

LOVE THE LORD



Lesson Twenty-six - How can I love God and honour my parents?

August 2023

Summary of key points

- Asian families place great importance on their family name and filial piety.
- Filial piety is a doctrine based on Confucianism which says that it is a virtue and a duty to respect, obey, and care for our elders in our family.
- The rules of filial piety oppose God's Word (with 5 examples) and often involve ancestor worship, which God strictly forbids.
- God wants us to honour our parents but not to be enslaved to them. The first commandment in the Bible that comes with a promise is the one that tells us to honour our father and mother.
- God's Word shows us that we do not belong to our parents and that there are no family structures in eternity. Our first priority should be to our Eternal Father, who is the One who has given us everything.
- We need to know where our loyalties lie, whether to our family or to God first (with a test of 6 statements).
- God's Word gives us some helpful guidelines on how to build healthy boundaries and speak the truth in love.

Watch the lesson online

<https://youtu.be/zJ3fVSDVEpQ>

Transcript

Welcome to lesson 26 Love the Lord where we talk about the typical pressures Asian adults feel from their parents and elders, and how we are to respond with God's love and wisdom.

We will begin by inviting God to speak to us personally through this study. Please follow along as we pray together. Click pause at any point if you need more time.

First, let's thank God for His perfect character and His perfect will for us.

Next, please tell Him about the things that have been stressful and ask for His help and guidance.

Let us put down our burdens of sin and confess the ways we have sinned against God and against others, and ask for His forgiveness.

Please confess the ways others have sinned against us, and forgive them in Jesus' name.

Next, let us ask God to purify and open our hearts to receive His teaching.

Finally, please repeat these words, "In Jesus' name, I silence all distractions and voices that are not from God. Amen."

Let's begin the lesson for today. How can I love God and honour my parents?

Jesus made several strong statements during His time on earth. One of them was that if we want to be His disciple, we must love God so much that by comparison, we appear to hate everyone else—including our father and mother. Our parents greatly influence how we see relationships, this world, and God. The saying, "like father, like son" or "you are a carbon copy of your parents" has some truth to it.

Luke 14:26 "If you want to be my disciple, you must, by comparison, hate everyone else—your father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even your own life. Otherwise, you cannot be my disciple. (NLT)

Our parents' expectations, hopes, and teachings leave deep imprints on our own behaviours and motivations without us even realising it, but the Bible teaches us to not copy their behaviour and customs, whether consciously or subconsciously. Instead, we are to let God transform us into new people by changing the way we think. But if we are totally honest with ourselves, our hearts are often divided between God and our families. We think about them and their needs more often than we think about God.

Romans 12:2 Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. (NLT)

We all need to pray these verses from Psalm 86 together, "Teach me your way, LORD, that I may rely on your faithfulness; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name. I will praise you, Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify your name forever." (Psalm 86:11-12 NIV)

This can be especially challenging for those of us who have been raised in Asian households because we have been told that it is our family name that is paramount and that filial piety is of utmost importance. Filial piety is a doctrine based on Confucianism which says that it is a virtue and a duty to respect, obey, and care for our elders in our family. Being filial is not so much about showing unconditional love, but about following human rules on family duty and obligations.

Here are some of those obligations and how they compare with God's Word.

1. We are expected to obey our parents and family elders, no questions asked. The Bible, on the other hand, says that we are to obey God first before any human authority. | *Acts 5:29 But Peter and the apostles replied, "We must obey God rather than any human authority. (NLT)*
2. We are to obey God's commandments as a demonstration of our love for Him. Most times, however, we are expected to go along and obey family traditions and rules that have been passed down through the generations. | *John 14:15 "If you love me, obey my commandments. (NLT)*
3. This is how we end up being led into idol worship and ancestor worship. For instance, we feel obliged to pay our respects to our dead ancestors so that their spirits will not be offended or enraged by our lack of filial piety. We somehow believe that our actions can and will impact the afterlife, which is not only false but also a belief in necromancy, something that God strictly forbids. God promises to set His face against anyone who practises necromancy. | *Leviticus 19:31 "Do not defile yourselves by turning to mediums or to those who consult the spirits of the dead. I am the LORD your God. (NLT)*

Leviticus 20:6 "If a person turns to mediums and necromancers... I will set my face against that person and will cut him off from among his people. (NLT)

4. God's Word also reminds us that whatever we do, we should do it all for God's glory. In filial piety, however, it is the family name that must be held in the highest honour. We must never bring our family shame. | *1 Corinthians 10:31 So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. (NLT)*
5. One way that we can let the family down is by failing to become successful in the eyes of the world and to earn lots of money. There can be a lot of shame attached to being seen as under-achieving or lagging behind our peers. God's Word, on the other hand, teaches us that we should serve God alone and not be enslaved to chasing money. | *Matthew 6:24 "No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money. (NLT)*

So we can see that many Asian family obligations actually oppose God's Word, and we have to be very intentional about who we follow first. If we love our earthly father or mother more than we love God, He will consider us unworthy of being His child. The reality is that we cannot call ourselves God's children and yet follow our family's traditions, expectations, and demands first. That would be greatly disloyal to our supreme God and Father.

Matthew 10:37 "If you love your father or mother more than you love me, you are not worthy of being mine; (NLT)

We all need to renew our understanding about family relationships from God's point of view and walk in Biblical truth. Here are some facts.

1. Firstly, we do not belong to our earthly families. We belong to God. | *Romans 14:8 If we live, it's to honor the Lord. And if we die, it's to honor the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. (NLT)*
2. God is the One who gave us life. Without Him breathing life into us, we would not come into existence. | *Isaiah 42:5 God, the LORD, created the heavens and stretched them out. He created the earth and everything in it. He gives breath to everyone, life to everyone who walks the earth... (NLT)*
3. In God's eyes, our parents are our "guardians and managers" until we receive Jesus as our Saviour. | *Galatians 4:2-3 They have to obey their guardians until they reach whatever age their father set. And that's the way it was with us before Christ came. We were like children; we were slaves to the basic spiritual principles of this world. (NLT)*
4. There are no earthly family structures in eternity, just like the angels. Our earthly parents cease to be our parents. | *Matthew 22:30 For when the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage. In this respect they will be like the angels in heaven. (NLT)*
5. And no ancestor can help us in this life, no matter how many rituals we follow or offerings we make. They no longer play a part in anything here on earth and know nothing of what happens here. Even if we simply show up at any ancestral ceremony, we deeply grieve the Holy Spirit and disregard His presence in our lives. | *Ecclesiastes 9:5-6 ... the dead know nothing... Whatever they did in their lifetime—loving, hating, envying—is all long gone. They no longer play a part in anything here on earth. (NLT)*
6. Every thing we have and every success we have enjoyed is because of God. He is the One who gave us the ability to thrive. Our earthly parents certainly gave us a good head-start in life, but the ultimate credit always goes to God. He is the One who gives us power to be successful in order to fulfil our covenant with Him. | *Deuteronomy 8:18 Remember the LORD your God. He is the one who gives you power to be successful, in order to fulfill the covenant he confirmed to your ancestors with an oath. (NLT)*

And there is only one Parent we have for eternity and that is God the Father. From this, we can see why God expects our first loyalty to go to Him and Him alone. No Parent has ever sacrificed His most precious Son to pay for our salvation. Only God has.

Matthew 6:9-10 Pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. (NLT)

All this can be hard for us to wrap our minds around, especially if our parents have been very good to us or perhaps if they have been very demanding on us. It feels as if we are expected to abandon, betray, or disappoint our parents. But this is not the case.

The first commandment in the Bible that comes with a promise is the one that tells us to honour our father and mother. Then things will go well for us and we will live a long and full life. God rewards us for honouring our parents.

Ephesians 6:2-3 “Honor your father and mother.” This is the first commandment with a promise: If you honor your father and mother, “things will go well for you, and you will have a long life on the earth.” (NLT)

To honour our parents means that we will

1. show them respect, | *Leviticus 19:3 “Each of you must show great respect for your mother and father... I am the LORD your God. (NLT)*
2. encourage them, | *1 Timothy 5:1 Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, (ESV)*
3. care for their needs, and | *1 Timothy 5:8 But those who won’t care for their relatives, especially those in their own household, have denied the true faith. Such people are worse than unbelievers. (NLT)*
4. be living testimonies for Jesus Christ. | *Luke 8:39 “No, go back to your family, and tell them everything God has done for you.” So he went all through the town proclaiming the great things Jesus had done for him. (NLT)*

Honouring our parents does not mean we choose to live the way they do. Each generation should set its hope anew on God and not repeat the mistakes of their ancestors, especially if our parents refused to give their hearts to God. Should we follow our parents into rebellion against God?

Psalms 78:7-8 So each generation should set its hope anew on God, not forgetting his glorious miracles and obeying his commands. Then they will not be like their ancestors— stubborn, rebellious, and unfaithful, refusing to give their hearts to God. (NLT)

Many of our ancestors worshipped false gods and idols and passed on this tradition to our families. Do you know how God sees this? *“This is what the LORD says: “What did your ancestors find wrong with*

me that led them to stray so far from me? They worshiped worthless idols, only to become worthless themselves.” (Jeremiah 2:5 NLT)

God Himself specifically warns us not to follow in our parents’ footsteps and defile ourselves with their idols. Let us read Ezekiel chapter 20 verses 18 to 21 together, *“Then I warned their children not to follow in their parents’ footsteps, defiling themselves with their idols. ‘I am the Lord your God,’ I told them. ‘Follow my decrees, pay attention to my regulations... ‘But their children, too, rebelled against me. They refused to keep my decrees and follow my regulations, even though obedience would have given them life...” (Ezekiel 20:18-21 NLT)*

God continues to warn us in 2 Chronicles chapter 30 verses 7 to 8, *“Do not be like your ancestors and relatives who abandoned the LORD... and became an object of derision, as you yourselves can see. Do not be stubborn, as they were, but submit yourselves to the LORD. Come to his Temple, which he has set apart as holy forever. Worship the LORD your God so that his fierce anger will turn away from you.” (2 Chronicles 30:7-8 NLT)*

Our parents often pass on family traditions without realising that they are acting in direct rebellion against God, inviting His anger rather than God’s peace, love, protection, blessing, and grace.

In fact, God’s original plan for our parents was that they would wholeheartedly follow Him and teach us about God’s commandments, even repeating them again and again to us, day in and day out.

Deuteronomy 6:6-7 And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up. (NLT)

When our families stay faithful to the one true God and obey His commandments, God promises to count us as righteous and continue to bless us and preserve our lives.

Deuteronomy 6:20-21,24-25 “In the future your children will ask you, ‘What is the meaning of these laws...?’ “Then you must tell them... God commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear him so he can continue to bless us and preserve our lives, as he has done to this day. For we will be counted as righteous when we obey all the commands the Lord our God has given us.’ (NLT)

Has this been the pattern in your household while you were growing up? Where do your loyalties lie? Here is a quick test for our loyalties. We will now go through six statements, please pick the ones that resonate with you, if they are true.

1. “My family always comes first.” | True or False
2. “Their happiness is my top priority.” | True or False

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3. “My parents’ approval is crucial.” | True or False
 4. “I can’t allow them to lose face.” | True or False
 5. “I feel guilty if I don’t obey their wishes.” | True or False
 6. “I maintain peace at home by obeying them.” | True or False

How did you fare? How many did you pick “true” for? Consider how this way of thinking affects our loyalty to God. Can we truly call ourselves God’s children when we are more loyal to other human beings than to our Creator and eternal Father? How does God feel about all this?

God created us in His image to follow His ways, but mankind has been re-making their children into their image to follow their ways for centuries. All this may seem normal for us because it has already become a pattern of the world.

Genesis 1:27 So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (NLT)

We are expected to bend to our earthly parents’ demands and expectations, yet the Bible shows us that love does not demand its own way.

1 Corinthians 13:4-5 Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. (NLT)

Also, were you aware that placing all our faith in human beings, even if they are our parents, brings us a curse? In Jeremiah chapter 17 verse 5, it says, “*This is what the Lord says: “Cursed are those who put their trust in mere humans, who rely on human strength and turn their hearts away from the Lord.”* (Jeremiah 17:5 NLT) This is because our parents’ ideas may actually be the opposite of God’s plan for our lives. Even if they have the best intentions for us, their plans might lead us astray.

In Isaiah chapter 30 verse 1, we read, “*“Woe to the obstinate children,” declares the LORD, “to those who carry out plans that are not mine, forming an alliance, but not by my Spirit, heaping sin upon sin;”* (Isaiah 30:1 NLT)

Whenever we choose to obey our parents’ desires for us, no matter how well-meaning, we unwittingly become their slaves. God wants to teach us how to love others well, but keep us free from being enslaved to them.

Romans 6:16 Don’t you realize that you become the slave of whatever you choose to obey? ... (NLT)

This means we need to set up healthy boundaries that are built on mutual respect for any, and all, of our relationships.

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1. For example, while we certainly should help our relatives with their needs, we should not agree to save up our money for their sake. Any financial resource that God gives us is best invested in the things He has chosen for us. | *2 Corinthians 12:14 ...For children are not obligated to save up for their parents, but parents for their children. (ESV)*
 2. We should live quiet lives and mind our own business, | *1 Thessalonians 4:11 Make it your goal to live a quiet life, minding your own business... (NLT)*
 3. and not participate in family gossip, slander, and quarrelling. At the same time, we should honour our relatives and not judge them for doing so. | *2 Corinthians 12:20 For I am afraid that when I come... I am afraid that I will find quarreling, jealousy, anger, selfishness, slander, gossip, arrogance, and disorderly behavior. (NLT)*
 4. We should not seek to take revenge for the sake of our family name but we can honour our relatives and listen to their grievances. | *Romans 12:17-18 Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. (NLT)*
 5. Honouring them does not mean we have to always follow their advice, ways, or traditions. | *Jeremiah 17:5 This is what the Lord says: "Cursed are those who put their trust in mere humans, who rely on human strength and turn their hearts away from the Lord. (NLT)*
 6. Neither should we prioritise them over our own spouse and marriage. Our marriage covenant before God means that our priority is first the Lord, then our spouse, then our children, and then finally, our parents — and not the other way round. We need to have our own personal boundaries as individuals, and especially after marriage. | *Genesis 2:24 This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one. (NLT)*

The effect of filial piety on a family means that the older generations' opinions are usually revered over the younger adults'. We may not be consulted on family matters or be allowed to speak up. Basically, the older generation becomes the lords of the family.

1 Corinthians chapter 8 verses 5 to 6 says this. Let's read it together. "... some people actually worship many gods and many lords. But for us, There is one God, the Father, by whom all things were created, and for whom we live. And there is one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things were created, and through whom we live." (1 Corinthians 8:5-6 NLT)

The Bible reminds us to put away childish ways of thinking, speaking, and reasoning. We simply need to learn how to do so in ways that honour our parents and elders.

1 Corinthians 13:11 When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things. (NLT)

Our own parents often stay ignorant of our true desires and thoughts simply because we have never spoken up for ourselves and because they never knew to ask us. As a result, conveying our own needs and boundaries can feel unnatural and even disrespectful at first. Yet speaking the truth in love is one way of growing to become more and more like Christ.

Ephesians 4:15 Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. (NLT)

Thankfully, the Bible provides some guidelines for us to follow.

1. First, we can start by asking the Holy Spirit for wisdom on how to say The things that we need to, in ways that are loving but also truthful and faithful to God. | *James 1:5 If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking. (NLT)*
2. We are called to respect our elders' position of authority, though not necessarily having to submit to everything they have to say. | *1 Peter 5:5 In the same way, you who are younger must accept the authority of the elders. And all of you, dress yourselves in humility as you relate to one another... (NLT)*
3. We do this with a humble attitude, because Jesus is also humble and honoured His elders. | *1 Peter 5:5 In the same way, you who are younger must accept the authority of the elders. And all of you, dress yourselves in humility as you relate to one another... (NLT)*
4. We can respectfully acknowledge and appeal to our elders' good intentions, knowledge, and care, | *1 Timothy 5:1 Never speak harshly to an older man, but appeal to him respectfully as you would to your own father... (NLT)*
5. while gently explaining our boundaries before they trespass into areas they should not any further. | *Galatians 6:1 Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. (ESV)*
6. At the same time, as a reflection of God's love for them, we ought to ensure that our words are always good, helpful, and encouraging. | *Ephesians 4:29 Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them. (NLT)*

God chose us as a gift for our parents. Therefore, we can be confident that He will also teach us how to be a blessing to them, according to His good and perfect will.

Psalms 127:3 Children are a gift from the Lord; they are a reward from him. (NLT)

God will lead us to good deeds that will shine His glory in our homes. In the process, our families may even be drawn closer to Christ, if we allow Him to lead us all.

Matthew 5:15-16 ... a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father. (NLT)

Let's spend the next few minutes to put down the pressures and expectations we face from our parents, and commit to follow God first.

Let us thank God for our families. God chose us for our families to be a blessing to them. We are called to be His light in a dark generation that does not know Him. They may not always understand our hearts and that is okay, because God understands.

Next, let us confess any pressures we feel in obeying them. Do we feel guilty, ashamed, conflicted, saddened, angry, harassed, pressured? Please confess our emotional burdens and give them all to Jesus.

Let us forgive our parents for not raising us according to God's ways. They are only repeating generational patterns they were taught from their own parents. Let us pray for them and bless them.

Next, let us confess our parents' expectations of us, one by one, and give those burdens to God. We can ask our all-powerful-Father in heaven to fulfil their needs, rather than for them to put all this pressure on us.

Next, let us repent of idolising our parents. Have we made their opinions more important than God's Word? Have we procrastinated on the things that God has called us to do because we feared for our parents' welfare or their reaction? Let's come clean before God.

Finally, let's thank God for His faithfulness to us and ask Him to make us a good testimony for His glory within our households.

We pray that you will experience a new fresh beginning with your parents, one that is based on God's love rather than the traditions and customs of this world.

We have come to the end of today's lesson. Here are the reflection questions for you to prepare answers to before your small group meeting as well as a testimony to watch. We pray that you will be blessed. See you next time.

Time for reflection

1. What are your parents' desires for or from you?
2. Are these expectations aligned with God's will for your life?

Watch the testimony for this lesson



Personal notes