

Honor Your Mother

God's Words:

Deuteronomy 5:16 Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, that your days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with you on the land which the LORD your God gives you.

Reflection:

In her book, [Plan B](#), Anne Lamott talks about her struggle against honoring her dead mother. I didn't share Anne's struggle, primarily because it had never occurred to me to honor my mother. It was a non-issue. I had my reasons. But now, more than four decades after her death, I see Anne's words and God's command: Honor your mother ... Honor your mother, and my non-issue becomes an issue. Honor your mother. How? I've carried aching scenes in my memory for years. What can I honor?

A huge heavy curtain separated my mother's real self from the frantic act she performed. Hungry for attention and lonely beyond imagining, she hid her vulnerability and left only a powerful actress onstage. I don't recall more than a few fleeting glimpses of my real mother. But the needy, angry imposter? I knew her well and recoiled. Honor your mother. Right.

What can I honor? Clearly not her behavior. But perhaps – and this thought is new – perhaps I can honor the real mother, the one obscured by the actress, the one hiding behind the act, perhaps I can honor *her*. The Bible doesn't say to honor what our parent *does*; it says to honor *them*, the person inside. Peter points the way: honor the hidden person of her heart. (1 Peter 3:4)

God (as He always does) must have given her a lovely heart. I'm quite sure she never believed it existed. She found little love directed towards her, and she never did love others very well. Her longings for relationship were acted out wrongly and painfully. She did her best, a seriously flawed best, but – an important but – her best nonetheless. When I look at her intent, at her heart, the actress fades from view, and I realize that my real mother has been there all along. I've simply not seen her.

As I now begin to see her, my anger shifts to a deeper emotion: sorrow. Sorrow for the wrongs she received and for those she dealt out. The sorrow helps. It carries with it a compassion that makes me oddly willing to honor her. As I ponder Anne's and God's words, I become aware of a loveliness that was hiding behind my mother's façade. I remember a warm moment I'd previously ignored. I soften. Just today, decades after her death, I begin to see her. Just today.

I didn't get the mother I would have designed. And I've resented my loss and numbed myself to its pain. For decades I've looked and longed for what would never be. All those bitter years. But today? My perspective has shifted. I'm moved to sorrow for her losses as well as my own. Our mutual sorrow makes us compatriots – we share unmet longings. Though we gifted each other so poorly, we both have known the hunger for good gifts. Our hearts are not so different after all.

Prayer:

In [Windows of the Soul](#), Ken Gire asks the Lord: "Give me eyes to see, ears to hear, and a heart to receive what You are offering me... that I might sense what is dear to You so that it might become what is dear to me..." (p. 25)

Lord, I can sense that she is dear to You. And now (I ask through my tears) move me to honor what You see and I've missed: the hidden person of her heart. May she, that hidden person, become dear to me.