

Christian Parenting

Week 6: Shepherding a Child's Heart

What follows is a summary of Tedd Tripp's book, *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, Revised and Updated, 2nd Ed. (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 1995)

I. Getting to the Heart of Behavior

A. The Heart is the Centerpiece of Human Life

Proverbs 4:23 Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.

Luke 6:45 The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.

B. Sin comes from the heart

Matthew 12:33-34 Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. ³⁴ You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.

Mark 7:21-23 For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. ²³ All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.'"

C. The Heart is the Part of you that...

1. Thinks
2. Feels
3. Weighs/assesses
4. Plans
5. Remembers
6. Decides
7. Loves

D. The Heart is thus the Centerpiece of Parenting

Proverbs 23:26 My son, give me your heart and let your eyes keep to my ways

E. Christ Desires Heart Obedience

***Matthew 15:7-9 You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: ⁸
 "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. ⁹
 They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men."***

F. Parents Can Focus too Much on Behavior

1. Behavior is the fruit, the heart is the root
2. A child's behavior can become the focus because it's much easier to see and it often clamors for attention... bad behavior can irritate and rankle a parent
3. So often parents think they've solved the problem when they correct the bad behavior... but has the heart behind the sin been addressed??
4. It is easy for Christian parents to raise outwardly compliant children who are still rebellious against God in their hearts
5. Example: fighting over a toy

Two children are fighting over a toy. A parent comes in and the obvious question is "Who had it first?" But the problem with that is it doesn't get to the root issue in both. "Who had it first is an issue of justice. Justice operates in favor of the child who was quicker on the draw in selecting the toy. But you have two sinners who are displaying a terrible hardness of heart toward each other. Both children are saying, 'I don't care about you or your happiness; I am only concerned about myself. I want this toy. My happiness depends on possessing it. I will have it and be happy, regardless of what that does to you!'"

True parenting must get to the root issue of all this!

All behavior is linked to attitudes of the heart.

So every occasion is an opportunity to get to the CROSS OF CHRIST... the only remedy for the sinful hardness of heart we all display.

1 Corinthians 2:2 For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Galatians 6:14 May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

G. Discussion Questions

1. Discuss why it is so important to deal with heart issues when training our children.
2. Why is it so easy for parents to get sidetracked and deal only with behavior and not the heart issues behind it?

3. If the goal of parental discipline is the transformation of the heart, how would that change your parenting approach?

II. Your Child's Development: Shaping Influences

A. Basic Thesis: Your child is shaped by influences—events and circumstances—in their developmental years that prove to be catalysts for the kind of person he/she will be. Godly parenting involves ensuring those influences are the best possible for the goal of godliness, and in shepherding your child's reaction to them.

B. Shaping Influences Listed

1. Structure of family life

- a. Is the family a traditional nuclear family or not?
- b. What is the marriage like? How do the parents relate to each other?
- c. How are the parenting roles structured? Who does what, and how do they do it?
- d. Are there other children in the home? If so, what is the birth order of those children? What are the relationships like between the children?
- e. How do the various personalities of the children mesh with one another?

2. Family values

- a. What does the family value above all? What are lesser values? How are these values communicated by the way the parents spend their time, energy, and money?
- b. What do the parents fuss over, and what do they let pass with less comment?
- c. Do the parents seem to value relationships more than possessions or the other way around?
- d. What philosophies hold sway at the dinner table?
- e. What are the spoken and unspoken rules that govern family life, and what do these rules show about the value structure of the family?
- f. What are the boundaries within the family life? What things are held secret by the parents, and what things are discussed openly?

3. Family roles

- a. Which parent earns the money? Or do both?

- b. Who does what chores? What does the dad do? What tasks are the mom's? How about each child? What are their roles in the smooth functioning of the home?
- c. When there is a financial problem or a maintenance issue in the family, who addresses it? When there is a medical issue, who addresses it?

4. Family response to failure

- a. How do the parents deal with the failure of their children? Is there a feeling of perfectionism or of grace?
- b. If a child tries to do something and fails, is he/she affirmed and encouraged to try again, or shamed for the failure? Do family members mock the failure? Is the child instructed based on the failure so they can succeed better in the future?

5. Family history

- a. Where has the family lived? What were the circumstances of the father's employment history?
- b. What of the parent's history with their families? Is there harmony or brokenness?
- c. Has family life been characterized by stability or instability? Has there been a history of medical problems or other crises?

6. Family conflict resolution

- a. How does the family handle conflicts? Do the parents fight and get angry, or do they resolve biblically?
- b. When there are conflicts between the children, how do the parents address it?
- c. Do family members talk together about their problems? Do they pray together and resolves quickly, not letting the sun go down on their anger? Or are there grudges held over a long time?
- d. What about conflicts outside the family... does the family deal well with others in the world with whom they may disagree? People at church? At work? Neighbors? Etc.
- e. Is the family clannish and insular or open and welcoming to the outside world with whom it may disagree?

C. Mistakes in Understanding Shaping Influences

1. Seeing influences as DETERMINISTIC... like we're machines and the grace of God is not greater than any or all of them; like we're computers to be programmed by these influences, and there's nothing we can do to escape the outcome of their cumulative effect
2. DENIAL that influences are significant, as though it doesn't matter at all what these influences are... that God's grace is able to transcend all of them and it doesn't really matter what parents do to shape the influences of family life

D. Discussion Questions

1. What have been some of the prominent shaping influences of your child's life?
2. What is the structure of your family? How has that structure affected your son or daughter?
3. What would your children identify as the core values of your family? What are the things that matter most to you?
4. What are your patterns for conflict resolution? How have these patterns affected your children? Is change warranted? If so, what change?

III. Your Child's Development: Godward Orientation

A. Thesis: Your child will grow up and fundamentally live for God or an idol. Godly parenting will address the heart-focus of your child away from idolatry toward the living God.

B. Faith or Suppression

Simply put, your child will either respond to God by faith in the gospel, or suppress the truth in wickedness:

Romans 1:17-18 in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." ¹⁸ ¶ The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness,

C. The Great Danger of Idolatry

Romans 1:25 They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator-- who is forever praised. Amen.

D. What is an "Idol"?

1. An idol is any created thing that takes uppermost affection in a person's heart, a place that should be reserved for God.

2. It is an item of heart focus, in which the individual trusts to give meaning to life, or to save from sin, or to bring ultimate fulfillment and happiness.

E. Choosing Between Two Ways

1. Ultimately, your child will “worship” something, even if he/she may end up claiming to be an atheist
2. Either he/she will love and delight in and serve God or some array of created things
3. These choices start being made very early!!!

Psalm 58:3 Even from birth the wicked go astray; from the womb they are wayward and speak lies.

Psalm 51:5 Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

F. The Heart is Not Neutral

1. Your child’s heart will inevitably be drawn toward God and Christ or driven away from them toward some idol

Matthew 12:30 He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.

Luke 9:50 "Do not stop him," Jesus said, "for whoever is not against you is for you."

2. There is no middle ground; no separate peace possible
3. Their natural sinfulness will attract them to idolatry from the very beginning... especially the number one idol: SELF!!

G. Whom Will the Child Worship?

1. You must be aware at all times that the child is not merely living some insignificant little life in your home... he/she is living before the eyes of an infinite, holy God who created him/her and before whom he/she will someday stand to give account
2. It is part of the parents’ job to make God’s presence FELT, to make every issue be a part of God’s wonderful universe
3. The question every single day will not be “Will we worship?” but “Whom shall we worship?”

H. Implications for Childrearing

1. You need to be done forever with a secular view of the world that seeks to keep God in a box
2. God has to do with sports, music, science, finances, the cleanliness of the room, the respectful answer to a parent, etc.
3. Since Godward orientation can only come about by faith, and since faith comes by hearing God's word, then God's word needs to be the focus of every day
4. As a parent, you will seek to craft the influences of your home to point constantly to God
5. You will not see your child's failures as simple immaturity or their unique personality, but rather as evidence that they are responding to the goodness and mercy of God in Christ or responding in unbelief

I. The Importance of Godward Orientation

1. Key example: Joseph, purity and perspective
2. Purity

Genesis 39:9 How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?

3. Perspective

Genesis 50:20 As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

J. Discussion Questions

1. What do you think is the Godward orientation of your children? Are their lives and responses oriented around God as a Father, Shepherd, Lord, Sovereign, and King? Or do you see them living for some sort of pleasure, approval, acceptance, or some false god?
2. How can you design winsome and attractive ways of challenging the idolatry you may see within your child?
3. Are you and your spouse spending time in prayer for God to reveal himself to your children? Ultimately, God initiates any work in your children's hearts.

IV. You're In Charge!

- A. Thesis: Parents need to embrace their God-given roles of authority and wield that authority as God intends for the good of the child and for his glorious purposes, not as domineering tyrants or embarrassed weaklings, but like Jesus, the servant-King.

B. Confusion over Authority

1. Our culture does not like authority
2. We neither like to submit to authority, nor to wield authority... we tend to murmur rebelliously in the one case, and act sheepish and embarrassed in the other
3. We need a biblical understanding of authority
4. Is the authority of a parent invested because the parent is merely physically larger and stronger? Is it because we are smarter and more experienced? Is it because we are not sinners and they are? Do we have the right to tell our kids to do anything we want to?

C. What is Authority?

1. Simply put: Authority is the God-given right to command. The biblical response to God-ordained authority is submission and obedience.
2. Scriptural support
 - a. Authority in general

Romans 13:1-2 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. ² Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.

- b. Parental authority especially

Exodus 20:12 "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.

Ephesians 6:1 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.

D. How God Wants Us to Wield Authority

1. Not Lording it over, as the Gentiles do

Matthew 20:25-28 Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ²⁶ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wants to be first must be your slave-- ²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

2. Patterned after Christ

John 13:13-15 You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am.
¹⁴ Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

3. Limited by Paul

Ephesians 6:4 Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

E. Called to Be in Charge

1. As a parent, you have authority because God calls you to be an authority
2. As a God-ordained authority, you have the right to act on behalf of God; it is God that has set you up in authority over your jurisdiction.
3. You act under his ultimate authority to do as he would will; you command in order to shape your children's lives as it would please him, not as it pleases you.
4. You must undertake all your instruction, your care and nurture, your correction and discipline because God has called you to:

Genesis 18:19 For I have chosen [Abraham], so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him

5. Thus unholy anger and sinful pride must not enter into your exercise of authority; neither are your children at your beck and call to suit your carnal desires.

F. Called to Obedience

1. You do not come to your child demanding, for your own purposes, that he knuckle under you and obey.
2. Rather, your discipline of your child is meant to be a path of life:

Proverbs 6:23 For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light, and the corrections of discipline are the way to life

3. You must sometimes force yourself to discipline your child because God commands it and you must be obedient to him!
4. This should give you CONFIDENCE TO ACT... because God has given you a duty to perform... you are on a mission from God!
5. This should also give you a MANDATE TO ACT

6. Parents should teach their children to obey them very early in life: “all the way, right away, with a happy spirit”... this is a subset of their whole life obedience to God

G. Parenting Defined

1. Our culture: parenting is reduced to providing care... food, clothes, bed, quality time, an education, life experiences...
2. God’s will: SHEPHERDING YOUR CHILD’S HEART on his behalf, in addition to the provision mentioned
3. Thus we have clear objectives: to use our authority to shepherd their hearts and prepare them for eternity and for fruitfulness for the glory of God

H. Humility in the Task

1. Understanding our function as God’s agents can keep you sharply focused and HUMBLE as parents
2. It is very sobering to realize that you discipline your child by God’s command
3. No place for sinful anger here!

James 1:19-20 Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, ²⁰ for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

Vs.

Daniel 3:19 Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual

Proverbs 20:2 A king's wrath is like the roar of a lion; he who angers him forfeits his life.

4. Thus discipline is corrective, not punitive; it is an expression of love for God and for the child

I. Discussion Questions

1. What do you think is the nature of your authority as a parent? How does this square with the biblical view?
2. How frequently does your correction of your children boil down to an interpersonal contest rather than an underscoring of God’s authority over your children?

3. How would you describe your job as God's agent for discipline? How will seeing yourself as God's agent change the way you discipline?

V. Examining Your Goals

VI. Discarding Unbiblical Methods

VII. Embracing Biblical Methods: Communication and the Rod

VIII. Summary

- A. The heart determines behavior. Learn, therefore, to work back from behavior to heart. Expose heart struggles. Help your children see that they were made for a relationship with God. The thirst of the heart can be satisfied in truly knowing God.
- B. Your children are the product of two things. The first—shaping influence—is their physical makeup and their life experience. The second—Godward orientation—determines how they interact with that experience. Parenting involves 1) providing the best shaping influences you can and, 2) the careful shepherding of your children's responses to those influences.
- C. You have authority because God has made you his agent. This means you are on his errand, not yours. Your task is to help your children know God and the true nature of reality. This will enable them to know themselves.
- D. Since the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever, you must set such a worldview before your children. You must help them learn that only in him will they find themselves.
- E. Biblical goals must be accomplished through biblical methods. Therefore, you must reject the substitute methods our culture presents.
- F. God has given two methods for childrearing. They are 1) communication and 2) the rod. These methods must be woven together in your practice. Your children need to be known and understood. Thus, rich communication is necessary. They also need authority and firmness. Thus, the rod is necessary. The rod functions to underscore the importance of the things you talk about with them.