

Shepherding A Child's Heart

Week 3: A Child's Development - Shaping Influences

Review:

1. Last week, we learned that understanding authority is equally as foundational as the importance of the heart.
2. Why is exercising parental authority both *good* and *necessary* for children?
3. When a parent gives authority away or negotiates with a child, how does that harm the child?
4. How is the exercise of godly parental authority a positive shaping influence in the life of a child? How is the absence of parental authority or the exercise of ungodly authority a shaping influence in a person's life?

Main Idea:

Two things contribute to the development of a child: the shaping influences of life and the Godward orientation of their heart. Parents and communities of faith must be concerned with both. You must be concerned with how you structure the shaping influences of life that are under your control. You must also actively shepherd the Godward orientation of your children.

Children are not neutral in this process. They are not merely the sum total of what you put into them. They interact with your shaping efforts according to the Godward commitment of their hearts. Raising children is not like operating a plastic extrusion press. Children are responders. They are active in what they become.

Video (notes below)

1. Definition of Shaping Influences

- a. Events and circumstances in a child's development that prove to be catalysts for the person they become
- b. Biblical basis
 - i. Genesis 18:19
 - ii. Deuteronomy 6:2
 - iii. Proverbs 22:6
 - iv. Ephesians 6:4
- c. The person your child becomes is the product of his life experience and how he responds to the shaping influences of life

2. Examples of Shaping Influences

- a. Family structure—includes the myriad of different combinations of relationships that form a family's background and history
- b. Family values—what is important to mom & dad?
- c. Family boundaries—what is private, what do you share?
- d. Family roles—children learn how to be parents as they observe mom and dad
- e. Family conflict resolution—how are issues resolved?
- f. Response to failure—what happens when mistakes and failures occur?
- g. Family history—major events in the life of a family, like marriages, deaths, moves, etc.
- h. Education—type and form
- i. Instability of the culture

3. Two mistakes that are made regarding shaping influences

- a. Denial—saying that children are unaffected by early childhood experiences
- b. Determinism—assuming children are simply the product of shaping influences
 - i. For instance: “If I provide the proper environment, it will automatically produce the proper child.”

4. Your kids are never passive responders to the shaping influences you provide

- a. They are active responders
- b. Children respond to the Godward orientation of their hearts

5. What is this teaching about?

- a. It *is not* about how to get it right
- b. It *is not* to guarantee that you kids will grow up in the faith
- c. It *is* really about living before God in obedience
 - i. Fulfilling the calling God has given to you
 - ii. Trusting God for what God will bring in the lives of my children

6. Then why bother?

- a. You do all that God has called you to do because God has called you to do it
- b. Ultimately, your children are responsible for their responses to your parenting
- c. The condition of your child’s heart determines how he will respond to the shaping influences of his life (see Proverbs 4:23)
- d. Proverbs 9 provides the balance needed
 - i. The wise person responds well to instruction and grows wiser
 - ii. The foolish person resists instruction and sinks more deeply into rebellion

7. We have three reasons for hope

- a. God’s purpose is to work through families
- b. The gospel is suited to the deepest needs of your children
- c. The gospel is powerful—it can transform your kids

Q&A

Reflection:

1. Can you think of examples in scripture that validate God’s concern for shaping influences and the imperative for parents to take responsibility for and structure those influences?
 - a. What are some of the shaping influences of life that a parent can control?
 - b. What are some shaping influences that might be out of a parent’s control?
2. Consider the two unbiblical responses to shaping influences: *denial* and *determinism*.
 - a. How would denial affect the way you respond to your child-rearing task?
 - b. How would determinism affect the way you respond to your child-rearing task?
 - c. How do we see these two errors (denial and determinism) applied in the Christian life for adults?

3. Can you think of a biblical example in which two people encounter the same circumstances but respond and are shaped by them in different ways?

4. How do you assess the orientation of a child's heart? Consider the following questions:
 - a. Are they inclined to trust and obey parental authority? Or are they wanting to be autonomous?
 - b. How do they respond to discipline? With humility? Or as a mocker? (Prov 9:7-10)
 - c. Are they concerned with others, or bent on pleasing themselves?
 - d. When they experience a good thing, are they controlled or consumed by it?
 - e. When they experience loss or grief (even over small things), are they unsettled and riled up?

5. Humans, including children, either respond to life's circumstances and shaping influences out of the grace of God and in reference to God, or they respond with some form of idolatry (pride, performance, power, influence, pleasure, sensuality, love of possessions, people-pleasing, anger, resentment).
 - a. What do you observe as the lens through which your children are interpreting their influences?

6. Regarding shaping influences, the primary tasks of a parent are 1) To ensure that the shaping influences in a child's life (that they can control) are consistently biblical, and 2) To help their children respond to all influences with a Godward orientation.
 - a. Are there any ways the shaping influences of life under your control should be changed?

 - b. How can you use the influences that are out of your control to teach your children God's ways and help them respond in faith?