



## A Preston Trail Study Guide

T H E 7 R H Y T H M S O F R O O T E D



DAILY DEVOTION



PRAYER



FREEDOM FROM STRONGHOLDS



SACRIFICIAL GENEROSITY



SERVE THE COMMUNITY



SHARE YOUR STORY



CELEBRATION

- Week One: Introduction
- Week Two: Your Self
- Week Three: Your Spouse
- Week Four: Your Kids
- **Week Five: Your Parents**
- Week Six: Your Neighbor
- Week Seven: Your Enemy

“I opened my mouth, and my mom walked out!” “Hey, kids, get off my lawn!” Maybe we swear we will never be like them when we get older. Maybe we idealize them and can’t wait to pass on the things they taught us and the way they made us feel about ourselves. Either way, adult relationships with parents are complex at best and potentially downright difficult! How can we be gracious with those who came before... especially now that we’re “becoming them”?

## How to Use the Materials

### For Individuals:

- Watch the service.
- Do the five-day devotional - start on Monday following the weekend message. (Use a journal or the space provided and a modern translation of the Bible.)
- Share with someone something meaningful you have learned during the week.

### With a Group:

- Before your group meeting, watch the service.
- Do the five-day devotional - start on Monday following the weekend message. (Use a journal, or the space provided on the guide, and a Bible.)
- Be prepared and ready to share thoughts from the weekend message.

### When your group meets, group members will:

- Use the weekly Small Group Discussion Guide.
- Share thoughts from the weekend message; daily devotionals serve as a supplement to the discussion.
- Pray: Reserve at least 20 minutes for prayer time.
- Encourage Group engagement: Watch the next weekend service, download and begin that week’s Study Guide on Monday. Come back prepared to share.

## Day One: Checking Your Inventory

### Read 1 Timothy 5:3-4.

“Do you love your kids?” For almost all of us, that’s a quick and easy Yes! “Do you love your parents?” Well... now, that can get complicated.

Some of us have grown up with imperfect but really good parents. They have taught us lessons about life, love and living that have served us well. They were present and emotionally available. They gave us the freedom to express ourselves without it challenging their identity or calling into question their love for us. They sat through middle school band concerts and listened patiently when we told them about breakups through choked sobs. They endured the adolescent years with dignity, and we all came through it to the other side with only a few dings and a lot of great stories to tell!

Some of us have differently complex relationships with our parents. Maybe they were emotionally distant or physically absent. Maybe they were demanding and overly authoritative. Maybe we rebelled and flipped the proverbial finger to their best leadership and advice. Maybe our relationship with them was fine, but our siblings struggled in various ways leaving us to feel like we needed to fill the gap. Maybe our parents died early in our lives, and we don’t have experience with them as adults.

Whatever your case, whether healthy or toxic or somewhere in between, God has a word for you today that can take you to your next right step in your adult relationship with your parents.



Daily  
Devotion

To love is to wish, will and work for the good of another person. It doesn’t matter whether or not that person makes it an easy choice. It doesn’t matter what our emotions might be about the task ahead. It is simply desiring God’s best in someone else’s life and being willing to help bring it about.

Regardless of our relationship with our parents, then or now, God is calling us to wish, will and work for their best... *where appropriate*.

Those two words hold a lot of meaning. For some, there isn’t the opportunity to show our love and respect for our parents for a variety of reasons. But for the rest of us, a better relationship can begin today.

We can learn to see and appreciate the humanity of our parents and simply enjoy them rather than constantly trying to better them. We can forgive whatever shortcomings they may have, especially the impact such deficiencies might have had on us when we were younger. We can learn to express gratitude and show compassion for them, extending the gracious benefit of the doubt that they did the best they could with what they had. We can also establish healthy boundaries around our relationship with them today that will help both of us (adult children and our parents) take the next right step.

Whatever your next right step might be regarding your parents, it is our prayer that you will have the curiosity and discernment to identify what that might be and the courage to follow through.

**Read 1 Timothy 5:3-4. What would it look like to *take care* of your parents as an act of love for God?**

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How would you rank your relationship with your parents on a scale of 1 (complete indifference) to 10 (healthy and thriving)? Why?

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How, if at all, has your relationship with your parents changed now that you are an adult?

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If you're a parent yourself, how has your relationship with your parents effected your relationship with your kids?

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If you can, thank the Lord for the parents he gave you because, if nothing else, they gave you life. Ask him for the wisdom and curiosity to investigate your relationships with your parents this week and to find ways that honor him in the way that you wish, will and work for the good of those who gave you life.



Prayer

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## Day Two: Knowing the Backstory

Read Luke 2:39-52.

We probably all have mixed emotions when it comes to loving our parents. Just as we, ourselves, are combinations of strengths and weaknesses, so are our parents. They aren't all good, even the best parents have room to grow and develop, but they probably aren't all bad either. Most took steps to improve upon the lives that they experienced in an effort to provide something different and better for their own children. They wanted *better* for their kids, even when they didn't exactly know how to define it, much less how to make it happen.



Daily Devotion

The generations are different, and each one responds to what came before in unique ways. Some of us grew up in an age when counseling was kept within the family and *providing for the family* meant “money” more than “presence.” Today counseling is—to most people—highly regarded, and quality time is valued more than a large salary. Many grew up with both parents working. Some grew up with at least one parent at home to help raise the children. Looking at our unique relationship with our parents can’t be done without first considering the relationship they had with their parents. It can’t be done without considering the cultural norms of the day when we were young.

Our family of origin sets the stage when it comes to healthy relationships with parents. Most psychologists measure two primary qualities within families of origin: connectedness and flexibility.

Connectedness can range from a practical absenteeism to being totally enmeshed in one another’s lives to where there are few boundaries marking where one person ends and the other begins. Along that spectrum, there are healthier and stronger positions than others that set children up to feel both loved and as a part of something bigger than themselves as well as unique unto themselves.

Flexibility measures the ability to embrace change. Some families do this better than others. Some parents encourage their kids to change, morph or develop into something different as they age. Others want their children to remain children always, so they don’t encourage them to become their own person apart from the family unit.

Whatever your experience, there is a balance to be found when we look to the Lord for the guidance and wisdom we

need as adult children. Laying down our hopes or wounds, we allow God to be our heavenly Parent, the only truly perfect Parent. Through his Spirit, we are able to see our parents the way he does and treat them with the compassion and grace that honors the Lord.

There is a biblical principle that, though intended for the marriage relationship, is important for all adult children regardless of their marital status—to leave and cleave.

Parents are gifts from God to us and are intended to be a reflection of his care and protection, his guidance and mercy, his direction and grace toward us. They are intended to teach us to look to him for the things we need. Parents were never intended to replace God. Just as Jesus established boundaries with his earthly parents in order to serve the Lord, so must we.

**Read Luke 2:39-52. What does it mean to you that Jesus’ first recorded words were setting boundaries for his earthly parents?**

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**What boundaries, if any, might you need to set between you and your parents?**

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**Has God ever acted as a heavenly parent to you? If so, when? How?**

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**How are unhealthy expectations of parents potentially devastating for generations to come?**

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**Thank God for the truth that his mercies are new every morning and that every day we get a chance to do life a little differently. Whatever your current relationship with your parents, ask God for the wisdom to know what to do today to help that relationship move forward in healthy ways. Ask him to help you create the kind of relationship with your parents that you hope your children will desire to have with you.**



Prayer

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## Day Three: Referencing the Player Guide



Daily Devotion

**Read Exodus 20:12.**

Loving our parents means wishing, willing and working for their good. From the earliest days of God's people, it has been one of the expectations of God. Families then were extended and provided for the safety and security of all included. You travelled by family, you celebrated by family, you conducted life within the extended relationships of family. Therefore, the role of parent, or elder, was extremely important. To respect and honor them was to ensure the survival of the family unit itself.

Despite your family of origin, someone gave you life. Someone fed you and clothed you. Someone kept you alive to reach the point where you are now. Gratitude is implicit in that. It is difficult to be grateful for your own life without also being grateful, in some measure, to the ones who gave you that life. This doesn't mean you are grateful for any harmful words or actions that they committed, it is simply a recognition that God brought you into this world in partnership with your parents.

God also calls us to obey our parents. Assuming they were not immoral, most parents do the best they can with what they have. That is worthy of obedience, even when you, as a child, disagree. As an adult, your call to obedience is different. As an adult, you are free to consider their thoughts and advice, and then make the best decision you feel is right for you.

As our parents age, it is our opportunity to see to their welfare as they saw to ours. Maybe this means taking them into your home or helping them, financially, to be in their own house or a care facility. Maybe this means visiting or sending cards or calling regularly. It means valuing them and doing what you can for them out of love for the Lord. The example of Jesus goes deeper than these basic commands.

As a child, he obeyed his parents and stayed under their leadership until he launched his public ministry. Likely, when Joseph died, it was Jesus who helped take care of and provide for the family.

As he was on the cross, some of his last words showed his continued concern for his mother. He entrusts Mary to the care of John, asking him to fulfill the responsibilities of a son.

As Jesus taught, he reminded his audience that there are many ways to be unhealthy in our relationships with our parents.

1. We can idolize them and “over love” them. We can become co-dependent and allow their opinions of us to replace God’s.
2. We can “under love” them and ignore them when we are in a position to offer aid or support.

OR, we can love our parents as our first neighbors and treat them as we would like to be treated.

As adult children, we have been provided the opportunity and challenge to continue to wish, will and work for the best for our parents. This will require the Lord’s help in many situations, and he is ready and willing to provide it. It will

require us to yield daily to the Spirit and to search for the healthy choice for them and for us moving forward. But, the fruit of obedience to our heavenly father on behalf of our earthly parents can leave a legacy for *our* children to wish, will and work for our best as we age.

**Read Exodus 20:12. Define *honor* in your own words.**

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**How does the Holy Spirit empower us to honor our parents according to his will?**

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**What does it look like to avoid “over” or “under” loving your parents?**

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**What step can you take today to model a healthy adult child/parent relationship for the next generation?**

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**Write a prayer to God today thanking him for the gift and example of Jesus in your life. Ask him today for the courage to keep choosing healthy steps forward when it comes to your relationship with your parents. For the good that your parents have done, thank God. For the ways he has redeemed the difficulties, thank God. For what he has yet to do, ask and thank him in advance knowing that he will be faithful.**



Prayer

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## Day Four: Changing the Settings.

**Read Hebrews 4:16.**

It is our hope that you have a healthy and thriving relationship with your parents. It is our prayer that God has worked to restore and redeem anything that might have been broken in your relationship with them. We pray you are



Daily Devotion

a healthy individual thriving in your own life because of the investment and guidance of godly earthly parents. But that is not the situation for all.

What do we do when our parents are unable or incapable of loving us or working for our good? What do we do when our parents are unlovable? They nag and complain, making time together with them difficult on a good day. God would have us *love*, even if we don't necessarily *like*, our parents. He would have us continue to wish and will and work for their good even when it costs us patience and is a huge challenge.

What if we felt our parents abandoned us? Either they gave us up for adoption, left us with a single parent or just walked out of our lives? As children, it is easy to feel unlovable if the ones who are *supposed* to love us the most can't or won't love us in ways that feel loving. It is often only as adults that we are able to discern God's loving care throughout our life's journey. He often provides either adoptive or even surrogate parents to fill the void; father or mother figures who step in for a season or a lifetime to make sure we experience the kind of guidance, direction and love that a child needs to succeed in life.

What if our parents are dangerous, and it isn't safe—emotionally or physically—to be around them? In that case, it is important to consider what God is calling you to do for yourself first. He is not asking you to put yourself in a dangerous situation. What he might be asking, though, is for you to pray for your parents. Maybe wishing for their best is the highest good you can safely offer. That's okay. Know that God sees your heart and honors whatever next right step you are able to take.

But what do you do if your parents are no longer alive? How do you heal old wounds or past hurts when your parents are no longer around for you to reconcile with? How do you honor their healthy and loving legacy when they are no longer around? You can write them a letter. Maybe it is a letter of forgiveness. Maybe it is a letter of gratitude. Either way, you can express yourself to them, read it out loud and trust that you can find some healing and closure.

Ultimately, our calling from God is to do what we can to love and honor our parents when and where it is appropriate. We are to extend the gracious benefit of the doubt and trust that whatever they weren't able to give, the Lord will provide. Whomever your earthy parents were, you were created for a purpose by your heavenly Father. He sees you and loves you with an everlasting love. Won't you lean into him today?

**Read Hebrews 4:16. Have you ever struggled with the idea of God as your Father?**

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**If you currently have a toxic relationship with your parents, or it is impossible to reach out to them in a practical way, what might God be asking you to do today?**

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**What reasons exist for you to not reach out to difficult parents?**

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**If your relationship with your parents isn't complicated like these examples, how could you honor God today out of gratitude for them?**

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**Write a prayer to God confessing your areas of weakness in your relationship with your parents and ask for his tender guidance to reveal some potential next steps to grow in that area of vulnerability. Ask him for the courage to possibly take the first step towards healing in a particular area and then for the fruit that comes from obedience. Ask him for a relationship with your parents that is healthy and holy.**



Prayer

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## Day Five: Ready Player One

Read John 3:16-17.

In *The 5 Love Languages*, Gary Chapman identified five key ways that people *express* and *experience* love. They include:



- **Words of affirmation**
- **Quality Time**
- **Receiving Gifts**
- **Acts of Service**
- **Physical Touch**

While these identifiers were originally intended for married couples and can be simplistic, this tool has blessed countless relationships over the years. Chapman has since extended his target audience to include most every relationship, including the ones we have with our parents

For some, they *express* their love and gratitude for others using the same ways they *experience* love. For others, it is different. While we all need all of the love languages at different times and in different situations, observe the following descriptions and see if any of them might spark connection with you and your parents. If we are to love our parents well, we need to know how *they* receive love rather than just the way *we* do.

**Words of Affirmation** - Express gratitude through verbal compliments, encouraging and kind words and humble requests. Don't assume they know how much you love them or how proud you are of them. *Your parent might light up whenever you praise them or give positive feedback.*

- Listen actively
- Encourage, affirm and appreciate often
- Make sure feedback is thoughtful and given in love
- Send a text or card
- Notice their efforts and acknowledge them publicly

AVOID- Saying *but* after *I love you*. It feels like the love is conditional

**Quality Time** - Spending time with another person while giving your undivided attention through quality conversation or just togetherness. Be careful about being distracted during your time together. *Your parent wants to share regularly scheduled times together or take a vacation or go on an outing together.*

- Sitting around and talking (TV off and devices down)
- Playing games or doing a craft together
- Going on walks or running errands together
- Ask meaningful questions

AVOID - isolation or extended periods of time apart

**Receiving Gifts** - Anything thoughtful that reminds you that someone cares for you. While especially important for major celebrations or anniversaries, gifts for no reason can be some of the most meaningful. It's not about the value of the gift but the love of the giver. *Your parent might take their time opening presents or remember gifts you gave them in the past.*

- A handmade or store-bought card, note or picture

- Snack or meal
- Wildflowers picked from the field or beautiful roses

AVOID - failing to appreciate or acknowledge the gift

**Acts of Service** - Expressing love or gratitude through service, believing that while words are important, sometimes actions speak louder than words. *Your parent might do things for you that you could've done yourself because they want to please you*

- Cleaning up a mess, preparing a meal or assisting with other chores around the house
- Responding to other requests for help with work, relationships or life
- Say "let me do that for you"

AVOID - making your gifts of service an expected habit

**Physical Touch** - Expressing love through positive physical contact with another person, especially important during times of high stress or crisis. *Your parent might be constantly in your space, wants to touch all the time, craves closeness.*

- Holding hands
- Hugs
- High-five or fist-bump
- Just physical nearness, sit close to them

AVOID- withdrawing affection or touch when you are upset.

**Write a prayer to God today thanking him for the unique way he has wired us to give and receive love. Ask him for insight into the way your parent receives love and then ask him for moments to express your love to your parent in the ways that are meaningful for them. Thank him for the ways that he has loved you so personally and intentionally. Thank him for being your good, good Father.**



Prayer

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## SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

### Welcome

**Opening Prayer** - Invite God's presence into your group time. Thank him for the gift of fellowship and ask him for insights, creativity and reminders of his love for you.

**Group Sharing** - Share something that has been meaningful to you from your daily devotionals.



Share Your  
Story

### Discussion Guide:

#### Checking Your Inventory

Describe your relationship with your earthly parents.

What has surprised you most about your parents now that you're an adult?

#### Knowing the Backstory

Describe the childhood your parents experienced.

What is something important you want to consider as you examine your relationship with your parents?

#### Referencing the Player Guide

Why is it important to love—even when we don't like—our parents?

How do you picture a healthy adult child and parent relationship?

### Changing the Settings

Besides your parents, who has God brought into your life to teach or train you?

What practical step can you take today to invest in your parent's love language?

### Ready Player One

Spend some time in concentrated prayer using the acronym P.R.A.Y.



Prayer

**Praise** - Praise God for who he is and what he has done.

**Repent** - Recognize where you need to turn from unhealthy or destructive thinking and patterns and turn back to God's way of life.

**Ask** - Ask for God's intervention on your behalf and on behalf of others.

**Yield** - Entrust your requests to God's good and perfect response and timing.

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