

Monday, May 8 - Many of us are already thinking about Mother's Day. What will we get them? How can I honor them? What will be the best way to remember them? As we think about our relationships, our parents are the one we can't change, we didn't have a choice - we didn't choose our parents. Who our parent's were really matters. For good, or for the ill, the way we were raised makes a mark on our lives, and that mark can continue to affect our relationships in the present. So let's ask the questions: Do we believe that things can really change? Does tomorrow have to be the same as today? Does our past, necessarily, have to dictate our present, or can things be different? God's answer is YES! Our God is a God who acts in this world to change things. That's what he does. It's true for sin and death and also true for the relational patterns in our lives. God can bless whatever we inherited from our family of origin, sustain what is healthy, and break the cycles of what is sick. **Read 1 John 3:1-11.** (If possible read it in "THE VOICE" translation, you can find it at www.biblegateway.com).

Tuesday, May 9 - **Read Ephesians 6:1-2.** Our ability to relate to others is wrapped up in the relationship we have with our mom and dad. The enemy knows God is a perfect Father. If he can fracture relationships with our earthly fathers, he will have put us behind the "eight ball" of fully understanding who God is, how we relate to him, what he thinks about us, and how to live in a relationship with him. When we come to know Jesus, we receive a new identity. That new identity isn't that you are a church member, or that you believe something, but that you *become* something: A Christian. We don't have to fear of thinking of God as a father because he's a version of our dad that we long for deep inside our heart. We can either reinforce what's been broken in our lives with our mother and father, or we can be part of reversing the curse and leaning into what can be. The power of the gospel is that we can be a reflection of the love of God to our parents, even if they are not the reflection of the love of God to us.

Wednesday, May 10 - **Read Ephesians 4:25-32.** These verses set out a remarkable standard for Christian interactions, calling Christians to live by a simple guideline: "Only say what is helpful when it is needed for building up the community." (Occasionally we are not helpful even when we mean well. Covenant's Missions department recommends the book *When Helping Hurts*, by Corbett, Fickert and Platt to help us understand when even good intentions can do harm rather than helping.) One aspect of using language wisely, hinted at in James and present in today's reading, is silence. Silence lets us listen, which is vital for speaking in ways that build up. When is it helpful to hold back a comment or observation, even if it might be accurate? Ephesians 4:25 also quoted Zechariah 8:16: "Each of you must tell the truth to your neighbor." When is the truth so helpful that it would be wrong to keep silent? Ephesians 4:32 said our ideal is to treat one another "in the same way God forgave you in Christ." Have you learned ways to "be angry without sinning" (verse 26)? What steps, direct or indirect, can help you grow a character strong enough to treat others as God treats you?

Thursday, May 11 - **Read James 3:7-18.** James, Jesus' brother, was the most prominent Christian leader in first-century Jerusalem (see Acts 15:13-21). His letter carried on many aspects of the Hebrew wisdom tradition. In his day, some Hebrew zealots claimed that "wisdom" meant violence and hatred against Rome. James described instead a godly wisdom that was "pure ... peaceful, gentle, obedient, filled with mercy and good actions, fair, and genuine." Scholar William Barclay wrote of the Greek word *eirēnikos* (translated "peaceful") that "when it is used of men its basic meaning is right relationship between man and man, and between man and God. The true wisdom produces right relationships ... the true wisdom at all times brings men closer to one another and to God." When have you known people whose lack of "wisdom" sowed seeds of conflict or division? How wise and peaceful are you with your words? Verse 9 described a painful reality that has continued right to today. How can the kinds of inner issues listed in verses 14 and 16 help to trigger angry, cursing speech toward others? What people in your life have instead modeled "wisdom from above" that is "pure ... peaceful, gentle, obedient, filled with mercy and good actions, fair, and genuine"? What impact did they have on your heart and the way you live?

Friday, May 12 - **Proverbs 10:6-12.** With so many focused books and resources, we sometimes begin to think that marriage and family life is a unique, specialized field. In some ways, perhaps—yet the Bible often reminds us that the values that guide all healthy interactions apply, if anything, more strongly to our families. The principles in these seven Hebrew proverbs speak clearly, if not specifically, to family life. Verses 6-11 all contrast people who are honest, trustworthy and upright with those who deceive, who reject wisdom in order to pursue their own ways and who do violence, if not physically then emotionally. In what ways have you felt the difference between marriages and families that embody the "righteous" attitudes and speech listed here with those torn by the "foolish" or "wicked" qualities? "Love covers all offenses" in verse 12 used the same Hebrew word as verse 11's "the mouth of the wicked conceals violence." Here, said commentator Paul Koptak, it meant "the covering that promotes healed relationships ... Hatred stirs up, love smoothes over. Discord and dissension spring from hatred, but love nurtures harmony." When has love healed in your life, not by ignoring a problem, but by being the glue that points beyond the problem to an essential connection worth preserving?