

The First Commandment With a Promise

by Carter Conlon

The first commandment with a promise is to honor your father and mother, and it is a serious commandment in the sight of God that is crucial for our spiritual growth and well-being.

Duration: 55:24

Scripture: Exodus 15:27, Ephesians 6:2-3

Topics: "Commandments"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of obeying and yielding to the word of God. He draws a parallel between the choice Pharaoh had to make in letting the Israelites go and our own choice to obey or harden our hearts. The preacher highlights the consequences of hardening our hearts, such as losing provisions and experiencing destruction. He also addresses the question of how to honor deceased parents, emphasizing that the best way is to make right decisions and have a heart that is reconciled with them. The sermon concludes with a prayer of gratitude for the freedom found in obeying God's word.

Transcript

This message is one of the Times Square Church pulpit series. It was recorded in the sanctuary of Times Square Church in Manhattan, New York City. Other tapes are available by writing World Challenge, PO Box 260, Lindale, TX 75771 or calling 903-963-8626.

You are welcome to make additional cassettes of this message for free distribution to friends. However, for all other forms of reproduction or electronic transmission, existing copyright laws apply. Father, I thank you that your church, Jesus, is not built in a flash.

It's built line upon line, little by little, victory by victory. And tonight I come just to put one more brick in the wall that you're building around your saints. I ask for the skill to put it in carefully, to put it in rightly and solidly, that this truth may remain in the heart and conscience of the hearers.

I ask you, Lord, for intelligence far beyond any ability that I may have, that I may speak simply and clearly and in a manner that it can be understood in the inner man by every person that you have brought into this house. Jesus, thank you for your manifested presence tonight. Thank you that you love us so much, God, that you come and allow us to experience the freedom of worship and praising you.

Then you come to build into our lives those things which are going to keep us and glorify your name until you come. Give me great grace tonight to speak this and give great grace to the hearers to hear it. Lord, there's going to be a tearing down of a stronghold in some people's lives.

There's going to be some pain involved with this. But Lord, you're the one who said that you come and the anointing is given to release those that are bruised in heart. And I'm believing that bruised hearts are going to be set free.

I'm believing that those have been captivated by this issue are going to be released. And God, the very course of some people's lives is going to be changed. And Father, I thank you for it from the depths of my heart, because you are the only one, Jesus, who can do this.

And Holy Spirit, you're the only one that can open this truth and make it a reality. If you don't quicken it, it will just fall to the earth. Give us ears to hear and hearts to obey.

I thank you for it in Jesus' mighty name. Ephesians chapter 6 in the New Testament, Ephesians chapter 6, and the title of my message tonight, or should I say rather the Lord's message to you, is the first commandment with a promise. The first commandment with a promise.

Now there are all types of commandments in the Old Testament. Thou shalt not kill, for example, or thou shalt not steal are simply commandments. There's no promise with them, other than the obvious, that you'll not suffer the punishment of disobedience.

But this is the first one with a promise. It's found in Ephesians chapter 6, and I have only verses 2 and 3. Honor thy father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise. And here's the promise, that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.

I want to read it again. Honor thy father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise, that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. Now I'm going to tear this verse apart very slowly, because I'm believing that God wants to build something of this truth into our lives tonight.

Now the word honor in the Greek text is to mean to prize something, or to fix a value upon something. God is saying, I want you to fix a value upon your father and upon your mother, that it may be well with you. Now the word well means well done.

It's the word actually that Jesus uses in Matthew chapter 25 verse 21, where he says, I gave certain skills or talents to a person who brought it back and had made increase with what I had imparted into their life. And he looked at that servant and said, well done, good and faithful servant. And that's the context of this word well.

It just means I may be able to say to you, well done, at the end of your course. The word be means to be made or formed, to be created from nothing, or to have something come to pass. And the last word I want to just dissect for a moment is the word earth, which means land, and it also means sometimes it is a word used as a place that is fit for fruit bearing.

Now to sum all of this up, I want to give you my definition of these two verses of Scripture. Now this is strictly mine, and I'm trying to make it applicable to our lives tonight. And here's how I read this.

Prize or fix a value upon your father and mother, that you may be formed by God into a servant over which he may proclaim, well done. Fix a value on your father or mother. God says that I can make you into something that you are not yet, and at the end I can look at your life and say, well done, good and faithful servant.

And that you may long live in a place that is fit for bearing good fruit, or you may long dwell there. Incredible, when you begin to tear it apart and look at it, it doesn't mean just that it will be well and you'll live long on the earth. I don't think it necessarily applies just to longevity, that if I honor my father and mother, I'm going to make it to 85 and then I'm going to die.

No, it's more than that. That you will long dwell in a place that is fit for bearing good fruit. Now, there are some commandments in the Bible that even God's own people from time to time are reluctant to obey.

Now, if you go back with me in the Bible to Matthew chapter 15, I want to show you this very principle as applies this commandment of God. Matthew chapter 15, beginning at verse, the scribes at the beginning, they came to Jesus and they got all upset because his disciples didn't wash their hands before they ate bread. Now, he answered them about something much more serious than just washing your hands before you eat bread.

Chapter 15 of Matthew, verse 3, he said, why do you also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? For God commanded, saying, honor thy father and mother, and he that curses father or mother, let him die to death. In other words, it was so serious, this commandment in the sight of God, that in the Old Testament, he said, if any man curses his father or mother, he is to be put to death. But you say, whosoever shall say to his father or mother, it is a gift.

By whatsoever thou mightest be profited by him. In other words, whoever says, I'm under no obligation to do anything for my father or my mother. If I do something for them, it is strictly out of the generosity of my heart.

It is an absolute gift. And honor not his father or mother, verse 6, he shall be free. In other words, he said, you've changed my commandment.

You've said that there's no necessity of honoring father and mother, that whatever I do for my father and mother will just be a gift out of my own generosity, and I'm now free from the commandment of God. And he said, thus you have made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. Verse 7, he said, you hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, this people draw nigh to me with their mouth, and honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.

For in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. Now it's an amazing thing. It looks as if by the time that Jesus arise on the scene in the Gospel of Matthew, that the people just simply didn't want the burden of disobedience.

Families to some degree, I suppose, had begun to break down. Selfishness as a society begins to draw farther away from God. Selfishness always begins to take over from self-sacrifice.

And it became to be a burden, I suppose, to look after or to honor father and mother. And so, many of the people just began to draw back. And they began to change the commandment, and just alter it a little bit, and make it more palatable for the hearing.

And say, well, let's just change it. We'll still sort of obey it, but we'll change the obligation from a commandment to a suggestion, and ultimately to just the benevolence of doing whatever we feel like doing. And Jesus said, but this is a tragedy, in a sense, of the people who are approaching me, and not taking seriously some of the things that I've shared and spoken that have to be done.

Now, Paul the Apostle, in 2 Timothy chapter 3, said the last days are going to be characterized by very perilous times. And the perilous times are going to be essentially times of selfishness, self-centered lifestyles, people disobedient, he said, to parents. Now, that's an incredible thing.

You wouldn't think, well, that's gone all through history. And how is that going to characterize the last days? No, he said, no, but there's going to be an increase in this kind of, as the Bible calls it, lawlessness. And there are going to be a people who have without natural affection.

And the word in the Greek text means family affection. There are going to be a people who are disobedient to parents. There's going to be a breakdown of the family as it is as God ordained the family to be.

Society is going to begin to move away from God's order. Every man will begin to do what is right in his own sight, and natural family affection will begin to die. And this will be a perilous time.

It is a perilous day when we see families breaking apart, when we see the very structure of the family under attack in our generation. We can be sure this is a sign that we are living in perilous times. There are strong movements underfoot now in society itself to change the very definition of family.

And with the change of that definition, you're going to be sure, and it's under the guise of tolerance, but you're going to be sure once the definition is adequately changed, there will be an intolerance for the original God-given definition of the family. Being a father and a mother and the children in subjection to their father and mother, and such and so forth. Now, the prophet Malachi, just go backwards in your Bible to the last book in the Old Testament, just only a few pages, and it's in chapter 4. God was speaking through the prophet Malachi, and he's talking about the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

Now, we know this scripture was fulfilled initially, at least with the coming of John the Baptist. Because the apostle said to Jesus, well, doesn't the scripture say that Elijah's got to come first before Christ is going to return? He said, well, I'm telling you that Elijah has already come. He's talking about this initial fulfillment, but I believe this is something that God did just prior to Christ's coming through John, but it's also something that the Holy Spirit has to do in every heart of every believer before God can truly visit with his life-changing power.

And he says in chapter 4, verse 5, he said, Behold, I send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse. Now, this is my interpretation of how this verse could apply to you and me.

I will send a message to you which must be heard before I come. Now, the message I send to you will turn your heart back to something or someone which you have rejected. And if you don't hear this message, my coming will smite your fruitful place with destruction.

He said to Malachi, the Lord said to Malachi, I'm going to come, but before I come, I'm going to send a message. And the message that I send has got to turn the people's hearts back to God's established order

beginning in the home, in the family. And he said, if it doesn't happen when I do come, I will smite the earth with a curse.

That's an incredible warning, an incredible thing written in the scriptures. My heart's crying when I read this, I say, oh God, I understand now that the true ministry that stands in the name of Jesus Christ and says, I have called to God to prepare your heart so that Christ may come and dwell within you has got to turn your heart back again to some things that we may not want to look at. There are some things in all of our lives that might be unpleasant to look at, some places that we don't want to go, some calls to obedience that might be hard to obey.

But the Lord said, if I'm going to come, if I'm going to bring you into a fruitful place, you've got to be able to hear this. There are certain orders that have to come back into the church, the nation, and of course, the Christian life above all else. Now, go with me back in the Old Testament to the book of Exodus now, chapter 15.

I'll talk a little bit about the children of Israel. Now, this is right after they were set free from 400 years of bondage. God sent a message, and he sent it through two messengers, Moses and Aaron, and they stood in front of Pharaoh, the most powerful king at that time in that part of the world, with a simple message, let my people go.

And he hardened his heart against that message, and because of the hardening of his heart, all types of destruction and depravity began to come into his own nation. Ultimately, it culminated with such judgment coming upon him that he was forced, and the people were forced to release the children of Israel into freedom. The Bible says that they went through an impossible scene.

God took them through powerfully, and they sang songs of great deliverance. That's where Miriam and Aaron sang the song of God sending Pharaoh and his chariots into the depth of the sea, and it was a marvelous deliverance. I suppose it's a type of you and I when we come to Christ.

The devil had us in his grip, but God sent a word. He sent it through somebody. It could have been a friend at work.

It could have been a sermon you heard in church. In some cases, it's just Christ himself, through the Holy Spirit, coming and speaking into the heart and revealing himself to somebody who's in desperate straits and looking for God, looking for a way to freedom. And you and I found freedom in Christ, and we walked through and out of the grip of darkness, and walked through the impossible places of captivity, and we found that the devil himself could not hold us, because the hand of God was on us.

And we come into the house of the Lord like we are here tonight, and we sing the songs of Zion. We talk about Pharaoh being drowned in the sea, and we know and understand that we're in the hand of God now, and nothing can stop us. Nothing can stop the plan of God that he has destined for our lives.

The Bible tells us in Exodus 15, beginning of verse 22, that the children of Israel were only a few days into the journey when they were confronted with water that was too bitter to drink. So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of shore. And they went three days into the wilderness and found no water.

And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the water of Marah, for they were bitter. And therefore, the name of it was called Marah. And the people murmured against Moses and said, what shall

we drink? You know, sometimes in the Christian life, we get only a few steps from our salvation and find ourselves in a very bitter place.

We find ourselves, we say, oh God, this is living water, just like you said to Isaiah. You said you're going to pour out upon me, and you're going to cleanse me and wash me. And I feel like those in the banquet feast in John chapter 7, when Jesus, you said, if anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink it.

I've come, and the water is so good. You remember when you first come to Christ, how good the water is? How good the promises are? How good it is to go to sleep at night knowing that heaven is your destiny? Knowing that God's got you in the palm of his hand? Knowing that none of your enemies, yes, you might be struggling against hell itself, but there's the inner knowledge that no power of evil that's formed against you is going to prosper. You now have the power to condemn every tongue that rises against you in judgment.

And you come to the house of God, and it's so exciting because you say, oh God, the water is so sweet. The water is so sweet, it's so sweet. After years of abuse, and years of lies, and years of struggling and suffering under the lashing tongue of the devil, finally I'm in a place of sweet water.

And one day you come so soon and early into your journey, you come into the house of God, and all of a sudden here's some water put before you. And it's, oh God, how can you expect me to drink this? Lord, this is so bitter, this is a bitter place. Why did you so soon have to bring me to this bitter place? You see, there was a time happening here.

God says, yes, I'm going to bring you out of Egypt, I'm going to show you my power, but before we can progress, before I can take you into the land of everything I promised you, I've got to take you through these bitter places. It's part of your growth, because if this doesn't get out of your heart, I'm not ever going to be able to plant you in a fruitful place. Everything I begin to do in your life, this bitterness that's not dealt with, is going to come and strangle it.

And my coming, which should be a blessing, ends up being to you a curse in a sense, because nothing grows. Nothing ever comes to fruition. It's planted, but it doesn't grow, because there's a bitterness in you.

There's a root, and that root is deep, it goes right through your loins, it's part and fabric of everything you are, and everything I plant within you, this root will come and work its way around it, and in the end will choke it out. And my coming, which should have been a blessing, ends up being a curse, until this is dealt with in your life. And so He brought them to this water, and it was a type of what happens in the Christian life when we come to Christ.

Some people never want to deal with the bitter water. They never want to go to these difficult places. They just look at the pool and just try to pass it by.

But you can't pass it by. It is something that has to be dealt with, or it will choke the very life of Christ out of you. Bitter water, too difficult to drink.

I know exactly what some are thinking tonight. You've read a scripture that said it's the first commandment of the promise. You said, I'm to honor my father and my mother.

But tell me, Pastor, how do I honor a father and mother who abandoned me? Tell me how to honor a father and mother who beat me. How do I honor a father and mother who abused me, physically or

verbally? And folks, I'm not minimizing it, because I know in some of your lives, because I've heard the stories, the depth of the pain. The depth of the wounding.

The physical, the sexual abuse that occurred in some cases in your own house. The verbal abuse of a drunken father or mother, or just an angry person who just constantly is speaking death into your life. Tell me, how do I honor a father or mother who I never have known, or never took an interest in my life? There will be some here tonight who could say, Pastor, you're telling me to honor a man I don't even know who he is.

I never met him. My mother was single when I was born, or my father took off before I was born, or when I was just a child. I don't even know who my father is.

I've never gotten a birthday card. I've never heard from him at Christmas. He never calls.

I don't even know who he is. And you are asking me tonight to honor him. You're going to have to tell me how I do this, because otherwise I'm never going to be able to get away from this.

And the people looked at Moses, and they were so upset that they began to murmur against Moses. And they began to say, Look, you bring us out of Egypt, and you bring us to this place, and show us this pool of water. You tell us now how we're going to drink this.

It's not possible. It's too bitter to drink it. And it's true.

There are some situations here that are so awful, that in your natural strength, you'll never be able to deal with this. It's impossible. You can't drink it.

You look down. The memories come flooding back. You're asking me to honor somebody that traveled down the hall at midnight and abused me.

You're asking me to do these things. I'll never be able to do it. The memories are too bitter.

But he said, Moses cried to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a tree. And when he cast the tree into the waters, the waters were made sweet. And there he made them a statute and an ordinance, and there he proved them.

And God said, There's only one way this will ever happen in your life. I'm going to show you the power of the cross. At the cross, Christ said, I myself suffered the wrath of my father.

You have to understand, the wrath of God was poured out on him. Everything that you and I have ever deserved was poured out on Christ. I'm comforted by the fact, quite often, that everything that we will ever have to experience, he experienced.

The wrath of his father came upon him. Incredible when you think of it. And Christ made a determination to honor his father, even though he knew he had to suffer his father's wrath before he would be raised on the third day from the dead.

And it's only when the power of the cross is applied to these areas of our lives can they ever be made sweet. It's in the power of the victory that Christ won on Calvary that you and I can enter into that victory. When he rose from the dead, he truly took captivity captive.

He truly took every memory captive. He truly took the weakness of the human heart captive. He truly took every lie of the devil captive.

And he gave the Bible's gifts unto man. He gave us the power, the Scripture says, to those who believe on him. He gave us the power to become the sons and daughters of God.

He gave us everything we need to triumph and to do what God asks us to do in these areas. To do this in our own strength is impossible. How could... I know it's to ask an impossibility to ask anyone here to drink such bitter water.

It's only when we apply the power of Calvary, the power of God, the promises of God, that we will ever find the strength to be obedient to these areas of our lives. Then he gave a promise. Verse 26, he said, If you will diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord your God, and will do that which is right in his sight, and will give ear to his commandments and keep his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon you which I have brought upon the Egyptians, for I am the Lord that healeth thee.

Now there's a promise for obedience. God said, if you will obey me in this, I will put none of these diseases upon you that you have seen come upon the Egyptians. I will set you free from all of the cancerous hatred, from all of the blind, awful words that are spoken about family.

I will set you free from the wounds that are plaguing and driving all of this society from pillar to post looking for happiness and looking for peace. God said, if you will obey me, I will take these things off of you. I will set you free.

I will give you a testimony of grace and glory. I will cause you to stand. You will have such a testimony of life if you will obey me in this and allow me to give you the strength to perform what I ask you to do.

Now the most recent disease in their memory would be the loss of the firstborn of each family because of the stubborn refusal of Pharaoh to hear the word of God. Imagine that the word of God came and they wouldn't obey it in Egypt. And they would be so, so remember.

God, I remember the wailing and the anguish as every house had a dead child. And usually the firstborn was a symbol of the continuance of your family lineage, your strength. Every house lost its strength in other words.

The lineage was destroyed because there was a refusal. The word of God came. The instruction was simple, let them go.

But Pharaoh wouldn't let them go. And I think of the song that the children of Israel were singing on the other side of the Red Sea. I think of them sitting around the campfires at night saying, How foolish of Pharaoh.

How insane. The word was so simple and he just wouldn't obey it. He could have saved his family.

Unspeakable sorrow. He could have saved the destruction of the fruitfulness of the nation. There was fruit, there was livestock, there was provision.

It was all destroyed. Because of simple stubbornness to hear a simple instruction. Let the people go.

And he wouldn't do it. And I can see them just after they're set free and then a very short time later they're sitting around the same campfire, but now they're around the pool of Marah. And that pool of bitterness in a sense is where they're being given the same instruction that Pharaoh was given.

The same word is coming to them. Now, I want you to hear me on this. I'm drawing an inference from the Scriptures, which is not specifically stated, but it does have an application in every one of our lives.

You see, the question arises, how do we respond when we sit in Pharaoh's seat and the word of God comes to us saying, Let them go. It's an incredible thing. We can see the foolishness of Pharaoh.

We sing about it. We even clap our hands and worship about it in Times Square Church. But how do we respond when God's word comes to us and says, Those that kept you in bondage, those that wounded you, those that made your life hard, bitter bondage, let them go.

And now we are sitting in Pharaoh's seat. You see, those who have not let them go, you are now sitting in Pharaoh's seat. You are Pharaoh.

And the word of God comes to you and says, Listen, yes, I know you were hurt. Yes, I know you were held in bondage. Yes, I know that you were betrayed.

Yes, I know you were abandoned. Yes, I know you were not provided for. But you are now living in a higher place than you used to live.

You are now in the hand of God. So I say to you, let them go. Let them go.

Release the debt that they owe you. Let them go. Set them free.

Honor them. Let them go. And so now we have a choice, just like Pharaoh.

We can obey and yield to the word of God or we can harden our hearts and watch the provision of our land taken away. Watch our cattle die. Watch our families go into the same spiral of destruction that we have come from.

Verse 27 He said, They came to Elim, where there were twelve wells of water and three score and ten palm trees, and they encamped there by the water. After the tree was applied to the water, God said, If you will obey me, I will bring you to a never-ending supply and I will give you life and give you peace. Now I know that there are people here tonight that say, Pastor, you're just going to have to get more specific with me.

How do I honor a father or mother who has already died? Or is too far away or in some place where I can't get to for any kind of face-to-face reconciliation? Tell me, how can I honor them? Here's the best way. This is only an illustration. You do it whatever way you have to.

I think maybe someday you can just sit down and write all the things that you feel that they owe you and were never done for you. Then take it, tear it up, offer it to God and just throw it away. And say, I've released the dead.

How do you know when the dead is released? Well, first of all, it's when you stop rehearsing the matter. When you stop telling everybody you meet how rotten your father and mother were. You stop rehearsing it.

That's how you know you've let the dead go. When you stop talking about it. When your face doesn't get all twisted every time you start talking about... You see, those who don't, my experience has been those who don't release the dead always seem to struggle with authority all their lives.

Never trust any authority. A woman goes into a marriage, her husband has some little failure and she says, you're just like my father. You ever said that to your spouse? You're just like my mother.

You want to know why you said that? Because you've not released the dead. You're still rehearsing the matter. In your spirit, you're not letting it go.

And you see, what should be the blessing of God is a destruction. The Lord says, until this is dealt with in your heart, my coming, instead of bringing fruit, ends up being a curse in what should be bringing life into your heart and your home. Those who don't forgive run the risk of reliving the very thing they despise within their own families.

I've seen it over and over and over again. Job said it in Job 3.25, the thing which I greatly feared has come upon me. I'll tell you why it happens.

I think the principle is fairly simple. And it's simply this. The direction in which you are looking is most often that which you will become.

If you are motivated as a Christian to change just because you don't want to be like somebody else, if that's your motivation, you will more than likely become exactly like that person. It's an incredible thing. I've seen this so many times now, I know it's not coincidence.

I've had people come in for counseling and say, I hate my father, my mother, whatever is my uncle, I hate that person and I'm becoming just like them. The very thing I hate I'm becoming. You see folks, they're becoming it because that's the direction they're looking in.

Not looking to be like Christ, but to be looking to be unlike someone else. Folks, if you want to grow in Christ, the Christian motivation to move forward must always be to like Christ and not to be unlike someone else. You've got to release the dead.

You've got to let it go and then look to Jesus, the Bible says, the author and finisher of your faith. And say, Lord, I want to be like you. I release everybody that's hurt me in the past.

I let them all go. Family, husbands, wives, children, whatever the situation is, I let it go and I look to you now. Because you are now the source of my hope, my life and my strength.

And everything I'm going to be, I want to be like you. How do I honor my father and mother if they're still living? You can show active kindness. Galatians 6.10 says, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

I'm sure your father and mother has a birthday. If they're still living, you can send a card. You could write a letter and tell them what God is doing for you.

Whether or not it's reciprocated is not the issue. We don't necessarily... God didn't say, honor your father and mother if they've done everything right. He just said, honor them.

And that was a commandment. That it may be well with you. That you may live long upon the earth.

There's so many things you can do. So many active kindness to begin to turn this whole thing around. Even if it doesn't turn around your original relationship with your mother and father, it will change your family relationship.

The Bible says, whatever you sow, that's what you're going to reap. And you can be sure that if you choose to honor your father and mother, that your children will honor you. They will arise up as the Scripture says, and they will call you blessed.

Lastly, you can take the caring of your parents as a holy charge from the Lord. Because really that's what it is. Colossians 3.23 says, whatever you do, do it heartily as unto the Lord, and not unto men.

You take it as a holy charge. Say, God you spoke this into my life. And you told me that if I would do this, Lord you would bless me.

Now I've been a teenager. And I've done teenage things. Which I suppose could have really alienated me from my mother and father.

I was a rebellious teenager. Said things I shouldn't have said. Defied authority I shouldn't have defied because of my own ignorance and lack of understanding of God's ways.

Then I made it worse. I got saved. And didn't have a lot of discretion.

I was sort of like a bull in a china shop. Come home with good news. Hey, guess what? You're all going to hell.

You know? My Christian testimony was not very intelligent. And I made it worse. Even as a Christian.

But I thank God with all of my heart tonight. That along the road reading the word of God, I've come across some of these truths. And God began to speak to me about these things years ago.

And by grace began to move me in the direction of making past wrongs right. And building a bridge where I could. And being reconciled where it was possible.

I came back from Nigeria to find that both of my parents are gravely ill. Will probably or possibly lose them both in the very near future. I was home recently and it's amazing It's amazing to be reconciled.

It's amazing to be able to hold your mother and hold your father and say I love you. And have them say the same thing back. It's amazing to have taken steps and I didn't take them just because they're ill.

It took them a long time ago. And of course they're very gracious and they took steps in my direction as well. There's such a healing coming into my whole family.

I've not done everything right as a father. I've made some mistakes as a Christian. I've shared many of them openly here in this church.

I've shared them in the pastor's conference. And my children could legitimately look at my life and find fault with how I represented God before them. Some of the things I did.

Times that I lost my temper. They could be justified in holding little grievances against me. I got some cards lately from a couple of my children that have astounded me at what they had to say in those cards.

My daughter wrote to me and she said, Dad, I find no fault in you. She said, you're a righteous man in and out of the pulpit of God. And I want to be like you for the rest of my life.

Just an I love you card I guess. I had one of my sons write to me and say the very same thing recently. I was talking to my wife about it and I said, what have I ever done to deserve this? That my children could rise up and say such words.

Then I began to realize I made a choice to honor my father and my mother. I made a choice, even though we disagreed on issues of even God at times and the truth of God as I see it, I made a choice which is a higher choice. To honor my father because he is my father.

And to honor my mother because she is my mother. And to honor God by obeying him. And I see life and fruit in every area of my home.

I see God moving in an unprecedented way in my children, my family. I see the coming of Christ bringing fruit and life everywhere I turn and everything it seems that God gives me to touch prospers. And it all comes from some basic truths that early on in your Christian walk we are confronted with and are given the choice to obey or disobey.

In the book of Numbers, I just want to read it to you. Please, you don't have to turn there. In Numbers chapter 6, the Lord spoke to Moses and he said, I want you to tell Aaron and his sons to bless the children of Israel.

And he said, I want to bless in particular those who have my name on them. I want you to pronounce a blessing on them. Now, that means those that have not taken my name in vain.

That doesn't mean you swear the Lord's name. That was really an old religious teaching. It means you don't take the name of Christ and then make it a worthless thing in your life.

No, but those that have taken my name and are intertwined with me and allowing me to work with them. He said, I want you to pronounce a blessing. So, I want to pronounce that blessing on you tonight and I'm going to give an altar call in a moment.

And I'm going to speak this blessing over your life. And here's the blessing. The Lord bless thee.

This is the first part of it. And keep thee. The Lord make His face to shine upon thee and be gracious to thee.

The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee and give thee peace. This is the first blessing. God says, those that have my name and are walking in truth are going to be kept by the power of God.

The Apostle Peter said, we are kept by Him to a salvation that is soon to be revealed. Even though for a season we are in heaviness through the trials that we have to face. But those that make the choice to walk God's way, God says, I'm going to keep you.

I'm going to keep you. It's an amazing thing. The second blessing, He said, my face will shine upon you and I'll be gracious to you.

In other words, I will not turn my back to you, but I'll turn my face to you. You'll see me face to face. You'll understand me.

You'll have an intimate relationship with me. And I will be very, very gracious to you. Beloved, I've got to tell you, God's been very gracious to me.

Extremely gracious. If I would have been God, I'd be on the heap a long time ago. Thank God I was not God in my own life.

God's been very gracious to me. In spite of my mistakes, I have had it in my heart to do right and to trust God for the power to do it. And I've seen His face and I've begun to understand some things about Him.

He's been extremely gracious to me. And the word gracious really means favored and provided for. God says, I will favor you.

I will know where you are. I will raise your life up to be used for my glory and I will give you all the provision you will ever need to do what I call you to do. You'll never lack of anything that you need to do what I've been called you to do.

Acts 5.32 Peter stood before the religious people of his day. They had taken him and cast him, what the Bible says, into the common prison. I like to call that common prison the prison of bitterness.

That's probably the most common prison in society today. It's bitterness and unforgiveness. If you would want to characterize or find a sin that underlies probably most of everything that goes on in society today, you'd find that very common sin, that common prison of unforgiveness and bitterness.

Especially in light of the breakdowns of family that we've experienced perhaps in this last few decades. But Peter stood. And he said, he was released by an angel.

A messenger came and he was released from the common prison. And he was found shortly after standing and preaching in the temple. The words of eternal life.

And he stood and spoke about Christ. And he said, we are witnesses of these things and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him. Beloved, I want to tell you something.

When you make the choice to obey God, you will be released from the common prison. And you will be a witness to your generation of a releasing power of a man or woman who can't be held by any of the common prisons of this generation. And God will cause you to stand before your generation and be a testimony.

And say, yes, Christ rose from the dead and I am a witness because I can't be held in the common prisons of my generation. The Holy Spirit has been given to me because I've made choices along the way I've chosen to obey God. And lastly, the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee and give thee peace.

Peace. There's a passage of Scripture that says, mark the perfect man or the man in which the work of God is perfected for the end of that man is peace. Paul says, be careful for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be known to God.

Be careful for nothing means don't hold back from what God is asking you to do. That's what it means to be careful. Don't hold back.

Just come to God and let your requests be known to Him. And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ. Finally, brethren, He says,

whatsoever things are true and honest and whatsoever things are just and whatsoever things are pure and whatsoever things are lovely and whatsoever things are of good report if there be any virtue and if there be any praise think on these things.

Those things which you have both learned and received and heard and seen in me do and the God of peace shall be with you. Paul says, you've seen me walk in a certain path and this is an instance when I can honestly stand before you and say, beloved, you have seen that I have chosen to walk in a certain path and God has been with me. And I challenge you now in the name of Christ to not hold back from doing what God is asking you to do so that Christ can come and bless you.

That Christ can come and empower you and set your family and your whole thinking on a different course and release you from the common captivity of this generation. And the God of peace shall be with you. Christ said to Ezekiel, I will give you a new mind.

I will put a new spirit in you. I will be your God. You will be my people.

He said, those who walk my way you're going to be called the restorer of things that have been broken down. You're going to be called the repairer of the breach and the restorer of all things. God said, I'm going to do something in you.

I'm going to set you free. Because tonight you're going to make the choice to obey me. Hallelujah.

I see in my spirit people released from this common prison tonight. This common prison of unforgiveness. This common prison of bitterness.

This common prison of rehearsing old grievances. This common prison of disobeying God under the guise of, well, I'm justified to disobey God. No, we are never justified to disobey God.

This common prison that the devil loves because he knows that if he can keep you there he can rob you of the blessings that God wants to bring into your life. Tonight, by God's grace I want to challenge you to be reconciled to every man and woman who lives on the face of the earth. Be reconciled.

Don't let yourself be robbed any longer. Be reconciled to your mother and father. Be reconciled to your brothers and sisters.

Be reconciled to every race and color and culture and language. Be reconciled. Paul was able to stand with power before those that accused him because he said, I have a conscience that's free of offense towards God and man.

I am free. I've obeyed God. I've released the dead.

I've let everyone go that owes me anything. And because of it, God is able to come and bless him and enable him to impact not only his generation but ours as well. Gave him words which weren't his own.

Gave him an intelligence so far beyond his natural ability. Gave him understanding because he had a face-to-face relationship with Jesus Christ. For some who are here tonight, this is one of the greatest calls you will ever get.

You can't go farther until you've dealt with this bitter water. It's going to mean some letter writing, some phone calls. It's going to mean some letting go.

It's going to mean stopping speaking some old stories. One of the very first things when I started to share my testimony years ago, the Holy Spirit told me, He said, don't ever dishonor your father and your mother in your testimony. Not every father or mother does everything right.

And the Lord said, you won't do everything right either with your children. Don't ever dishonor them. I thank God that I've obeyed that.

Thank God with all my heart. Oh God, thank you. God, thank you so much.

Thank you so much. You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free. It's wonderful that you're making this choice tonight.

And you're going to struggle with it. But you'll never take it up again because tonight you're deciding to do it God's way. And God says, I'm going to put the tree in your bitter water.

I'm going to show you my power. You trust Him tonight. Trust Him because the devil will want you to take that old bitterness up when you leave here.

But you don't have to now. And the Holy Spirit's going to tell you what to do. Now, if your mother and father are dead, there's nothing you can do.

Just stop telling this story. But if they're still alive, and you know where they are, you can write a card. You can send a letter.

And you don't relive the old grievance. I forgive you for and list of all the stuff. You don't even have to say, I forgive you.

Just tell them what God's doing in your life. Tell them, I love you. Even if you have to say it by faith.

And I thank God for you because you're my father. I thank God for you because you're my mother. Amazing.

It will be well with you. You will live long in a place of fruitfulness, God said. It's going to be well with you.

Let's all pray together, those who have come to this altar. Lord Jesus, I have heard your word tonight. And God, it's beyond my power to obey you.

But I believe with all my heart that tonight as I make the choice to release my mother and father from the debt they owe me. I make the choice to honor them as you have commanded me to. That you will give me the power to break the curse of bitterness that these things have planted in my life.

I thank you Lord for loving me enough to bring me to this place and to confront me with these issues. Because you want to plant absolute divine life within my heart. Tonight, I take all my list of everything that my mother and father or anybody else owes me.

I tear it up and I offer it to you. I ask you Jesus to take this out of my heart and give me the freedom that I ask you for tonight from all of these issues of my heart. I release my father.

I release my mother from anything they owe me. I forgive them because you have forgiven me. I thank you Lord that you are going to bring change into my home, into my family, into my life.

You said you would bless me. You said it would go well with me. I would live long in a fruitful place.

I believe it. I receive it. Consider it done in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. I actually pronounce this blessing on you.

I want you to hear it now. The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you.

The Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace. God, I thank you for what you have done tonight in this house. I thank you Lord that you have hand-picked us to hear this word tonight.

Thank you Lord that you are setting people free. I thank you that there's going to be reconciliation. I thank you mighty God there's going to be shouts of joy even tonight when people go home and they can say I'm free, I'm free, I'm free, I'm free, I'm free, I'm free.

I thank you God you're going to turn the hearts of fathers to children as well as children to fathers. God you're going to turn some hearts. You're going to bring some children home.

God you're going to do things that can only be done by your hand. Lord we entrust it to you, we believe it God that you're going to do these things. Lord we thank you that you are true to your word.

When we obey you God you say there's a promise with this obedience. God we receive it, I receive it tonight and I thank you for it. I thank you mighty God.

I thank you Lord that it's as if my children don't even see my failings. Lord you have given me favor in the sight of my own children and I thank you God from the very depths of my heart. I thank you Lord that you will give the mothers and fathers your favor in the sight of their children in spite of past mistakes.

Lord you'll bring the hearts of the children home because many here have made right decisions tonight and their hearts have been made right in relationship to their own parents. God thank you, God thank you. We thank you for the freedom tonight.

We thank you God, we praise you. We bless you Lord. We bless you God.

We bless you Jesus. God we bless you. This is the conclusion of the message.

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