

Christian Parenting

Week 7: 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...

Thinks... Feels... Weighs/assesses... Plans... Remembers... Decides... 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

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
2. Family values
3. Family roles
4. Family response to failure
5. Family history
6. Family conflict resolution

C. Mistakes in Understanding Shaping Influences

1. Seeing influences as DETERMINISTIC...
2. DENIAL that influences are significant, as though they doesn't matter at all

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

A. Unbiblical goals

1. Developing special skills
2. Psychological adjustment
3. "Saved" children: the "sinner's prayer is enough" approach
4. Family worship: "the family that prays together stays together"... but no real connection to actual life
5. Well-behaved children
6. Good education: if they get a good education, their lives will be good
7. Control: some parents have no noble goal at all... they just want to keep their kids from running wild; the concern is personal convenience and public appearance

B. Biblical Goal

1. Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question #1: "What is the chief end of man?"
A: "To glorify God and enjoy Him forever."
2. Is there another ultimate goal that is worthy?

1 Corinthians 10:31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

Psalm 73:25 Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.

C. Discussion questions:

1. How do you define success? How would your child complete this sentence: "What Mom and Dad want for me is...?"
2. How do the unbiblical goals listed here tempt you in your parenting?
3. How do your own ultimate purposes in life affect your parenting?
4. What do you think it means to live for the glory of God?

VI. Discarding Unbiblical Methods

A. The World Pumps Out Stuff on Parenting

B. Unbiblical Methods Listed

1. "I didn't turn out so bad!"
2. Pop psychology
3. Behavior modification
4. Emotionalism
5. Punitive correction
6. Erratic eclecticism
7. Bribery

C. Evaluating Unbiblical Methods

1. Realize that each of these fails to address the heart issues behind behavior
2. They also fail to give a beautiful, overarching value system by which the child will eventually live his/her life
3. We need to "Take every thought captive and make it obedient to Christ" (2 Corinthians 10:5), and like the Bereans, search the Scriptures to see if these things are true (Acts 17:11)
4. God has ordained not only the goals but the means to achieve them

D. Discussion Questions

1. Have you thoroughly thought through what you are doing as a parent? Have you subjected what you are doing to a thorough biblical critique?
2. What is so wrong with these unbiblical responses and strategies?
3. How would you defend this statement: "The behavior of our children is not the problem—the root issue is in their hearts."?

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.

IX. The Rest of the Book: Shepherding Through the Stages of Childhood

- A. Infancy to Childhood: Training Objectives
 1. Primary characteristic: change
 2. Understanding authority
 3. Circle of blessing
 4. Honoring defined
 5. Obedience defined
 6. Call for consistency
 7. Process of appeal
 8. The Importance of example
 9. Shepherding your children in godly attitudes
 10. Benefits of learning to be under authority

11. Save time: do it right!!

B. Infancy to Childhood: Training Procedures

1. The “When” of spanking
2. The “How” of spanking
3. The “Why” of spanking
4. Frequently asked questions

C. Childhood: Training Objectives

1. Characteristics of childhood: growing independence of choice and personality
2. Big issue: development of character
3. Change in focus: from outward obedience to heart obedience
4. Avoiding Phariseeism
5. Three-pronged tool of diagnosis:
 - a. The child in relationship to God
 - b. The child in relationship to himself
 - c. The child in relationship to others
6. The need for periodic review

D. Childhood: Training Procedures

1. Addressing the heart
2. Appealing to the conscience
3. Developing character: definition: “Living consistently with who God is and who I am”
4. Interpreting behavior in character terms
5. A long-term vision

E. Teenagers: Training Objectives

1. Signs of the times: a period of instability, anxiety, vulnerability, but paradoxically a period in which the teen is seeking to establish an independent

persona; their need for direction will never be greater, but they consistently resist efforts to corral them

2. Rebellion: often misguided attempts to establish individuality; BUT can also be a sign of something far deeper between them and God
 3. Three foundations for life
 - a. The fear of the Lord
 - b. Adherence to parental instruction: both structured (family worship, intentional discipleship) and unstructured (Deuteronomy 6—as you go)
 - c. Disassociation from the wicked
- F. Teenagers: Training Procedures
1. Internalization of the gospel: not merely “getting them saved”
 2. Shepherding this internalization
 3. Developing a shepherding relationship with teens: decreasing authority, increasing influence
 4. Shepherding your teen through doubt: finding answers to ever deeper questions and issues
 5. Positive interaction: being a source of encouragement and faith through the word of God
 6. Developing an adult relationship with your growing teen
 7. Waiting for the right time: Developing sensitivity to your teen
 8. Deal with broad themes: in adult relationships, we don’t nitpick over everything that annoys us, but overlook and cover a lot
 9. Allowing room for disagreement: distinguishing between Scriptural issues and personal tastes; don’t waste your influence on things that don’t matter
 10. Beyond internalization: what milestones await
 - a. Developing a Christian mind
 - b. Developing friendships with adults
 - c. Discovering and developing their ministry niche
 - d. Discerning their possible career trajectory

e. Establishing their own home and family identity

f. Developing a mature relationship with parents

11. Entrusting your children to God