

Shepherding A Child's Heart

Week 15: Shepherding Children Ages 6-12

Warm-up:

1. How does shepherding a child well in the early years (0-5) establish a foundation for the later years?
 - a. How is the opposite of this also true?
2. What are some of the aspects of shepherding children that change as they move beyond the 0-5 years and into the 6-12 years?
 - a. What becomes easier?
 - b. What becomes more difficult?
3. How important are the influences in a person's life during these years between 6-12 ?

Main Idea:

Parents of school age children are faced with new challenges and must build upon the earlier lessons of being a person under authority. One of the primary focuses during these years is character development. A child must be learning how to respond to situations in life with biblical wisdom (trust and obedience toward God). His conscience must be developed as the reasoning factor of the soul, and parents must appeal to the conscience in order to help him develop the capacity to reason to right conclusions using the Scriptures as his guide.

It is obvious that character development is not taught through the same methods as teaching a toddler to be under authority... Spanking works well to teach younger children to obey, but it is not effective at teaching a 12 year old to be wise. As children grow, we must address the heart using godly communication, a clear appeal to their conscience, and an appropriate application of corrective discipline where necessary.

Video (notes below)

1. Many issues cannot be reduced to obedience—we need to get to the sin beneath the

sin 2. The heart directs behavior

- a. Note the illustration from Matthew 15
- b. It is what comes out of the heart that makes a man unclean
 - i. Ungodly behavior flows from ungodly attitudes
 - ii. Godly behavior flows from godly attitudes
- c. The danger is that parents isolate behavior issues from heart issues
 - i. Very easy for parents to focus on behavior instead of the heart
 - ii. The temptation: trying to produce behavioral change without addressing heart attitudes behind behavior
 - iii. Note the “Shut up Jar” illustration
 - iv. A fight over a toy is really a fight between two selfish kids

3. Does God commend right actions for wrong motives?

- a. This is what Jesus condemned the Pharisees for
- b. If you deal with the heart, the right attitudes will follow

4. See chart for a suggested list of attitudes of the heart

5. The attitudes of the heart push and pull our children's behavior

- a. As parents we want to give our children these truths
- b. Develop a heart notebook
- c. Address practical concerns (e.g., what does revenge look like for an eight-year-old?)
- d. Concerns about electronic media
 - i. Children are ready to deal with the Internet only when they gain insight into the attitudes of their heart.
 - ii. Technical proficiency is not enough to prepare kids for the internet world

6. Attitudes of the heart are about much more than information transfer

- a. Yet we say to our kids, "I can't believe you would be so selfish"
- b. We act as if having the right information is all that matters
- c. The attitude of the heart is what matters most

7. Dealing with issues of the heart

- a. Allows parents to stand in solidarity with children, since they are facing the same issues
- b. The beauty is that Christ has come to transform the heart
- c. When we are dealing with the heart we are naturally led to the gospel
- d. The goal: give children a way to understand themselves in light of the grace of the gospel
- e. We want our children to have an intelligent grasp of the grace and power of the gospel

Q&A / Reflection:

1. When we talk about character development, we are talking about the fruits of the Spirit that are the product of authentic faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - a. Where does this leave us if our children do not believe, or if we are unsure of their belief?
 - b. What's the difference between teaching them toward doubt and teaching them toward faith in these situations?
2. Tripp pointed out that God does not "commend right actions for wrong motives" ...
 - a. Does this mean that a parent should not insist on right actions, regardless of motives?
 - b. How do actions/attitudes/behavior become the opportunity for parents to address the heart and appeal to the conscience?
 - c. Why is it important to have an understanding of the grace of God and His sovereignty when seeking to be faithful in these things?
3. Practically speaking, how does a parent do this? How do you appeal to the conscience of a child when their behavior presents the opportunity?

a. What are some practical examples/ suggestions?

4. There are 3 main categories that parents should consider when trying to diagnose their child's shepherding needs. Asking questions in these categories can help give direction to how you appeal to the conscience.

Relationship with God	Relationship to Himself	Relationship with Others
Is there a conscience need for God?	How does he think of himself?	Is he loving others?
Is knowing and loving God important?	Is he aware of his sin?	Is he mindful of others? Or mostly self?
Is God a source of comfort and strength?	Is He aware of God's grace?	Is she controlling of others?
Do choices reflect knowing God?	Is he arrogant? Or Humble?	Is he compassionate/ forgiving?
Is God big? Or Small?	Is she chained by fear/pride?	Is he pleasant for others to be around?
Is God unkind? Or merciful?	Is he self-righteous?	How does she handle disappointment?
Is the child trusting/obeying God	Does she see herself in Christ?	How does he handle being sinned against

5. Parents must develop the skills needed to assess these categories and seek to shepherd their children according to their needs. This is true of long-term character development needs, as well as addressing behavior "in the moment". Doing this well necessitates thinking clearly and thoroughly about the "what", "when", and "why" of behavior. Sometimes the fact that we do not think thoroughly these things is reflected in asking poor questions of our children. For example, "why did you..." is usually a poor (or at least insufficient) question. Here are some better examples of questions that can help your children have a clearer understanding of their actions and responses:

- a. Tell me about the situation...
- b. How did you respond when...
- c. What did you do (or say)?
- d. What were you trying to accomplish in doing (or saying) that?
- e. How did your actions help or hurt?
- f. What would have been a better thing to do or say?
- g. Did your actions reflect your love for God and love for neighbor?
- h. What do you need to confess and seek forgiveness for?
- i. Do you believe that Christ's death fully pays for your sin?
- j. Do you believe that God's grace mean that "when you get it wrong, you can get it right?"
- k. What can you do now (and next time) to glorify God and love your neighbor?

6. Often times the things that interfere with parents nurturing and shepherding their children through these questions (or similar questions) happen to be their own idols. Sometimes our own desires distort our vision, especially when our children's behavior presents a shepherding opportunity. Some of those idols can include:

- a. You want to be respected
- b. You want comfort/ ease
- c. Appreciation
- d. Success in parenting
- e. Control
- f. You want peace

- i. Be on guard against these lusts and their ability to derail your love for your children.
- ii. Repent of any known idols that frequently interfere with shepherding your children well.