heed Paul’s words to the church at Corinth: “Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love” (1 Corinthians 16:13–14).

We’ve got to encourage one another to be involved and not abandon our kids to the culture. We’ve got to do it because God is going to hold us responsible for how we protect our families.

God will help you be worthy of honor and involved in your child’s life. Just ask Him to reconnect your heart to your children’s.



SHARE with Others in Community

Use your freedom to serve one another in love. (Galatians 5:13)

Talk about the insights you have as a result of the prayer moments above. Discuss these with a prayer partner or small group. Practice sharing words of appreciation, encouragement, celebration, and comfort with one another. Let these moments be times where you practice connecting emotionally with one another so that you are better equipped to connect with your children.



LOVE Others in Community

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of Him. (1 John 5:14–15 NIV)

After you have effectively prioritized your own kids and grandkids, ask Jesus to show you a person within your sphere of influence who is “fatherless.” Ask God to show you how you can be a spiritual father to this person. Discuss this insight with a prayer partner or small group, and then pray together.

Heavenly Father, do in my heart and life whatever You need to do for me to impart my life and the gospel. Help me to accept any role You have for me as a “spiritual father.” Thank You for hearing my prayer and accomplishing Your will in my life.