



Foundations of Faith- A Biblical Approach to Parenting #2

The Heart of a Child

Imagine a parent whose child pushes them away and says something like, “Don’t touch me!” What should a parent do? Should the parent(s) sit the child down and lecture him/her about the evils of pushing parents? Should the parents simply brush it off as “just a passing stage” and take comfort that their child is sinning on time? Is there something more that needs to be dealt with or something more that needs to be said?

Parents need to work backwards from behavior and try to understand what is going on inside a child’s heart. There are questions that need to be asked. Questions like, “What was he thinking when he did that? What was she wanting more than anything else? Parents need to ask these types of questions because our Creator, Who understands parenting and understands children better than anyone, says that actions come from the heart.

- Luke 6:45 **“The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.”**

There are two very important things for parents to remember when they start to deal with “issues of the heart” (the inner man; what a person is thinking; a person’s motives or desires):

- 1) The impact of the curse of sin on our minds has affected our ability to think and reason. In other words, as a result of the fall (Genesis 3) neither the parent nor the child has the ability to know truth apart from God’s Word. Each person needs God to help him/her think biblically.
- 2) The “heart of man” (parents and children) is so wicked and sinful that nobody has the ability to fully understand it. Realizing this truth will help parents keep a proper balance between dealing with the “*heart of a child*” and the *actions* of a child.
 - Jeremiah 17:9 **“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”**

While sin has corrupted the parent’s and the child’s ability to think and reason, God does expect each one to evaluate his/her thinking and motives in light of the Scriptures. God says that parents and children have the ability (as Christians guided by His Word and with the Holy Spirit living inside) to change the way they think.

- Ephesians 4:23 **“and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind.”**

In this lesson, we will study how to deal with the heart of a child and examine how a heart for God should result in a God-centered home.

I. The Heart of a Child

A. The need for parents to get to the heart

1. How would you summarize the truth of the following verses?

- 1 Samuel 16:7 **“But the LORD said to Samuel, ‘Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.’”**
-
- Proverbs 4:22-23 **“Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life.”**
-

Note: Proverbs instructs parents to help their child think – to get to his/her mind.

Mark 7:21-22 “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness.”

2. What does the “heart” mean?

In the Scriptures the “heart” does not refer to the blood-pumping organ in the chest. Rather it has been described as the “*immaterial*” part of man or the “*control center*.”

Simply, the “heart” would include the thoughts, attitudes, emotions, motivations, will, conscience, mind and other terms.

- 1 Corinthians 4:5 “Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, *but wait* until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the **motives of men’s hearts**; and then each man’s praise will come to him from God” [emphasis added].

3. How would learning to deal with “heart issues” help to strengthen a person’s parenting?

Determining the underlying desires will help the parent to know the appropriate teaching for the situation. Learning to deal with “heart issues” and behavior has a more long-term effect on the child. Simply dealing with the behavior alone is more of a temporary solution.

4. Our Lord’s attitude about the heart

Our Lord had some very strong words for the scribes and the Pharisees (religious leaders of that day) who put too much emphasis on the outward behavior and failed to have a “heart” that was right before God.

What does Matthew 15:7-8 reveal regarding what our Lord thinks about those who neglect to have a heart right before God?

- Matthew 15:7-8 “**You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying, 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME.'**”

- Matthew 23:27 “**Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness.**”

What kind of a child will be produced when a parent only deals with the child’s behavior and does not help him think and deal with wrong motives and desires?

In Shepherding a Child’s Heart Tedd Tripp makes some observations:

“Superficial parenting that never addresses the heart biblically produces superficial children who do not understand what makes them tick. They must be taught how to understand their behavior in terms of heart motivation.”

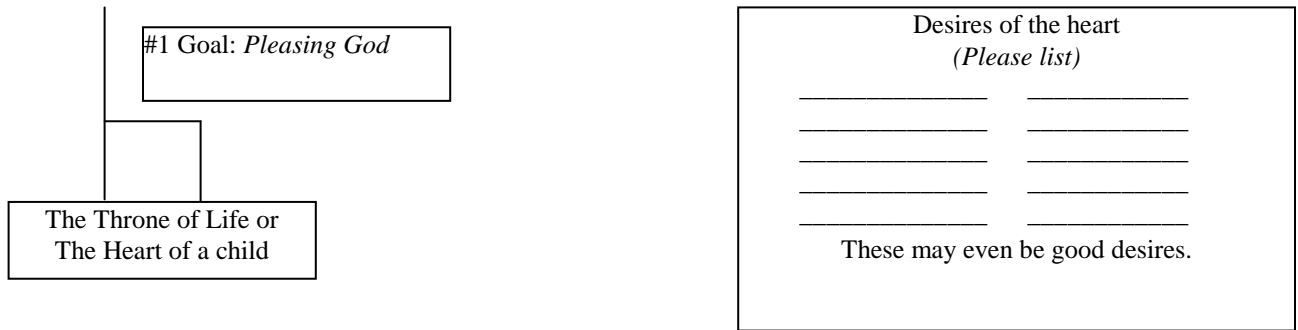
Tripp points out that children are not just a product of their physical makeup and life experiences; they are also a product of their responses to those experiences. Responses can be categorized as oriented either toward God or away from God. Therefore, responses are an act of worship, either to God or to idols.

There are two responses to God: faith or suppression of the truth in unrighteousness (Romans 1:18-19). Suppression of the truth in unrighteousness results in idolatry. Wrong behaviors are reflections of idolatry.

B. Dealing with the child's heart

Consider the following diagrams and how they illustrate what might be going on inside the child's heart (inner man):

Diagram #1: Pleasing *God* is the #1 goal of life.



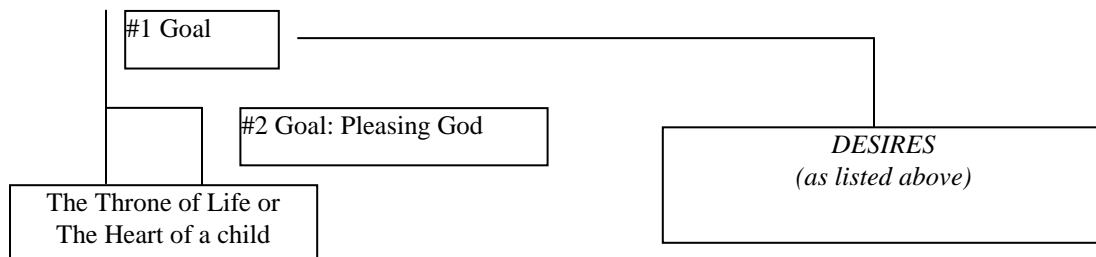
Please read James 1:13-15:

- James 1:13-15 **“Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God’; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.”**

Note: “Enticed” is a fishing term that literally means “to bait a hook..”

Diagram #2: The *child's “desire(s)”* become the #1 goal, and pleasing God is secondary.

A parent must consider what happens when a child's “desire” is made more important than pleasing God.



What would the Bible call something that a child would allow to become more important than pleasing God, or something that he/she would “worship” instead of worshipping God?

John Calvin taught that the human heart is a factory of idols. He also pointed out that it's not that we want something; it's that we want it too much.

An important question to ask is this: How do you know when something has become an idol?

Two questions to consider in helping us answer this question:

- 1) *How does a child respond when he/she doesn't get it (i.e. the desire)?*
- 2) *Is the child willing to sin in order to get it (i.e. the desire)?*

Example A: John 12:42-43

- John 12:42 **“Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; 43 for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God.”**

What were some “idols of the heart” that these men possessed?

Example B: Johnny has been told that he is to always make his bed before breakfast. Today, Mom discovers that Johnny’s bed has not been made. Mom thinks, “Is it laziness? Is it rebellion? Is it due to distraction by some desired pleasure? Do I have all the facts?”

How would the idol be different in the following scenarios?

- *“It’s too hard to get the wrinkles out.”*
- *“I’m sick of cleaning my room. Jenny doesn’t have to make her bed.”*
- *“Dad asked me to help him in the basement with the leaking pipes, right away.”*
- *“I’ll get to it--can I just finish this level on SuperMario?”*

Disciplining Johnny for disobedience would be appropriate in three of the above situations. In counseling him, however, the issues that need to be addressed are quite different.

Helping Johnny to see how his desires led him to do wrong will help him in general. Exposing the idol that he was worshipping helps to clarify how to grow more specifically.

Work through the following chart backwards. Start by listing some sinful behaviors, then think about some possible idols that would lead to that behavior, and then consider some truths that the child has rejected or neglected and would need to understand in order to help him deal with those idols.

Truth Rejected	Idols	Behavior
Truths: Submission/Authority	Control – wants to be in charge	Child to parent: <i>“Don’t touch me!”</i>
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

II. A Home that Helps to Shape the Heart

God wants each person to view life’s situations through His eyes--to look at things with eternity in view, not simply the present moment. God, our Creator, is to be the center of life and the home. *That* is His designed

plan. These Scriptures are not just good ideas. They are commands from God. If families are going to function the way that God intended, they *must* be God-centered.

Having a God-centered home means the following:

A. Loving God first

- Matthew 22:37-38 “**You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the great and foremost commandment.**”
- Matthew 6:33 “**But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you.**”

Is it possible for parents to love their child more than they love God? Or to want to please the child more than they want to please God? Why or Why not?

—

—

B. Following God’s plan for the family

The first mention of the family is in Genesis 2:24 “*For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh*” [emphasis added].

When Adam was alone, God created a spouse for him. This was the first family, and it was a family *prior* to the addition of children. The family consisted of a male and female in a covenant relationship of marriage.

At the very beginning of the family, it is determined that children are to be brought up and to *leave* their father and mother. The marriage is **permanent**--the parenting is **temporary**. God was the head of the family, Adam was the head of Eve, and they two would have authority over their children. As a child grows up and gets married, he or she establishes a new and separate and **permanent** relationship with that spouse.

An easy way to remember this principle is to learn the following diagram:

T = *temporary*

P = *permanent*

T = *temporary*

As parents practice this principle and teach it to their children, the family develops a God-centered home and not a child-centered home or a self-centered home.

C. Compare the God-centered home and the child-centered home: (How to Help Angry Kids, Lou Priolo)

Child-Centered Home	God-Centered Home
<p>Where children learn to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interrupt adults talking • Use manipulation and rebellion to get their way • Dictate the family schedule • Take precedence over spouse’s needs • Have equal or overriding vote • Demand excessive time or attention 	<p>Where children learn to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know the joy of serving others • Cheerfully obey the first time • Not interrupt parents • Not manipulate others • Know that they will not always get their way • Work their schedule around their parents’ schedule • Have input into decisions but not an equal vote

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Escape the consequences of sinful and irresponsible behavior • Speak to parents as though peers • Be the dominant influence in the home • Be entertained or coddled out of a bad mood • The child perceives that the entire family exists to please him and make him happy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand parents have other God-given responsibilities • Suffer natural consequences for sinful and irresponsible behavior • Honor parents as authorities • Esteem others more important than selves • Fulfill household duties (chores) • Protect themselves from bad influences • Not divide parents on disciplinary issues • Not be more intimate with either parent, than the parents are with each other • The child perceives that the husband is the head of the family and the wife is submissive to her husband. Theirs is the primary relationship.
---	---

D. Practical applications

Grandparents may joke about “spoiling” the grandchildren. In what ways might a grandparent be training a child to be self-centered, in a sense “sabotaging” the parents?

—

—

In homes where there has been a divorce, and custody issues exist, consistent discipline between the two homes is desperately needed. Look over the characteristics of a child centered-home and decide which of those problems are likely to show up in this situation.

—

—

What characteristics of the child centered home do you notice in your family?

—

What changes do you need to make in your home to become more God centered?

—

As a parent finds areas that need improvement and implements changes in the home, it would be wise to explain to the children that he/she (the parent) was previously wrong to allow these behaviors and habits to develop.

A parent will also need to communicate to the child(ren) that it is his/her (the parents) desire to please God by making these changes in the home. A parent would then need to ask forgiveness and model to the children his/her submission as a parent to God’s Word.

(See handout for “Christlike Character Qualities”)

Christ-like Character Qualities

Quality	Opposite	Definition
Attentiveness	<i>Unconcern</i>	Showing respect for a person by giving undivided attention to what he is saying.
Obedience	<i>Willfulness</i>	Freedom to be creative under the protection of divinely appointed authority
Contentment	<i>Covetousness</i>	Realizing God has provided everything I need for my present happiness
Orderliness	<i>Disorganization</i>	Preparing myself and my surroundings so that I will achieve the greatest efficiency
Reverence	<i>Disrespect</i>	Awareness of how God is working through the people and events in my life to produce the character of Christ in me
Forgiveness	<i>Rejection</i>	Giving up my right to remember, or get revenge for, a hurt done to me.
Gratefulness	<i>Unthankful</i>	Making known to God and to others in what ways they have benefited my life
Faith	<i>Presumption</i>	Using God's Word to understand how He wants me to respond to a given situation and acting in harmony with it
Truthfulness	<i>Deception</i>	Earning future trust by accurately reporting past facts
Security	<i>Anxiety</i>	Structuring my life around what is eternal and cannot be destroyed or taken away
Meekness	<i>Anger</i>	Yielding my personal rights and expectations to God
Cautiousness	<i>Rashness</i>	Knowing how important biblical thinking and planning is in accomplishing right actions
Patience	<i>Restlessness</i>	Accepting a difficult situation from God without giving Him a deadline to remove it.
Dependability	<i>Inconsistency</i>	Fulfilling what I consented to do even if it means unexpected sacrifice
Determination	<i>Faintheartedness</i>	Purposing to accomplish God's goals in God's timing regardless of opposition
Punctuality	<i>Tardiness</i>	Showing a high esteem for other people and their time
Discernment	<i>Judgment</i>	Knowing the difference between good and evil
Loyalty	<i>Unfaithfulness</i>	Using adversity to confirm my commitment to those whom God has called me to serve
Compassion	<i>Indifference</i>	Concern for others demonstrated by actions that help them grow and glorify God
Alertness	<i>Unawareness</i>	Ability to anticipate right responses to that which is taking place around me
Thriftiness	<i>Extravagance</i>	Not letting myself or others spend that which violates biblical guidelines
Responsibility	<i>Unreliability</i>	Knowing and carrying out the biblical expectations of God and those in authority
Virtue	<i>Impurity</i>	The purity of thought and actions that are produced in my life from obedience to God's Word
Fairness	<i>Partiality</i>	Making a decision after carefully and biblically evaluating the viewpoint of each person involved
Tolerance	<i>Prejudice</i>	Viewing others as unique expressions of specific character qualities in varying degrees of maturity
Joyfulness	<i>Self-pity</i>	The satisfaction that results from genuine harmony with God and biblical relationships with others
Wisdom	<i>Natural inclinations</i>	Seeing and responding to life situations from God's frame of reference
Humility	<i>Pride</i>	Thinking and acting in ways to show how God and others are actually responsible for the achievements in my life.
Love	<i>Selfishness</i>	Giving to others without having as my motive personal reward
Initiative	<i>Unresponsiveness</i>	Recognizing and doing what needs to be done before I am asked to do it
Discretion	<i>Simple-mindedness</i>	Learning to identify and avoid words, actions and attitudes which are not honoring to God
Diligence	<i>Slothfulness</i>	Recognizing every responsibility is a special assignment from the Lord and using all my energies to accomplish it
Decisiveness	<i>Double-mindedness</i>	The habit of making difficult decisions and basing them on biblical principles

Creativity	<i>Under-achievement</i>	Approaching a need, a task, an idea from a new perspective that is guided by biblical principles
Endurance	<i>Giving up</i>	Using God’s grace to continue pleasing Him in both routine and difficult circumstances
Sincerity	<i>Hypocrisy</i>	Eagerness to do what is right with transparent and pure motives
Enthusiasm	<i>Apathy</i>	Expressing with my words, actions and attitudes the joy and excitement of serving the Lord
Self-control	<i>Self-indulgence</i>	Bringing desires under the control of biblical principles
Generosity	<i>Stinginess</i>	Realizing that all I have belongs to God and using it for His purposes
Deference	<i>Rudeness</i>	Limiting my freedom in order not to offend those God has given me the opportunity to serve
Sensitivity	<i>Callousness</i>	Being observant of the condition of others in order to help them please God

Note: These character qualities have been defined by others (Bill Gothard) and are not original here. Many have been modified to emphasize biblical actions and attitudes in a practical way, rather than a “feeling” emphasis. They are listed in this order as the earlier qualities lend themselves to younger children.

Application: Child’s name _____

Character Quality	Opposite	Definition

How would this character quality be seen in the following situations:

- Home? _____
- School? _____
- Play? _____

What illustrations from the Bible would be helpful to teach this character quality?

In what specific situation can I model this to my child?

How does the opposite help to understand the quality?

Thinking about specific character qualities, and specific applications, helps us to leave “fuzzy land” (where we don’t grow) and to make specific changes.