

CONCORD  
SUNDAY  
SCHOOL

LESSON 39

SUNDAY,  
SEPTEMBER 27,  
2020

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**Ezekiel 18:1-4 NRSV**

1 The word of the Lord came to me: 2 What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, “The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge”? 3 As I live, says the Lord God, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. 4 Know that all lives are mine; the life of the parent as well as the life of the child is mine: it is only the person who sins that shall die.

**Background**

Ezekiel is a book full of riddles and visions. This is the same book in which the writer sees the valley of dry bones, as well as a wheel in the sky. This entire 18th chapter is one that deals with themes like the “ways of the Lord,” “wickedness,” and transgression. Why do bad things happen to good people? Is there a reason? We will only be engaging four verses of this text today. In your own devotional period, consider the entire chapter. What messages are you hearing through this passage? How does God appear? How are humans characterized here?

**Today’s lesson will focus on God changing God’s mind.**

**Read the scripture out loud together.**

**Discuss with someone in your home. Do you think people get what they deserve? Why or why not?**

### **What's happening during this passage?**

The writer of Ezekiel is outwardly thinking through a common proverb. The proverb is, “the parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.” The prophet says, “do not use this proverb anymore, God’s orders.” In God’s voice, the prophet says, “know that all lives are mine, the life of the parent as well as the life of the child.” The passage ends with a reminder that only the one who sins will die.

### **What's up with this proverb?**

This proverb was often used to explain away why children experience hardship. After all, innocent children haven’t done anything to deserve bad things, so it must be the parents, right? This is the logic of “generational curses.” Even worse, there are people who use this idea to explain away children’s disabilities. How many times in the Bible, and in our own communities, have we tried to find a rationale for children’s disabilities or illnesses? Who does it help if we say that the parent is “responsible?” What assumptions are we making about disabilities and chronic illness? Instead of asking, “how can we support this new parent” or “what can we change about our classrooms so every child can participate in their own way,” we often ask, “whose fault is this?”

Of course, many commentators have noted that the proverb might have been used to exonerate themselves from a situation. After all, they’re in exile not because of their own doing, but because of the “sins of our ancestors.” It is much easier to blame adults than develop a more complex concept of suffering and struggle. Perhaps there is no rationale to why we suffer.

### **Why does God edit this proverb?**

It simply doesn’t work for God anymore. This is not the first time God changes God’s mind. Check out Numbers 27:1-11 for an example of God having a different idea.

God not only recorrects this proverb, but tells the people “this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel.” God corrects this toxic theology and provides another way for people to make sense of the World. So, God says that all lives belong to God, both the condition of the child and the parent. In saying so, God disrupts the idea that the child and the parent are acting on each other *outside* of God’s power. God intervenes to say, “only the one who sins will die,” which of course is an impossible riddle. Everyone dies. Everyone sins. In doing so, God re-

orients the focus from blaming parents for the hardships children may have. Instead, God offers the truth that we all fall short, we are all human, and we all will someday die. Death is not a punishment. It simply *is*.

### **What does it mean for the Life to belong to God?**

We are in the palm of God's hand. While our families have a major impact on our lives, we are still held by God. Humans may hold onto what our parents did, or what our name means around town. Humans may hold grudges over us because of what they think about our families, our race, our community. But God is the ultimate decider. God is the one who holds the fate, not anyone else.

**What questions do you still have of this scripture? How will you commit to journeying with this text this week?**



### **Connection to Today's World**

Loida Guillen Strong was working towards a doctorate degree in nursing, all as a surprise for her mother. The newly minted Dr. Guillen Strong of the University of Central Florida kept her studies on the low so that she could shock her mom on graduation day. In a heartwarming video, we see Dr. Guillen Strong (in full academic regalia) embrace her mother as she collapses to the floor in awe.

This moment was significant because her mom, Mercedes, once had a dream to become a doctor. But after

having children and moving to the United States from the Dominican Republic, she gave up on that dream.

On the diploma, Dr. Strong wanted to include all of her names, which also included her own mother's name.

God gave this woman a degree, in a different way than she ever imagined. Mama Mercedes said, "It's like I got it myself."

**Journal: What are some dynamics that you'd like to address in your own family?**

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**Closing:** Sing/watch “Lord, I’m Available to You,”

For a video, click here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8\\_ruoVPpqQY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8_ruoVPpqQY)

*Lord, I'm available to You*

*My will I give to You*

*I'll do what You say do*

*Use me Lord to show someone the way and enable me to say*

*My storage is empty and I am available to You*

**Prayer:**

Dear God,

You are the God of our ancestors. You are the God of Concorders’ long gone. You are the God of our family members.

God, we know that we are connected to our people. We know that we cannot separate ourselves from the beauty, intelligence, wit and perseverance of our elders and ancestors.

Help us to take responsibility for what belongs to us. Convict us when we are ready to blame things on someone else. Show us how to glean wisdom from those who have gone before and to forge a new path with you as our Guide.

In Jesus’ name we pray,

Amen

**Works Cited:**

<https://www.usatoday.com/videos/life/humankind/2020/09/21/daughter-earns-secret-doctorate-hardworking-mom/5857449002/>

[http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=1016](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1016)