



A Quick Reference and Lesson Guide

End-of-Life Issues: Caring for Elderly Parents

By: Ruth Harvey

1 Scenarios and Assessment

Scenarios/Case Studies

A. Scenario #1

At seventy-five years of age, Evelyn Smith retained her vibrant health, but living alone presented increased difficulties. Essential tasks such as driving, grocery shopping, and housekeeping seemed too overwhelming. Thus, Evelyn and her children faced the uncomfortable, but crucial task of making decisions regarding her finances and future living arrangements.

B. Scenario #2

Alice Jones thoroughly enjoyed living at the Mountain View Retirement Community. She maintained a large degree of personal independence and had many wonderful friends there. Then dementia started taking its dreadful toll. Memory loss led to increased fears and the disorientation of Sundowners Syndrome. Consequently, Alice grew terrified of venturing outside her apartment. Faced with this escalating problem, her daughter, Betty had to decide whether she would assume the caregiver role or seek another solution.

Definitions and Key Thoughts

Facts and Statistics

1. According to the Administration on Aging (AOA), the older population (sixty-five years or older) currently represents 12.9 percent of the US population, about one in every eight Americans.
2. AOA estimates there will be approximately 72.1 million older persons by 2030, comprising 19 percent of the US populace.
3. In 1940, just 7 percent of sixty-five-year olds survived to age ninety; by 2050, the number will climb to an astonishing 42 percent!
4. According to Equip.org's article, *Care for the Elderly*, 20 percent of all people who have ever lived past age sixty-five are alive right now.
5. For many seniors, increased longevity is coupled with debilitating memory loss and the Alzheimer's Association says one in three seniors die with Alzheimer's or another dementia.

B. Elder Caregiving

1. The expanding elderly population pushes many adult children into caregiving roles for their aging parents.
2. Middle-aged adults involved in the dual tasks of raising their children while caring for aging parents are known as "the Sandwich Generation."
3. Families, rather than institutions, provide 80 percent of long-term parental care.

4. According to the Family Caregiver Alliance, the number of “unpaid family caregivers” is set to reach 37 million by 2050, an 85 percent increase from the year 2000.
5. The majority of caregiving responsibilities often fall upon one adult child, typically a daughter, usually the eldest daughter.
6. Caregivers can become “hidden patients” because of failure to notice signs of personal stress and they often suffer severe physical symptoms.
7. According to Focus on the Family, studies reveal that more than half of all caregivers battle depression and many commonly experience “caregiver stress.”

C. Current Trends

1. In her article, “Under One Roof,” Linda W. Lee says that multi-generational homes are the big new trend.
2. In the United States, there are an estimated 4.3 million multi-generational households (three or more generations living together).
3. Representing about 5 percent of all households, this number is steadily rising.
4. Lennar, a foremost US builder, has responded with the NextGen home and these floor plans, available in more than fifty designs, remain one of the most popular choices.

D. Biblical View

1. Scriptures espouse a familial structure of healthy interdependence where elders are cared for and honored.
2. The fifth commandment (Exodus 20:12) establishes the precedent of honoring one’s parents
3. Jesus elaborated on this subject in Matthew 15:4–7, and denounced the greedy, religious rulers’ hypocrisy for encouraging parental disrespect.
4. In Ephesians 6:1-3 Paul focused on the promised blessing associated with obeying the fifth commandment
5. The Greek word used for honor (timê) focuses on the office or station of the person due honor; meaning we should honor our parents because of their place in our lives and their position in relation to us.
6. Numerous admonitions to honor and care for ones’ parents interlace Scripture (Exodus 21:17; Leviticus 19:3; 20:9; Deuteronomy 5:16; 27:16; Proverbs 20:20; 23:22; 30:17; I Timothy 5:3–8, 16).

Assessment (Interview)

A. For Senior Parents and/or Adult Children Considering Future Caregiving Options and Financial Provision

1. For many families, care options for aging parents are not considered until a crisis arises. Consequently, adult children may find themselves unprepared to handle their parents’ dependency.
2. Unsettling emotions such as confusion, sadness, and helplessness often accompany this transitional stage and should be viewed as normative.

3. Discussing a topic of this nature may seem difficult, however, familial discussions are very beneficial and will aid in putting a plan together.
4. These practical questions can facilitate healthy familial dialogue and offer guidance in assessing the situation.
 - a) Has the topic of caregiving been discussed with your parents, your siblings, or with your immediate family (spouse, children)?
 - b) Do your parents/parent have specific desires regarding caregiving, e.g. assisted living, in-home companion, nursing home, etc.?
 - c) Are your siblings willing to share the caregiving responsibilities?
 - d) Has your parents' financial situation been assessed in the following areas?
 - (1) Do they have any of the following: Social Security, savings, investments, and medical insurance?
 - (2) Do they have any debt?
 - (3) Is their checkbook(s) balanced and in order?
 - (4) Are their bills paid and up to date?
 - (5) Have they met with a financial planner, lawyer, or advisor who specializes in helping the elderly or ill?
 - (6) What do your parents feel comfortable handling and are they capable of doing so?
 - e) Are their personal and financial documents in order?
 - (1) Investment, bank, and insurance accounts
 - (2) Social Security numbers
 - (3) Debts and payments
 - (4) Savings, investment records, and lock boxes
 - (5) Contact information for doctors, insurance agents, accountants, etc.
 - f) Do your parents have adequate funds to cover caregiving costs?
 - (1) If not, how will this affect you and your siblings?
 - g) Are you familiar with your parents' medical history?
 - (1) Who are their doctors?
 - (2) What medication(s) are they taking?
 - (3) Have they had any recent medical tests?
 - h) Are there any pre-existing medical conditions that would necessitate a certain type of caregiving?
 - i) Who will speak for your parents if they are unable to speak for themselves?
 - (1) Do they have durable power of attorney if they become ill?
 - (2) Do they have a current will or living trust?
 - j) Premature dependence can lead to deteriorating skills and increased helplessness. Therefore, fostering an independent lifestyle while providing the necessary support should be the intended goal.
5. Additional Questions for Adult Children thinking about assuming the caregiver's role
 - a) Am I capable of taking care of Mom/Dad alone or will I need to hire outside help?

- b) Will I have social support and necessary resources available to me?
- c) Will I be able to give adequate time and attention to my family and myself?
- d) Am I financially prepared for the extra costs associated with caregiving?
- e) Will I be able to adjust my work responsibilities as needed?
- f) If the loved one's dementia leads to unfiltered behavior, can I cope with potentially hurtful words and actions?

B. Red Flags for Caregivers Experiencing Resultant Stress

1. Caregivers often ignore their own health, needs, and feelings; however, setting aside their personal wellbeing can result in damaging circumstances.
2. Carol Heffernan from Focus on the Family outlines the following warning signs as potential signals of dangerous stress levels. Are they experiencing any of these symptoms?
 - a) Unusual sadness, moodiness, or anger
 - b) Social withdrawal from activities, family, and friends
 - c) Fatigue, exhaustion, and difficulty sleeping (too much or too little)
 - d) Change in eating habits, weight loss, or weight gain
 - e) Recurrent headaches, stomachaches, and colds
 - f) Difficulty with concentration on other areas of life, possible decline in work performance
 - g) Unexplained irritability
 - h) Feelings of dread, hopelessness, and depression
3. If a caregiver is experiencing any of these symptoms, proper measures should be taken to seek professional help and to reduce stress.

2

Critique and Counsel

Biblical Insight

A. Scriptural View of Honoring and Caring for Aging Parents

1. Exodus 20:12 instructs children to honor their parents and connects this behavior to the promise of a long, full life.
2. Honor and obedience represent two components of parent/child relationships
 - a) Obedience is an action required of children still living at home under their parents' authority (Ephesians 6:1).
 - b) Honor, on the other hand, denotes an attitude transcending age and authority. Thus, honor remains a universal obligation for all children, regardless of age (Ephesians 6:2–3).

3. Proverbs 23:22 states, “Listen with respect to the father who raised you, and when your mother grows old, don’t neglect her” (MSG).
 - a) In his commentary on Proverbs, Daniel Segraves (1990) says parents should be honored and appreciated as the source of a child’s life. A child who disregards his/her parent actually exhibits a disregard for life itself.
 - b) Segraves also contends honor is always in order even though a child may not endorse a parent’s lifestyle choices. Parents should never be ridiculed, disdained, or neglected.
4. Jesus uttered a scathing rebuke against religious leaders who encouraged adult children to offer “*Corban, A gift*” instead of honoring and caring for their needy parents (Matthew 15:4–6).
 - a) Corrupted teachers of the time conceived a warped method whereby people could supposedly sidestep the biblical obligation to care for their parents.
 - b) Adult children driven by anger or desire for retaliation against their parents could refuse financial aid under the guise of offering it as gifts to God.
 - c) This sort of contemptible hypocrisy remains repugnant to God.
5. In I Timothy 5:3–8, Paul instructs believers to care for widowed and aged parents and relatives.
 - a) Verse 4 states, “But if she has children or grandchildren, their first responsibility is to show godliness at home and repay their parents by taking care of them. This is something that pleases God” (NLT).
 - b) Apostle Paul linked provision for one’s parents to the evidence of one’s faith, “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” (verse 8, NLT).

Wise Counsel

A. For Adult Children Considering Caregiving

1. Ecclesiastes 12:1–7 describes the aging process and this natural part of life’s cycle should not be feared.
2. Establish and maintain productive communication regarding parental caregiving within the family.
3. Be proactive! Do not wait until a crisis develops to put an effective plan in place.
 - a) Research caregiving options and available community resources.
4. Honoring and caring for parents represents both a responsibility as well as a privilege.
 - a) This transitional season offers an opportunity to bless the people/person who birthed you.
5. Caregiving is demanding, but sharing your parents’ final years can also offer a unique set of joys.
6. Care for your parents in such a way that you can live without regrets.

B. For the Caregiver Experiencing Accompanying Stress

1. Encourage proper self-care in the following areas:
 - a) Balance and prioritize your life.

- (1) Maintain a healthy marriage and family dynamic.
- b) Take care of yourself physically and mentally.
 - (1) Stay active socially and spiritually.
 - (2) Take time for rest, relaxation, and enjoyable activities.
- c) If depression is a problem, seek proper treatment.
- d) Ask for help from others (family, friends, church)—do not be afraid to speak up.

3 Application and Prayer

Application

A. Charting Your Caregiving Course

1. Initiate a discussion with parents and siblings to assess the caregiving situation
 - a) Areas of discussion should include the following:
 - (1) Financial resources available (parents and children)
 - (2) Parental medical information and history
 - (3) Aging parents' range of skills and activity levels
 - (4) Parents' personal and financial documents
 - (5) Responsibilities your parents feel comfortable handling
 - (6) Evaluate unity among the siblings
 - (7) Roles and responsibilities of all family members—everyone should be involved.
2. Explore caregiving options
 - a) What are your parents' preferences?
 - b) What options are financially and logistically feasible?
 - c) Craft a unique plan befitting your family dynamics and resources.
3. Foster an appropriate independent lifestyle for your parents
 - a) Do not encourage premature dependence.
 - b) People who want to age well should stay active mentally, spiritually, socially, and physically.

B. Relieving Caregiver Stress

1. The following action steps will aid in stress reduction.
 - a) Maintain daily devotions, such as prayer and Word intake
 - b) Exercise regularly, get proper nutrition, and get enough rest
 - c) Have regular medical check-ups
 - d) Engage in enjoyable social activities with family and friends

- e) Tap into local community caregiving resources
- f) Join a local support group
- 2. May want to give an outline of how steps will promote change.
- 3. Steps should involve healthier way of thinking/modified behavior.

Prayer

“Heavenly Father, we thank You for the miraculous gift of life and for our parents who birthed us into this world. We are grateful for their loving nurture and care throughout the years. Thank You for being part of every stage of our lives, from the moment of conception to our last breath. You are intimately involved in every detail and have a perfect plan for each of us. As we transition into this new stage of life, please guide our decisions. Direct our paths and help us to chart the best caregiving course for our precious parents and for our family. It is our desire to honor Mom/Dad and in the process to honor You in everything we do. Thank you for being our Guide and our Counselor.

4 Recommended Resources

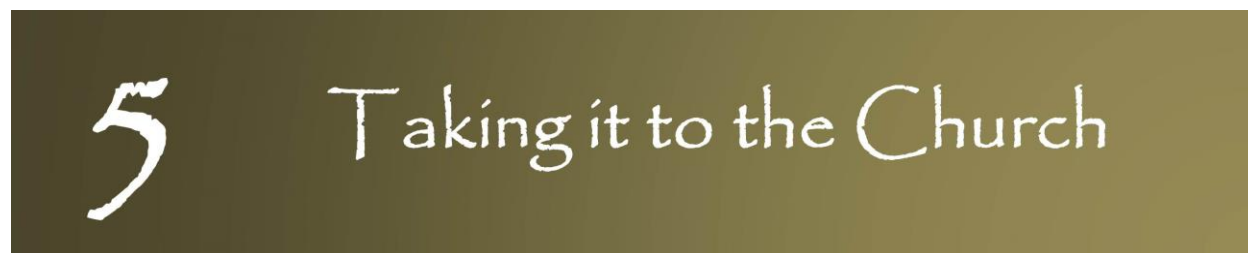
A. Websites/Internet

1. A Place for Mom <http://www.aplaceformom.com>
2. Caring for Ill or Aging Parents: focusonthefamily.com/lifechallenges
3. Role Reversal: Caring for Aging Parents: webmd.com/healthyaging
4. 10 Tips for Caring for Aging Parents: <http://money.usnews.com/money/blogs/the-best-life/2011/07/18/10-tips-for-caring-for-aging-parents>
5. 15 Ways to Take Care of Your Elderly Parents: <http://health.usnews.com/health-news/articles/2007/11/02/15-things-you-can-do-to-keep-mom-and-dad-at-home>
6. Alzheimer’s Association: <http://www.alz.org>

B. Books

1. Bathauer, R. M. *Parent Care—A Guide to help Children Provide Care and Support for Their Aging Parents*. Regal books, 1990.
2. Dean, B. *Caring for Your Aging Parents—When Love is Not Enough*. NavPress, 1989.
3. Deeken, A. *Growing Old and How to Cope with It*. Paulist Press, 1972.
4. Fritz, D. B. *Growing Old Is a Family Affair*. John Knox Press, 1972.
5. Gross, J. *A Bittersweet Season: Caring for Our Aging parents—and Ourselves*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2012.
6. Levin, N. J. *How to Care for Your Parents—A Handbook for Adult Children*. Storm King Press, 1987.

7. Lester, A. D. and J. L. Lester. *Understanding Aging Parents*. Westminster Press, 1980
- C. Material specifically for clergy
 1. Jacobs, M. R. *A Clergy Guide to End-of-Life Issues*. Pilgrim Press, 2010.
 2. Londis, J. J. *Faith-Based Caregiving in a Secular World: Four Defining Issues*. Privately Published, 2009.



Bible Study 1: Honor Your Parents: The Cornerstone Commandment

Focus: *Honoring our parents provides a cornerstone for successful lives and is foundational to our relationship with God and others.*

Lesson Text: *All Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version of the Bible unless otherwise identified.*

“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you” (Exodus 20:12).

“Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may be well with you in the land which the Lord your God is giving you” (Deuteronomy 5:16).

“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother,” which is the first commandment with promise: “that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth” (Ephesians 6:1–3).

Honor Defined:

Baker’s Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology (1996) states, “Most occurrences of honor in the Old Testament are translations of some form of *kabod*, while in the New Testament they are derivatives of *timao*.” Most commonly used in reference to the honor given to others, this term can also describe the honor given to God. The literal interpretation is *heavy* or *weighty* while the figurative meaning encapsulates the concept of granting someone a weighty position of respect. In the purest sense, honor is a reverent inward attitude made manifest by appropriate outward actions.

Understanding Honor within the Biblical Context:

To gain deeper insight into the fifth commandment, let us briefly examine the concept of honor within the biblical context. Our Western society is permeated with an individualistic mindset where an individual is defined by personal achievements. Conversely, the ancient Middle Eastern

culture was characterized by a group mentality where people found their identity in relationships with others, such as a family, a tribe, a community, or a nation (John 8:39; Acts 4:32; Philippians 3:5). Mark Strauss (2007) points out that a community-oriented society has a bearing on the way one relates to order and authority. Strauss says, Respect and obedience to parents, kings, priests, and elders were “essential for the maintenance of the divinely ordained balance of life.” Family relationships were extremely important and respect for parents was paramount because they were the source of one’s life. Parents gave structure and meaning to life by instilling the binding community values and establishing one’s connection to the land through inheritance. According to Strauss, in this sort of culture, a child’s goal “was not to make a better life than their parents, as is often the case in the West, but to guard the traditions, status, and honor of the family” In a group-oriented society, “the values of honor and shame are among the most important.”

In his examination of this biblical concept, Bob Deffinbaugh (2004) maintains that honor is personal and bestowed by someone else (Hebrews 5:4). It is preferential (Romans 12:10) and is given on the basis of a person’s position and power (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16; Romans 13:7; I Timothy 1:17; 5:17; I Peter 2:17). Showing honor or dishonor affects both private and public spheres of life (Leviticus 19:3; Deuteronomy 21:18–21; Proverbs 31:28–31).

Modern Factors that Hinder Parental Honor:

(Information source: *Between Child and Parent—Honoring Father and Mother (Exodus 20:12)* by Bob Deffinbaugh, May 13, 2004, www.bible.org)

- A. The advent and subsequent rapid growth of technology has facilitated access to knowledge hitherto unavailable. A downside of this societal development is that many people value knowledge over wisdom. As a result, there is an increased temptation to view parents and elders as antiquated and out of touch with modern society.
- B. The increasing divorce rate often puts children in the position of honoring one parent and despising the other. Moreover, Freudian Psychology has facilitated the widespread epidemic of blaming others, especially one’s parents, for personal problems and shortcomings.
- C. In conjunction with affixing blame, people are abdicating their individual responsibilities and government programs are increasingly viewed as a means of handling obligations to aging parents.

The Importance of Honoring Your Parents:

- A. Commanded in both Testaments
 - 1. Revealed in the Old Testament: Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16
 - 2. Reiterated and reinforced in the New Testament: Ephesians 6:1–3
- B. Foundational to the other Commandments
 - 1. The fifth commandment is a transitional bridge between the first four commandments dealing with our vertical relationship with God and the other five commandments focused on our horizontal relationships with others.
 - 2. It is intended to provide a basis for healthy relationships, both vertical and horizontal. (Proverbs 30:11–14; 31:1–5, 8–9; Malachi 1:6)
- C. First Commandment with Promise
 - 1. Connected to the promise of a long, full life
 - 2. Applicable to children of all ages—there are no age limitations

D. Parental honor is a necessary prerequisite for the successful passage of generational faith within the family unit (Deuteronomy 6:6–7).

E. Jesus modeled obedience to the fifth commandment

1. As a child, Jesus honored his parents and was subject to them (Luke 2:42–51).
2. As an adult, Jesus made provision for His mother in a final act of parental honor before his death (John 19:26–28).

F. Jesus also taught about the importance honoring your parents (Matthew 15:1–9; Mark 7:1–13).

1. He uttered a scathing rebuke against religious leaders who encouraged adult children to offer “*Corban, A gift*” instead of honoring and caring for their needy parents.
 - a) Corrupted teachers of the time had conceived a warped method whereby people could supposedly sidestep their biblical obligation to care for their parents.
 - b) Adult children who were angry or wanted to take retaliatory measures against their parents could refuse financial aid under the guise of offering it as gifts to God.
 - c) This sort of contemptible hypocrisy remains repugnant to God.

Practical Application for Today:

In our study about honoring our parents, it is important to understand the broad basis of this biblical injunction. While often viewed as an instruction for younger children, the Bible does not set any age parameters. Therefore, it is applicable to children of every age and at every stage of life. Furthermore, a comprehensive list of the necessary deeds required for proper adherence to this commandment does not exist. Deffinbaugh (2004) rightly observes “that different actions will be required at different times, of different people.” There is no easy “one size fits all” application, but there are many practical ways to fulfill our obligation regarding parental honor. Here are a few ideas:

A. Younger children (under-age, older children still living at home)

1. Obedience (Proverbs 1:8–19; 3:1–4; 4:1–2; 6:20–23; 7:1–4; Ephesians 6:1–3; Colossians 3:20)
2. Honor God and obey His Word
3. Appropriate conduct (e.g. at school, church, with friends, etc.) that will not cause familial shame
4. Notes of appreciation, handmade art
5. Cheerfully do your chores
6. Voluntarily lend a helping hand
7. Respectfully receive parental instruction (Proverbs 1:8–9; 3:1–4; 4:20–27; 6:20–22)
8. Treat others with dignity and respect
9. Maintain moral purity (Proverbs 5:15–23; 7:6–27)
10. Choose good friends who will be a positive influence (Proverbs 1:10–19)
11. Be dependable and industrious
12. Study hard and do your best at school
13. Get a job (when old enough)

B. Older Children (Of age, independent adults, single or married)

1. Honor God and obey His Word
2. Good work ethic
3. Live an honorable, morally pure lifestyle
4. Maintain regular communication with parents (e.g. phone calls, visits, notes, gifts)
5. Marital faithfulness
6. Be a good parent to your children
7. Foster healthy interaction between your parents and your children
8. Write a tribute to your parents and present it to them for a special occasion
9. Express your affection
10. Set aside time to help your parents with difficult chores
11. Provide appropriate caregiving (I Timothy 5:3–8, 16)

In Conclusion:

Honoring our parents provides a cornerstone for a successful life and is foundational to our relationship with God and others. Proverbs 23:22 states “Listen with respect to the father who raised you, and when your mother grows old, don’t neglect her” (MSG). In his commentary on Proverbs, Daniel Segraves (1990) says parents should be honored and appreciated as the source of a child’s life. A child who disregards his/her parent actually exhibits a disregard for life itself. Segraves also contends honor is always in order even though a child may not endorse a parent’s lifestyle choices. Parents should never be ridiculed, disdained, or neglected. Bestowing parental honor is a privilege often clothed in sensible, godly active wear.

Bible Study #2: The Communal Blessing of Intergenerational Relationships

Focus: Through mutually respectful interaction, intergenerational relationships can provide a blessed connection between elders’ wise experience and youths’ visionary passionate strength.

Focus Verses: *All Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version of the Bible unless otherwise identified.*

And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place. It shall be that whoever escapes the sword of Hazael, Jehu will kill; and whoever escapes the sword of Jehu, Elisha will kill. Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.” So he departed from there, and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he was with the twelfth. Then Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle on him. And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah, and said, “Please let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you.” And he said to him, “Go back again, for what have I done to you?” So Elisha turned back from him, and took a yoke of oxen and slaughtered them and boiled their flesh, using the oxen’s equipment, and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and followed Elijah, and became his servant (I Kings 19:16b–21).

And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out of my Spirit on all

flesh: Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams (Acts 2:17).

Cyclical Blessing of Intergenerational Relationships Defined:

In his book, *The Life God Blesses*, Gordon MacDonald (1997) defines the four ideal phases of life. In the first phase, the young person sets out to gain wisdom from the elders. Next comes the “householder” phase in which the home and family are established. This is followed by the “seeker” phase when the mature adult seeks to extract, absorb, and apply life’s most important lessons. Ideally, this seasoned seeker is “prepared to listen in humility” and is not distracted by the need to prove anything or demonstrate personal power (p. 40). Finally, this earnest seeker becomes the wise person to whom the students come. Thus, the cyclical blessing of healthy intergenerational interaction is repeated once again.... What a beautiful template for ongoing mutually productive intergenerational relationships!

Understanding Intergenerational Relationships within the Biblical Context:

Within the biblical context, there was a much greater interconnectivity between the generations due to the pervasive group mentality underlying the Middle Eastern culture. In *Families in Ancient Israel*, Carol Meyers (1997) writes, “the concept of the individual and of individual identity as we know it today did not exist in the biblical world (p. 21). There was an intense interdependence, especially within the family unit. Each family was a multigenerational unit that worked together for the household’s economic survival and success. The senior members of the clan, both male and female were repositories of information regarding “terrain, tools, climate, crop choices, livestock management, gardening, food processing, meal preparation, textile production,” etc. (p. 30).

Utilizing the practice of oral tradition, this knowledge was passed down from one generation to the next. As time went on a family’s identity became inseparably linked to its landholdings, the source of their survival, which underscores the reoccurring theme of inalienability of family property within the Mosaic Law. This explains Naboth’s vehement refusal to sell his vineyard to King Ahab. It was not just another nice piece of property adjoining the palace. On the contrary, this sacred inheritance of his fathers (I Kings 21:3) represented a multi-generational repository of work and wisdom directly connected to Naboth’s familial history and identity. Selling his vineyard would have been equivalent to throwing away his past, his present, and his future.

Additionally, a family’s religion was at the core of their household culture and “a person’s relationship to the deity was a function of that deity’s connection to his or her family” (p. 39). This concept is illustrated in Exodus 15:2, “This is my God, and I will praise him—my father’s God, and I will exalt him!” (NLT). The ancestral narrative in Genesis invoking the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is another prime example. Admittedly, this Middle Eastern multi-generational family unit is not representative of the typical North American familial model, however intergenerational relationships are still vitally important. They can create a sacred connection between the past, the present, and the future within our homes and our churches.

The Blessing of Intergenerational Relationships

A. Biblical Example: Elijah and Elisha (I Kings 19; II Kings 2)

1. On the heels of a great spiritual victory on Mount Carmel, Elijah fled in fear from Jezebel. Depressed, and depleted, he offered this prayer request, “Take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors who have already died” (I Kings 19:4, NLT).
 - a) God responded to his request by doing four things:
 - (1) He offered refreshment (I Kings 19:5–8).
 - (2) He imparted revelation (I Kings 19:9–13).
 - (3) He assigned responsibility (I Kings 19:15–16a).
 - (4) He instituted a new intergenerational relationship with Elisha (I Kings 19:16b–21).
 - (5) These four things put the discouraged prophet back on track and the Bible never records another bout of depression.
2. The intergenerational relationship between Elijah and Elisha was mutually beneficial.
 - a) Elijah shared his wisdom and experience to train his mentee for future ministry while Elisha provided companionship and strength to minister to his mentor’s needs.
 - b) This shared relational investment paid great dividends and brought purpose to both men.
3. II Kings 2 records the final interaction in this intergenerational relationship where important relational dynamics played out.
 - a) Just before his ascent into heaven, Elijah and Elisha went on a memorable journey especially planned by God, a time of commemoration, connection, and commissioning.
 - b) There were four key locations in their journey:
 - (1) Gilgal—Israel’s entry point into the Promised Land. (Joshua 4:19–5:12)
 - (2) Bethel—The House of God (Genesis 28:10–22).
 - (3) Jericho—Canaan’s first conquest (Joshua 6:17–7:26)
 - (4) Jordan—a place of miraculous intervention (Joshua 3:12–17; II Kings 2:8, 13–14).
 - c) Essentially, Elijah was connecting Elisha to his roots and commissioning him for his future by commemorating significant waypoints in Israel’s history.
 - d) Correspondingly, Elisha provided the comfort and companionship Elijah needed in this final stage of life.
 - e) At each juncture Elisha was given a choice about continuing the journey. His decision to stay and remain attentive to Elijah opened the avenue for an impartation of double portion anointing.
 - f) The final separation came but the dreams of the elder were inseparably joined to the visionary future of younger. Consequently, Elisha received a covering mantle of anointing and a stable platform from which to launch his ministry (II Kings 2:13–15).

This biblical illustration provides a wonderful model for productive intergenerational fellowship. Furthermore, the four key locations in the God-directed journey of Elijah and Elisha are synonymous with four significant points of interest in a senior saint’s storyline:

- Salvation experience
- Relationship with God and others
- Spiritual conquests
- Miracles (Divine intervention, provision, healing, etc.)

In her UGST Capstone paper, Love Thine Elder as Thyself: A Pastoral Care Model for Ministering to Senior Saints, Dana Fee (2012) writes about “the value and necessity of the aged telling their story” (p.9). There is “an intrinsic need to process their life-story” because it provides meaning and hope for the elder narrator (p. 10). Moreover, it presents a marvelous opportunity for the younger generation to connect with their roots and be commissioned for their future.

Practical Application for Today:

Intergenerational relationships can potentially provide great benefits for young and old alike, however it necessitates an intentional investment of time, energy, and affection. It may also require planning and even some patience. Fee (2012) provides an excellent idea in her UGST Capstone paper. Their New Life church family hosted “Heritage Sunday,” a day dedicated to honoring senior saints. Flower corsages were given, favorite hymns were sung, and elders were honored. “A video presentation included interviews with four elders sharing their favorite verses and other words of wisdom for the younger generations. People ranging in ages from eleven to fifty-nine, previously selected to speak to the senior saints, expressed words of appreciation, love, and honor. Each elder was asked to stand to receive those words” along with a small gift (p.13). “The pastor finished the service with a short devotional on valuing elders, followed by a prayer and blessing (ibid).”

Other practical ways to facilitate the relational investment process between the generations:

- Interactive communication via letters, cards, phone calls, and emails
- Weekly visits to senior saints or shut-ins
- Mentoring meetings where elders can share their stories and young people can ask questions
- A quarterly intergenerational lunch outing
- Provide ministry and fellowship opportunities that facilitate intergenerational interactions
- Tap into seniors’ skills (e.g. carpentry, auto mechanics, gardening, crocheting, knitting, quilting, embroidery, etc.) and create an instructive venue where these skills can be taught to young people

In Conclusion:

Intergenerational relationships can create a sacred link between the past, the present, and the future; a blessed connection between elders’ wise experience and youth’s visionary passionate strength. Mutual respect is requisite for successful dialogue. Additionally, love opens the door to embrace and appreciate the diversity of generational differences. This shared relational investment can pay great dividends and produce purpose for multiple generations.