

Sunday, April 25, 2021 | What No One Told Us About Parenting

Week 3 | 1 Timothy 5:3-8 | “Caring for Ailing Loved Ones”

A couple weeks ago, we started a new four-week series called ‘What No One Told Us About Parenting.’ This series seeks to answer questions about some of the most demanding areas of raising a family.

The first topic we tackled last week was a child’s nature. Parenting is striving to love and nurture a human being that has been *born broken*. Because of Adam’s disobedience, all of his descendants are exiled. But because of Christ’s obedience, all of his descendants are exonerated. Thus, even though every human being is born broken, they can have a new nature by being born again. More than a child needing correction, they need transformation through the life-changing power of the Gospel.

Last week, we tackled what the role of a child is in the family and what the part of the parent is in the family. The Children are to obey and honor their parents. While the parents are to not provoke their children to anger, nurture and admonish them. And ultimately, the parent and child ought to serve one another as if they were serving Christ.

Every parent has had the thought when they first bring home a newborn, “Where’s the instruction manual?” The same idea occurs later in life when older couples are tasked with taking care of aging parents. This is why, today, we’ll be addresses what is the responsibility of parents when it comes to their aging parents or in-laws.

Sadly, one thing that many couples do not realize before getting married is that they aren’t just marrying a person; they’re also marrying into a family. Interestingly, this situation is all too common in the United States as More than 20 million in the U.S. alone provide care for an aging parent or in-law.¹ That’s roughly one out of every 15 people. What’s more, families rather than institutions provide 80 percent of long-term care.

The marriage vows say, “in sickness and in health ... until death do us part,” but what does all that even mean? We often understand that those words entail taking care of our spouse, but what about taking care of our spouse’s family? Or how about when a spouse passes and the other is left with children to raise on their own? Relationships change in times like this. Lover becomes caregiver, and/or the child becomes the parent. The demands can alter emotions and

¹ Heffernan, Carol, “Caring For Ill Or Aging Parents,” February 1, 2007, *Focus on the Family*, <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/get-help/caring-for-ill-or-aging-parents/>, [accessed, April 25, 2021].

bring people to a place of disillusionment. In some cases, the role of caregiving is assumed without anyone asking, "Is it fair? Is it just? Is it right?" These are the questions that come to people's minds.

READ: 1 Timothy 5:3-8 (ESV)

³Honor widows who are truly widows. ⁴But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God. ⁵She who is truly a widow, left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day, ⁶but she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives.⁷Command these things as well, so that they may be without reproach. ⁸But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

Paul is writing to Timothy, a pastor in Ephesus, about the proper care of widows. This is significant as widows were some of the most vulnerable people groups in the ancient world.² Especially considering that when a woman lost her husband, she lost all social or legal status. Her well-being was intrinsically linked to her attachment to her husband.³ With him gone, her life was more than little at risk. And because of their precarious situation, they often became the prey of those who wanted to exploit their poor circumstance for financial gain.

This is not unlike today, where phone scammers make upwards of \$20 billion today, often manipulating the elderly. In fact, 90% of victims are over the age of 65. And phone frauds like this are mainly aimed at older adults, resulting in losses of more than \$184 million in 2018 alone.⁴

A Youtuber named Mark Rober has a fantastic video called "**Glitterbomb Trap Catches Phone Scammer,**" where he partners up with police to undermine an entire call center for phone scammers in India. Interestingly, *one of the people he helps was an elderly woman who had just lost her husband of forty years and would've lost her entire life savings.* I've put a link to this video in today's sermon description.

² Köstenberger, Andreas J., *1-2 Timothy and Titus*, Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary, (Bellingham, WA; Lexham Press, 2020), p. 165.

³ Towner, Philip H., *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 2006), p. 334.

⁴ Office for Victims of Crime, <https://ovc.ojp.gov/program/stop-elder-fraud/providing-help-restoring-hope>, [accessed, April 25, 2021].

So, needless to say, some of the easiest prey in our culture isn't just the young, but the old as well. As such, Paul wants to encourage the Church to prioritize protecting and providing for those who are grayer around the edges.

Paul talks about three individuals:

i. The worthy widow

- a. No none relative
- b. A known testimony
- c. Sixty years or older (cf. 1 Timothy 5:9-10)

This individual becomes the ward of the church. They are to be supported and respected as if they were the grandmother and mother of every individual in the church.

ii. The unworthy widow

For those women who would seek to abuse the goodwill of church and kin, Paul had some harsh words, “[she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives.](#)” If a woman had the ability and resources to work and provide for herself but refused to do so, Paul says that this is evidence that she isn't a Christian at all, but one who is dead inside. Those who live in the lap of luxury pleasing only themselves are nothing more than a walking corpse headed for the grave (cf. Rom. 7:9-10). Interestingly, Paul’s language here is the same in which he describes the heretics who were giving Timothy such trouble (cf. 1 Tim. 5:11-15).⁵ The worthy widow thinks of little else but the Lord, whereas the unworthy widow seeks to fulfill her earthly appetite.⁶

Paul even says to the church at Corinth that,

READ: 2 Corinthians 12:14 (ESV)

[Here for the third time, I am ready to come to you. And I will not be a burden, for I seek not what is yours but you. For children are not obligated to save up for their parents, but parents for their children.](#)

Mom, dad, before it ever becomes the responsibility of our child, we ought to do everything in our power to be as financially and physically independent for as long as possible. This means making wise choices with our health, with our time, and with our finances.

⁵ Towner (2006), p. 336.

⁶ Yarbrough, Robert W., *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 2018), p. 267.

iii. The responsible relative

Paul has three exhortations and one condemnation for this group.

- a. Taking care of aged parents is an act of worship.

Paul says, “learn to show godliness.” That word godliness is the Greek word εὐσεβέω (you-see-beh'-o), and the only other time it is used in the NT it is translated as "worship."⁷ While the care of an aging parent or relative isn't easy, it can be for the Christian way to glorify God. The genuine outworking of God in the home is a child taking care of their ailing parent or relative.

- b. Taking care of aged parents is repayment for the care they gave you.

Paul says, “make some return to their parents.” When we care for our loved ones, we are, in some way, reimbursing them for raising and providing for us. It's not and could never be exact restitution. This is why Paul says "some" return and not "full" return. As we all know, Paul knows it's hard to fully repay all that a parent does for their child. Yet when a child takes care of their aging parent, the child does

- c. Taking care of aged parents is celebrated by God.

Paul says, “this is pleasing in the sight of God.” God celebrates those children who take it upon themselves to care for their parents. This is an honorable and respected thing that God will ultimately commend in the life to come. Paul even says that when we bear the burdens of others, whether inside or outside our own family, we are fulfilling the entirety of the law (cf. Gal. 6:2).

But it isn't all exhortations for Paul in this passage. He has one thing to say to those who refuse to take care of their relatives.

READ: 1 Timothy 5:8 (ESV)

But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

Any so-called "Christian" who does not take care of their own is no Christian at all. In fact, Paul says they're worse even than those who have never heard the name of Christ at all. Refusing to care for ailing parents or relatives, no matter whether they're your own or your in-laws is to deny the faith. This makes you morally worse than an unbeliever because even those who do

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Köstenberger (2020), p. 166.

not have Jesus Christ living in them know it is right to take care of one's family. Failing to do so only brings condemnation down on the church itself. Sometimes the criticism lobbed at the church is true. How can we say to be followers of God when we do not take care of our own? "High ethical standards among Christians were critical to the spread of the Gospel."⁸

Before you refuse to take care of your parents, I want you to notice what the Psalmist says about God when it comes to these things:

READ: Psalm 68:5 (ESV)

Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation.

Deny the care due to your family, and you put yourself at odds with God himself. And failure to provide for one's household means disassociating oneself from the house of faith entirely.

SO, WHAT'S THE TAKEAWAY?

The genuinely religious take care of the needs of others, especially those of their own family.

READ: James 1:27 (ESV)

²⁷ Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

From the earliest pages of scripture, God was concerned about the widow (cf. Deut. 10:18; 24:17).⁹ As God defined it, Justice was expressed partly in how the widow was treated (cf. Isa 1:17). The first issue the Church itself had to deal with was how to care for this specific group of people (cf. Acts. 6:1). How we treat ailing loved ones, along with orphans, is a litmus test for whether or not we are faithful followers of God.

As in all things, Jesus is the best example of taking care of one's relative. Even while on the cross, Jesus thought of the well-being of his own mother (cf. John 19:27). Now, this wasn't only because he was the perfect Son of God; he was also the head of his household. Joseph, Mary's husband, was likely gone during the life and ministry of Jesus.¹⁰ This way, we do not have many mentions of him outside the birth narrative. So, Jesus taking care of his mother weighed on his mind so much that he thought of her well-being while hanging on a cross.

In fact, throughout Jesus's ministry, he made it his habit to speak on the widow's behalf more than once. He denounced the religious leaders for taking the property of widows (cf. Mr.

⁸ Yarbrough (2018), p. 269

⁹ Towner (2006), p. 334.

¹⁰ Yarbrough (2018), p. 264.

12:40). He praised a poor widow one day as she threw in all she had at the temple (cf. Lu. 21:1-4). In the birth narrative, a widow of over 80 years named Anna was instrumental in prophesying about the importance of Jesus' entrance into our world (cf. Lu. 2:37). In Luke 7, we find Jesus raising the son of widow. And Jesus even uses the character of a widow in one of his many parables to typify what persistent prayer actually looks like (cf. Lu. 18:1-8). Out of all those who Jesus care about, widows was a people group that was nearest to Jesus' heart?

READ: Mathew 15:1-9 (ESV)

¹ Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, ² "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat." ³ He answered them, "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? ⁴ For God commanded, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' ⁵ But you say, 'If anyone tells his father or his mother, "What you would have gained from me is given to God," ⁶ he need not honor his father.' So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God.

⁷ You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: ⁸ "'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; ⁹ in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'"

These religious leaders used religion as a means to get out of their responsibility toward their parents. Would anyone here today think their religion was worth anything if they didn't care for their own relatives? No. Of course not. Practice is always the proving ground of principle. We can say what we believe all day, but until we actually put it into practice, the principles we hold dear mean nothing.

EXAMPLE: The beautiful true story is told by a doctor who experienced firsthand what it meant to make love still work in times of difficulty. After laboring over this young lady's face in surgery, to make sure he did as clean of a job as possible, he writes, "The young woman speaks, 'Will my mouth always be like this?' she asks. 'Yes,' I say, 'it will. It is because the nerve was cut.' She nods and is silent. But the young man smiles. 'I like it,' he says, 'it is kind of cute.' ... Unmindful, he bends to kiss her crooked mouth and I am so close I can see how he twists his own lips to accommodate to hers, to show her that their kiss still works."¹¹

¹¹ Richard Selzer, *Mortal Lessons: Notes on the Art of Surgery*, (San Diego: Harvest, 1996), p. 46.

In the familial realm, there are times when the tables turn. A man or woman finds they become the caregivers for a spouse who can no longer care for themselves. The mother and father who once fed their little child are now having to be fed by their grown child. The mother and father who once changed and clothed their little child now have to be changed and dressed by their now-grown child. There is only one option for the Christian: care for those who are old as they cared for you when you were young.

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VIDEO DESCRIPTION

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TEXT: 1 Timothy 5:3-8

From the earliest pages of scripture, God was concerned about the widow (cf. Deut. 10:18; 24:17).¹² As God defined it, Justice was expressed partly in how the widow was treated (cf. Isa 1:17). And the first issue the Church itself had to deal with was how to care for this specific group of people (cf. Acts. 6:1). Meaning, how we treat ailing loved ones is a litmus test for whether or not we are faithful followers of God.

In the familial realm, there are times when the tables turn. A young couple finds they become the caregivers for a spouse who can no longer care for themselves. The mother and father who once changed and clothed their little child now have to be changed and dressed by their now-grown child. What are the options for individuals in such a situation? There is only one option for the Christian: care for those who are old as they cared for you when you were young. **The genuinely religious take care of the needs of others, especially those of their own family.**

“Glitterbomb Trap Catches Phone Scammer (who gets arrested)” by Mark Rober,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VrKW58MS12g>

Pastor’s manuscript can be found here:

¹² Towner (2006), p. 334.