

SESSION 10: PARENTING ISSUES

BIBLICAL PARADIGM FOR PARENTING

EPHESIANS 6:4

(The following is a review from a previous lesson)

Parents, do not provoke your children to anger, but nourish them in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. *Ephesians 6:4* (my translation)

From this verse we can presume:

- That there is a form of nurture that derives its excellence and power from the Lord;
- That, this being so, the method and means of this nurture would also derive from Him;
- The purpose, intent, and aim of this nurture would also derive from and also be focused on Him ("the discipline and instruction of the Lord").
- It falls to the parents **in cooperation together** to provide this nurture within the precincts of the family.

All human beings – children included – are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27; 9:6; et.al.). All human beings – including children – were created for the purpose of being loved by God and reflecting His glory, being His stewards over His creation (Psalm 8:3-8), and for Him to one day share His glory with us (Romans 5:2; 8:21; 29; et.al.). And all human beings – including children – are fallen, rebellious creatures (Romans 3:23; 5:12-21; 6:23) in need of the Savior (Acts 4:12).

Human beings are worshipers by nature (Romans 1) and, uncorrected in fallenness, will worship anything and everything other than God (Romans 1:18-25; et.al.). And we know that idolatry is a heart problem, not a behavior problem.

With this Biblical view of anthropology (study of the nature of man) and hamartiology (study of the nature of sin) as our starting point, we quickly see that every human being – children included – need to be discipled in becoming and remaining disciples of Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18-20).

People live life based on what they believe to be most true. What we saturate our minds with becomes what we believe; what we believe is what we live.

Romans 8:5 says, “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.” (ESV)

When children join the family, they become an additional stewardship for the husband and wife who have now become a mother and a father. Just as they have been covenantal partners in marriage, they become covenantal partners in parenting.

The quickest failing most people fall into once children come into the family is that the marriage is relegated to the sidelines and the children become the greatest priority. This is especially easy for the mother as she has a months-long physiological and emotional bond with the child, as well as a natural inclination to love, care for, and nurture her children.

Parents need to understand that children are **an addition** to the family; they do not **define** the family. Remember, God’s act of creation was “very good,” and was completed when Adam and Eve were united as husband and wife.

One day, the parents’ stewardship of these hearts will be concluded and the children will be 100% fully-accountable adults before the Lord. The task of parents is to disciple their children to become the godly men and women God created them to be.

Today, by the age of ten to twelve years of age, many children have already “left home”: they have moved out from under the authority and influence provided by their parents and have turned to other sources as the reference points of their lives. They have generally become as self-absorbed as their parents, living their lives by the motto, “I have the right to live my life the way that makes me the most happy.”

This, of course, is the very heart of rebellion. It isn't something that is learned. It is something that is inherent in us as human beings living this side of Genesis 3. However, we can be taught love for the Lord and loving obedience to His will. This is where parents come in.

We need to understand that children, just like adults, are worshipers by nature. They will either worship the One True God, or they will worship idols; they will be self-serving, or they will serve others; they will live in rebellion, or they will live in loving obedience.

We need to be honest: The two key factors in determining which path a child will take is going to be that child's parents' approach to stewarding their marriage relationship and to childrearing.

Once again we see that discipleship toward transformation and not behavioral modification are to be the goal of our relationship as Christians with the children God temporarily entrusts to us to steward and shepherd.

It is in the home that we engage in the most consistent and in-depth compliance to the Great Commission recorded for us in **Matthew 28:18-20**:

Then Jesus came up and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go *[participle]* and **make disciples** [verbal imperative] of all nations, baptizing *[participle]* them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching *[participle]* them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

SHEPHERDING VS. BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION

One of the most dynamic books on childrearing that we have found is *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, by Tedd Tripp. We use it extensively in our counseling ministry, everywhere from training our counselors to helping families with difficult parenting challenges.

Here is an excerpt from the "Preface to the Second Edition":

"God is concerned with the heart—the well-spring of life (Proverbs 4:23). Parents tend to focus on the externals of behavior rather than the internal

overflow of the heart. We tend to worry more about the 'what' of behavior than the 'why'.

Accordingly, most of us spend an enormous amount of energy in controlling and constraining behavior. To the degree and extent to which our focus is on behavior, we miss the heart. When we miss the heart, we miss the subtle idols of the heart. Romans 1 makes it clear that all human beings are worshipers; either we worship and serve God, or we make an exchange and worship and serve substitutes for God—created things rather than the Creator (Romans 1:18-25).

When parenting short-circuits to behavior we miss the opportunity to help our kids understand that straying behavior displays a straying heart. Our kids are always serving something, either God or a substitute for God—an idol of the heart. When we miss the heart, we miss the gospel.

If the goal of parenting is no more profound than securing appropriate behavior, we will never help our children understand the internal things, the heart issues, that push and pull behavior.

Those internal issues: self-love, rebellion, anger, bitterness, envy, and pride of the heart show our children how profoundly they need grace. If the problem with children is deeper than inappropriate behavior, if the problem is the overflow of the heart, then the need for grace is established.

Jesus came to earth, lived a perfect life and died as an infinite sacrifice so that children (and their parents) can be forgiven, transformed, liberated and empowered to love God and love others. When we miss the heart, we miss the glory of God.

The need of children (or adults) who have fallen into various forms of personal idolatry is not only to tear down the high places of the alien gods, but to enthrone God. Children are spring-loaded for worship.

One of the most important callings God has given parents is to display the greatness, goodness, and glory of the God for whom they are made.

Parents have the opportunity, through word and deed, to show children the one true object of worship—the God of the Bible.”¹

The only safe and true guide for proper and effective parenting is the Bible. The opinions of the world and of our own hearts cannot be trusted to guide us in knowing and living out God’s will. This is particularly true in regards to marriage and family. Only God’s Word provides us with a comprehensive picture of the human heart and of what God’s design is for relationships, parents, children, family, daily life, discipline and discipleship, and nurturing in grace and truth.

“The parenting task is multifaceted. It involves being a kind authority, shepherding your children to understand themselves in God’s world, and keeping the gospel in clear view so your children can internalize the good news and someday live in mutuality with you as people under God.”²

Our task as parents is to shepherd our children *toward* God, not toward us. They need to learn that their ultimate loyalty and duty are with God and with no one else—including their parents.

This requires an investment in the child, not simply addressing their behaviors and the impact their behaviors have on those around them. They need to be taught how our inherent bent toward rebellion and disobedience have to be replaced with knowledge of the nature and character of God, love for God, and loving obedience to His will.

This means we need to do more demonstrating than instructing, leading and guiding our children along this path than driving them from behind.

Our focus needs to be the attitudes of the heart far more than the behaviors that result from them. This requires focusing on the Gospel and its power to not only convict of sin, bring about repentance and reconciliation to God, but the power to bring present and ongoing transformation of the heart and the will.

¹ Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child’s Heart: Revised and Expanded*. Shepherding Press, 2005

² *Ibid.*, Introduction

UNDERSTANDING THE CHILD'S HEART

There are literally tens of thousands of books on parenting and child-rearing available. The underlying theses of what is offered ranges from a liberality of near-limitless freedom for children that treats them as entitled to "chart their own destinies," to a hyper-inflexible patriarchal/authoritarian dominance of children that treats them as things owned.

As Christians, if we believe that God's Word is fully sufficient and authoritative to provide us with the instruction we need to live our lives as God intends, then this is where we need to turn for guidance. The difficulty we run in to very quickly is that the context the Scriptures were written in is not the context in which we live today.

Scripture has much to say about the human heart, what we often refer to in Biblical counseling as the "seat of our desires." Both Proverbs and Jesus tell us to "Guard your heart with all vigilance, for from it are the sources of life," for, from it, come all of the evils that mark sin and lawlessness (Mark 7:20-23)

The world declares that children are inherently good, or, at the very least, morally neutral. God's Word declares that the opposite is true:

"Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him." **Proverbs 22:15**

Look, I was guilty of sin from birth, a sinner the moment my mother conceived me. **Psalm 51:5**

It is the righteousness of God available through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and continue to fall short of the glory of God. **Romans 3:22-23**

The behaviors of a child reflect the attitude of their heart just as readily as do their parents' attitudes and behaviors. Parents are not immune to selfishness and rebellion. To love our children and fulfill the mandate of Ephesians 6:4, we must address their hearts instead of focusing on their behaviors.

As believers, we are to default to studying and applying God's truth in every area of life, including parenting. The trap we can fall into when searching the Scriptures for answers to the question, "How does God want us to parent this

child?" is to de-contextualize what we find there, thinking that we've discovered a master template we then overlay on every child the same way.

As many of us have already discovered, the results of this approach are often disastrous.

While children have the same naturally-rebellious heart their parents have, yet they also have a more built-in desire to please as well. We *have* to abandon the hard-line approach to parenting—rooted in fear, worry over our image and reputation, concern over the opinions of others—that we easily fall prey to. We need to look to God and how He parents us!

It is of utmost importance for us to keep in mind that the child is learning and growing in their relationships with God and the parents just as the parents are learning and growing in their relationships with God and others.

Children need the same guidance, the same truth, the same mercy, the same grace, the same understanding and empathy, the same loving admonitions, and the same disciplining that adults do.

The person your child becomes is the outcome of two main things: the experiences he has, and how he interprets and interacts with those experiences.

DEALING WITH REBELLION

Key Passages

The Lord answered, "This will happen because my people are foolish. They do not know me. They are like children who have no sense. They have no understanding. They are skilled at doing evil. They do not know how to do good." **Jeremiah 4:22**

For the Lord disciplines those he loves, just as a father disciplines the son in whom he delights. **Proverbs 3:12**

The one who spares his rod hates his child, but the one who loves his child is diligent in disciplining him. **Proverbs 13:24**

Discipline your child, for there is hope, but do not set your heart on causing his death. **Proverbs 19:18**

*Do not withhold discipline from a child; even if you strike him with the rod, he will not die. **Proverbs 23:13***

*Discipline your child, and he will give you rest; he will bring you happiness. **Proverbs 29:17***

*If a person has a stubborn, rebellious son who pays no attention to his father or mother, and they discipline him to no avail, his father and mother must seize him and bring him to the elders at the gate of his city. They must declare to the elders of his city, "Our son is stubborn and rebellious and pays no attention to what we say—he is a glutton and drunkard." Then all the men of his city must stone him to death. In this way you will purge out wickedness from among you, and all Israel will hear about it and be afraid. **Deuteronomy 21:18-21***

*Then Samuel said, "Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices As in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, And insubordination is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has also rejected you from being king." **1 Samuel 15:22-24***



We can see two very clear messages about rebellion: God judges it to be as condemnable as He does sorcery ("You must not allow a sorceress to live." Deuteronomy 22:18); and He expects it to be purged from among His people.

How do we apply these principles in today's context? How do we address rebellion early on? And how do we deal with it when our attempts to teach our children that rebellion is evil fail? Do we take a "rod" to their backsides until they surrender and submit? Shall we call the elders together and have the unrepentant rebel stoned to death, or is there a Biblically consistent alternative?

As we studied a couple of weeks ago, authority and leadership in the home is not hierarchical, authoritarian, arrogant, oppressive, abusive, or "lording it over" in any way. It is not erratic, chaotic, inconsistent, or confusing.

Instead, it is lovingly self-sacrificial, seeking God's best for others even at great expense to one's self. There is balance, cohesion, rationality, reasonableness, humility, firm gentleness, and tender forgiveness (Ephesians 4:32).

BIBLICAL DISCIPLINE

Children learn very quickly what brings pain and what brings pleasure or is neutral. They also learn the difference between their parents' approval and their disapproval very quickly. This is why a swat or two on the bottom or a quick smack on the back of the hand accompanied by Mom's or Dad's stern voice and disapproving look can have an immediate modifying effect on most children.

Even when the child is very young and the parent follows this with assurances of their and God's love, a foundation is set for godly discipline and obedience. The stage is set for the child to learn that discipline and punishment differ, with discipline being designed to teach them to make moral decisions based on what is right and pleasing to God.

The Apostle Paul wrote the letters we know as Ephesians and Colossians at the same time. In those letters to the believers in two different areas, he teaches them many of the same things regarding Christian life and practice.

In both letters, as he gives general instructions to Christian households on how their relationships are to look, he speak clearly to the matter of disciplining children:

Ephesians 6:1-4 Children, obey your parents in the Lord for this is right. "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment accompanied by a promise, namely, "that it may go well with you and that you will live a long time on the earth." **Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger**, but raise them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

Colossians 3:18-21 Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is pleasing in the Lord. **Fathers, do not provoke your children, so they will not become disheartened.**

Rules of Thumb:

- Discipline, do not punish. Discipline seeks to correct; punishment exacts vengeance (Romans 12:19). It is to be done **firmly, consistently, and lovingly**.
- Treat the child with **love, dignity, and respect**, keeping in mind that they bear the *imago dei* just as much as anyone.
- Follow-up; keep your word
- Discipline must be carried out in love and not anger. Human anger does not accomplish God's righteousness (James 1:19-20).
- The discipline must match the offense *in both directions!* (Jeremiah 10:24; *Correct us, Lord, but only in due measure. Do not punish us in anger or you will reduce us to nothing.*)
- Discuss the discipline before it is rendered, then reassure the child in the aftermath, helping them understand the need for the discipline and that they are loved.
- Look for a repentant heart.
- Once the discipline is over, the sin is over as well. God allows discipline in our lives, but He forgives us in our repentance.
- "Keep God in Front."
- Teach them respect by being respectful. Call them to account without being too "quick on the trigger," showing wisdom and patience.
- Acknowledge and respect their appropriate personal boundaries. Seek to teach, not simply to correct.

PEER PRESSURE

Key Passages

You must not follow a crowd in doing evil things. **Exodus 23:2a**

How blessed is the one who does not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand in the pathway with sinners, or sit in the assembly of scoffers! **Psalms 1:1**

My child, if sinners try to entice you, do not consent! If they say, "Come with us! We will lie in wait to shed blood; we will ambush an innocent person

capriciously. We will swallow them alive like Sheol, those full of vigor like those going down to the Pit. We will seize all kinds of precious wealth; we will fill our houses with plunder. Join with us! We will all share equally in what we steal." My child, do not go down their way, withhold yourself from their path; **Proverbs 1:10-15**

He has told you, O man, what is good, and what the Lord really wants from you: He wants you to promote justice, to be faithful, and to live obediently before your God. **Micah 6:8**



Children learn very quickly what is acceptable to their peers. As they mature, dad and Mom move from primary authority and influence positions into secondary positions in the child's world. As mentioned earlier, by the time a child is between ten- and twelve-years old, they have virtually left home and their loyalties have become more outside the family than inside if the parents have not done an effective job of disciplining their children.

Children suffer from the same tendencies toward making idols of the opinions of others. They easily end up with the same longings to fit in and be accepted as their parents have had.

If they have been taught to manipulate by being trained to modify behavior to get what they want, their fear-driven manipulation skills become fine-tuned in the environs of middle- and high-school. They will feel a desperate need to look at act like the leaders of their peer group in order to avoid standing out and becoming a target.

Talking through the applications of the above verses with the children in the context of the school they attend and the relationships they are forming can be one of the most empowering and comforting ways to help peer-proof children when they have a base of God-honoring safe, caring, loving, and nurturing relationships with their parents and siblings.

Loving discipline combined with consistency develops love and respect for parents in children; inconsistency and cruelty or neglect develop contempt and animosity for parents in children.

The former helps parents maintain godly influence in the children's lives all the way into adulthood; the latter drives children to seek from those outside the family for the care and nurture they have needed and craved and they become lost to the parents.

Proverbs 2 is an excellent portion of Scripture to review with children frequently, discussing the implications and applications in their ever-changing contexts and relationships. The more they are exposed to it and taught how to apply the truths contained there—along with other Scriptures as well, of course—the more they will understand God and His precepts and find comfort and strength in them.

SEXUAL CURIOSITY

*Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbors, pouring it from the wineskin till they are drunk, so that he can gaze on their naked bodies. **Habakkuk 2:15** (NIV)*

As we have discussed at length before, human beings are sexual creatures, designed and commanded by God to “be fruitful and multiply.” Our children become just as fascinated with discovering their sexuality as they do anything else in their world—sometimes even more.

The best way to circumvent curiosity from becoming obsession is to talk about it openly, age-appropriately, and without shaming. Helping children understand and see the sexuality of mankind as a beautiful aspect of God's creation, and to learn early and ongoingly the God-ordained boundaries and limitations of human sexual expression is the surest way to put strong margins between your children and sexual sin.

25 WAYS THAT PARENTS PROVOKE THEIR CHILDREN TO ANGER

From *The Heart of Anger*, Lou Priolo, Calvary Press 1996

1. Lack of marital harmony. Hebrews 12: 15
2. Establishing and maintaining a child-centered home. Proverbs 29: 17
3. Modeling sinful anger. Proverbs 22:24-25
4. Habitually disciplining while angry. Psalm 38: 1; Ephesians 4:26-27
5. Scolding Eph. 4:29
6. Being inconsistent with discipline. 2 Corinthians 1: 17-18; Ecclesiastes 8: 11
7. Having double standards. Philippians 4:9
8. Being legalistic. Matthew 15:8-9
9. Not admitting you're wrong and not asking for forgiveness. Matthew 5:23-24; James 1:16
10. Constantly finding fault. Job 32:2-3
11. Parents reversing God-given roles. Ephesians 5:22-24
12. Not listening to your child's opinion or taking his or her "side of the story"
13. seriously. Proverbs 18: 3, 17
14. Comparing them to others. 2 Corinthians 10:12
15. Not making time "just to talk." James 1:19, Ecclesiastes 3:7
16. Not praising and encouraging your child. Revelation 2:2-5
17. Failing to keep your promises. Matthew 5:37; Psalm 15:4-5; Colossians 3:9
18. Chastening in front of others. Matthew 18: 15
19. Not allowing enough freedom. James 3:17; Luke 12:48
20. Allowing too much freedom. Proverbs 29:15; Galatians 4:1-2
21. Mocking your children. Job 17:1-2; Exodus 4:11
22. Abusing them physically. 1 Timothy 3:3; Numbers 22:27-29
23. Ridiculing or name calling. Ephesians 4:29
24. Unrealistic expectations. 1 Corinthians 13:11
25. Practicing favoritism. Luke 15:25-30
26. Child training with worldly methods inconsistent with God's Word. Ephesians 6:4

