

## Part 34: 'Leave Father and Mother'

Still yourselves and begin with a prayer of gratitude for parents. Share something of the way in which you carry your family. (20 minutes)

### Leave father and mother

As we saw last week, we carry a lot from our parents within us. We have their stamp of personhood on us and we are not free of them. We are 'owned' by them. This is good while we are children, needing to grow up in a safe and predictable environment, but as adults, if we are still dependent on and needing permission to be from our parents, then we are in a difficult place.

As we grow out of childhood, we move (usually in adolescence) into a critical phase where we need to question and challenge life. (Some people never grow out of the childhood stage psychologically.) It is here that we begin to explore our identity as separate from those close to us. We need to begin to 'own' ourselves, to learn to take responsibility for ourselves and so to begin to find our own separate identity. Of note is that Jewish children, at age thirteen, have a Bar-Mitzvah which is a rite of passage after which they become responsible for themselves before the Lord and the Law.

Jesus is recorded as being in the temple at the age of twelve, listening to the teachers and questioning them. His parents' dismay at his being undeterred by their fears shows something of his development of his own identity (Luke 2:41–52). Later, when talking about marriage, Jesus restates the need for a man and a woman to leave their parents in order to become a new unit. The same applies to a person reaching maturity, if they do not 'leave' their parents emotionally and psychologically, they will continue to be dependant on them, to the detriment of their own personhood. This often first needs physical leaving. This leaving needs to be done in a way that is honouring of the parents as the commandment says, 'Honour your father and mother, that your days may be long in the land'. It becomes tricky to leave if the parents are not wanting it to be.

It is difficult for us who are parents not to think of our children as belonging to us, yet the truth is that God has 'lent' us these children that God has created, so that we can bring them up with God to fullness and maturity. So the leaving process is difficult from both sides, but needs to happen if maturity is to be reached. The reward for this comes if the children, who have grown up to adulthood in their own right, can then form a rich and free friendship with their parents. (Ultimately, if this is good, the children look after the parents to their end.)

The relationship between adult children and their parents comes to a point where the rights which each had with the other need to be dissolved and re-negotiated. If there is no discussion about them, expectations can run very high and with them, hurt feelings. Jesus had to be what seems rather blunt when his mother and siblings wanted to see him while he was teaching in a crowd of people. They used their family right to demand access to him, but his response was to relocate what had been a family right to the new family in God.



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Read Matthew 12:46–50.

Reflect for 20 minutes on your life in and outside of your family and notice how far your state of leaving has developed.

Journal and share. (30 minutes)

End with an appropriate prayer and appoint a reader.

**During the week**, explore your movement out of your childhood family and see how much has been transferred to your family in God. Pray through all this with God your Father / Mother.



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