

**Kenneth Maresco
Covenant Life Church**

PARENTING 6-10

Shepherding Your Child's Heart

"We all know that God's goal for our parenting is that we work ourselves out of a job. His plan is that we would be his instruments in producing children who are biblically mature, ready to face life in the fallen world, ready to be salt and light, ready to be contributors to his kingdom work, no longer needing the day-by-day guidance that we have given them for so many years."¹

TRANSITIONAL PERIOD (Ages 6-10)

- Growing awareness of the world
- Growing awareness of other people
- Growing awareness of God (if taught)
- Expanding circle of influences
- Growth in "independent thinking"
- Critical period in shaping of their world view
- Childhood to young adult (adolescence)

I. Shepherding Our Children

A. We Shepherd Our Children as Stewards of God's Gifts

"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." Ephesians 6:4

"Understanding this simple principle enables you to think clearly about your task. If you are God's agent in this task of providing essential training and instruction in the Lord, then you too, are a person under authority. Your child and you are in the same boat. You are both under God's authority. You have differing roles, but the same master."²

"Recognizing that God has called you to function as His agent defines your task as a parent. Our culture has reduced parenting to providing care. Parents often see the task in these narrow terms. The child must have food, clothes, a bed and some quality time. In sharp contrast to such a weak view, God has called you to a more profound task than being a care-provider. You shepherd your child in God's behalf. The

¹ Paul David Tripp, *Age of Opportunity* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1997) 208.

² Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 1995) 47.

task God has given you is not one that can be conveniently scheduled. It is a pervasive task. Training and shepherding is going on whenever you are with your children. Whether waking, walking, talking or resting, you must be involved in helping your child to understand life, himself, and his needs from a biblical perspective (Deuteronomy 6:6-7).³

“Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are children of one’s youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them! He shall not be put to shame when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.”

Psalm 127: 3-5

B. We Must Instruct Them from God’s Word

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

Deut. 6:4-9

“Never let the watchfulness to check the buddings of evil, and to cherish the first tenderness of right feeling, be relaxed. The ceaseless activity of the great enemy teaches the value of early training. Be beforehand with him. Pre-occupy the ground with good seed, as the most effectual exclusion of his evil tares...Be at the mouth of the way with wholesome food, ere he has the opportunity of pouring in his bread of deceit...”⁴

1. Regular times of opening God’s Word

2. In your daily lives “Everyday Talk”

“Parents often correct their children from preference and church culture rather than God’s Word. The youth ministry is where you see the fruit of that kind of instruction. And the fruit of this kind of instruction is moralism and exasperated teenagers.” Dave Brewer

- a. Distinguish between the Word of God and your family rules
- b. Concern should be rooted in God’s Word
- c. Keep focus on God, not moralism
- d. Don’t wait for times of correction to use Scripture

³ Ibid., Tripp, 50.

⁴ Charles Bridges, Proverbs (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, reprinted 1994) 403-404.

C. Practicals for Teaching God's Word - Ages 6-10

1. Speak in ways a child can understand.
2. Make times of instruction brief.
3. Use role plays.
4. If they cannot read, help them memorize.
5. Apply the Bible to the issues in their lives.
6. The goal is that "we and our children and our grandchildren may fear the Lord and walk in his ways, enjoying a long life."

II. Our Example and Leadership

A. Leadership is Rooted in Example

- Is there any sin I need to acknowledge in my relationships or life?
- Have I demonstrated godliness by the way I have confessed and pursued that sin with the gospel in my life?

"The life classroom is constant, compelling and comprehensive. The same is true of our homes as well. They are environments where our children are constantly learning. Not only that, but we are always teaching our children. Our every response, whether it is instruction or silence, teaches. Our behavior and our love teach."⁵

- Ask your children to evaluate you.
- What do they learn from how you live?
- Are they aware that you are a sinner in the midst of the same sanctification process they are in?

"God wants his commands in that place of special privilege. Do you love God? Are you blown away by his Word? Is the awesomeness of God something that your mind keeps turning to? Does the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross for your sin dominate the thoughts of your heart? This is the picture of Deuteronomy 6 when it says, 'these commands are to be upon your hearts.' What thoughts live in your heart? You know and God knows. Your children know."⁶

"Your example can have a gracious restraining effect in the lives of your children or it can tempt them to rebellion." C.J. Mahaney

- Moral authority is based on trust.
- No matter how much they sin, if you sin, stop and show them how to repent.

⁵ Tedd and Margy Tripp, *Instructing a Child's Heart* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2008) 18.

⁶ John A. Younts, *Everyday Talk* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2004) 14.

B. Godly Leadership

1. Guide your schedule.
2. Make time for God's Word, and God.
3. Make the local church a family priority.
4. Build relationships with (love) your children.
5. Discipline your children toward godliness.

"Your children are accountable to God for their obedience to you, and you are accountable to God for raising your children to fear him. Therefore your focus in discipline is to hold your children accountable to God."⁷

III. Shepherding Toward Conversion

A. The Importance of the Question, "Is Your Child Saved?"

"Many of us have friends and relatives who profess to be Christians but in whose lives there appears to be no evidence of the discipline of grace. Oftentimes we cling to a frail hope that such persons are believers because they made a profession at some time, despite the lack of any evidence of the Spirit's work in their lives. It seems parents are especially prone to this form of denial regarding children who show no evidence of a genuine work of grace."⁸

B. Understanding the Condition of Our Children

- Children are born sinners

"...as it is written: 'None is righteous, no, not one; none understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.'"

Romans 3:10-12

"Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned."

Romans 5:12

C. Understanding Our Role as Parents

"I know that you cannot convert your child. I know well that they who are born again are born, not of the will of man, but of God. But I also know that God says expressly, 'Train up a child in the way in which he should

⁷ John A. Younts, *Everyday Talk* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2004) 67.

⁸ Jerry Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1994) 82.

go,' and that he never laid a command on man which he would not give man grace to perform. And I know, too, that our duty is not to stand still and dispute, but to go forward and obey. It is just in this going forward that God will meet us. The path of obedience is the way in which he gives the blessing. We have only to do as the servants were commanded at the marriage feast in Canaan, to fill the water-pots with water and we may safely leave it to the Lord to turn that water into wine."⁹

- Our calling as ambassadors for Christ begins in our homes.

"Under God's providence, when a man and woman have a child, they have kindled a spark that can never be put out. That child, blessed or cursed, will exist forever and ever. No peaceful oblivion waits for poorly reared children. And further, God has made the world in such a way that parents have a tremendous influence over the direction their children take—either for good or evil."¹⁰

D. Begin with a Biblical Understanding of Conversion

1. We must consistently share the gospel with them.

"I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes; first for the Jew, then for the Gentile."
Romans 1:16

"The gospel has an irreducible core of truth that can't be changed or eliminated. Jesus, who is God, humbled Himself, took on the nature of man, and led a sinless life. He was crucified on the cross unjustly by the hands of men and there received the wrath of God upon Himself for the sins of all who would believe. Jesus acted as our substitute, taking our punishment. Jesus is our Savior who, after taking the full fury of God for our sin, uttered the most wonderful words, "It is finished." Then, on the third day, Jesus rose again showing us His victory over death and sin. Jesus is Lord over all creation and we must submit our lives to his rule."¹¹

- We must shepherd our children toward an awareness of their need for a savior.
- We must help them to see there is no other way to be free from the grip of sin, and the wrath of God than by responding to the gospel in repentance and faith.
- We must help them to understand the cross.

⁹ J.C Ryle, The Duties of Parents (Conrad, MT: Triangle Press, 1994) 8.

¹⁰ Dabney, quoted in Wilson, page 11.

¹¹ Marty Machowski, Leading Children Towards Gospel Repentance and Faith, (Glen Mills, PA: Covenant Fellowship Church, 2007) 5.

2. What are repentance and faith, and how do they work together?

"I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus."

Acts 20:21

- *Repentance* involves sorrow for sin, changing one's mind about sin and turning from sin. Sorrow for sin, and a desire to flee it.
- *Faith* is trusting in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus alone for salvation from sin. True biblical faith includes understanding, approving and a wholehearted trust. (Getting into the wheelbarrow).
- *Conversion* is a single action of turning from sin in repentance and turning to Christ in faith.

"When we invite children to respond to the gospel we need to challenge them to repent and believe. As we evaluate their response we should look for both faith and repentance. This can take time and give us pause before we quickly interpret their response to the call of the gospel as genuine conversion."¹²

3. When and how do we talk to our children about repentance and faith?

"When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man..."

1 Cor. 13:11

"Children's talking, thinking and reasoning are, by definition, immature. They are often inconsistent. Their thinking can be arbitrary, simple and naïve. These qualities of children and youth are not in themselves wrong—they are the result of the fact that human beings do not spring from the womb fully formed in body or mind. Even Jesus had to grow in wisdom and stature."¹³

"You must tell your children over and over that satisfaction and contentment are impossible apart from a right relationship with God. Satan wants people to think he can offer more pleasure than God can. That's a lie. The world's pleasures don't deliver what they promise, and what enjoyment they do bring doesn't last. A Christian, however can find contentment and satisfaction in any situation; and only a Christian can fully enjoy the day to day pleasures God gives, because he doesn't depend on them for happiness. He can take or leave them because he finds his joy in God."¹⁴

¹² Ibid., Machowski, page 8.

¹³ Robin Boisvert, "Water Baptism and Your Child", Covenant Life Church Seminar, April 1998.

¹⁴ John A. Younts, *Everyday Talk* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2004) 108.

- Variety of ages
- Look for an awareness of sin and dislike for sin
- Look for an awareness of God
- Ask God for wisdom
- Look for fruit
- Don't be surprised if you have to help them apply the gospel as a saved sinner

4. What is evidence of genuine faith and repentance?

“Conversion always results in a changed life. All Christians bear the fruit which comes from repentance. Jesus said, ‘You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide.’ (John 15:16) Scripture is clear; conversion always results in a changed life. If there is no observable fruit in a child’s life, it is best to assume there has been no conversion.”¹⁵

“Our change, or sanctification, is gradual and may be small at first. The Scripture uses the analogy of fruit on a tree. At first only the flower is observable. But in a few weeks the tiny fruit begins to form. Trees that only flowered but did not produce fruit can be distinguished from those on which fruit are present. Children are quick to speak an allegiance to Christ (like the flower) but it is only when God regenerates their hearts that they bear lasting fruit.”¹⁶

- Love for God and his ways
- Love of others
- Fear of God

IV. Shepherding Toward Conviction

A. Your Child’s Heart

1. What is the heart?

“For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.”

Luke 6:43-45

2. Behavior is rooted in the heart

¹⁵ Marty Machowski, Leading Children Towards Gospel Repentance and Faith, (Glen Mills, PA: Covenant Fellowship Church, 2007) 9.

¹⁶ Ibid., Machowski, Page 9.

a. The “I wantsies”

What our children say and do flows from the heart.

Circumstance → Response

“I hit him because he took my toy!”

“I screamed at her because she screamed at me.”

Circumstances → Child → Response

Circumstances → Heart of Child → Different Responses

Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.
Proverbs 4:23

“If my heart is the source of my sin problem, then lasting change must always travel through the pathway of my heart. It is not enough to alter my behavior or to change my circumstances. Christ transforms people by radically changing their hearts. If the heart doesn’t change, the person’s words and behavior may change temporarily because of an external pressure or incentive. But when the pressure or incentive is removed, the changes will disappear.”¹⁷

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

1 Cor. 10:13

b. The importance of shaping influences

“Shaping influences are those events and circumstances in a child’s developmental years that prove to be catalysts for making him the person he is. But the shaping is not automatic; the ways he responds to these events and circumstances determine the effect they have upon him.”¹⁸

- Structure of family life
- Family Values
- Family Roles
- Family conflict resolution
- Friends (including media and music)
- Education
- Church
- Other life experience

3. Correction should always engage with the heart

¹⁷ Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemers Hands* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002) 62.

¹⁸ Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child’s Heart* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 1995) 26.

“All behavior is linked to some attitude of heart. Therefore, discipline must address attitudes of heart. This understanding does marvelous things for discipline. It makes the heart the issue, not just the behavior. It focuses correction on deeper things than changed behavior. The point of confrontation is what is occurring in the heart. Your concern is to unmask your child’s sin, helping him to understand how it reflects a heart that has strayed. That leads to the Cross of Christ. It underscores the need for a Savior. It provides opportunities to show the glories of God who sent His Son to change hearts and free people enslaved by sin.”¹⁹

4. Avoid the Good Kid Syndrome – outward change to impress others or ourselves

Our objective when we teach our children is not simply to ensure...that our children are not criminals, or that they “do well”. Rather, our desire is that they should love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul and mind. Therefore, formative instruction must be rooted in Scripture, not in what Dr. Phil and Dr. Laura advise, or what Parents magazine recommends or even what the pediatrician tells us to do.”²⁰

5. An illustration of shepherding the heart with the gospel:

a. Discipline and instruction:

1. Discipline involves enforcing painful consequences to remind your children that there are consequences for disobeying God.
2. Spanking should reduce in frequency as you move toward puberty.
3. Disciplinary consequences can vary from child to child.

b. An outburst:

- Your seven year old and your five year old run to the car and begin to fight over the middle seat next to the baby.
- You are exhausted.
- They begin to fight.
- You stop the fight, get them in their seats, and go to pick up your pastor/pastors wife.

c. What you are tempted to say:

- How many times have I told you not to fight?
- I have told you a thousand times not to fight!
- Your dad is going to hear about this when he gets home!

¹⁹ Ibid., Tripp, page 22.

²⁰ Ibid., Tripp, page 19.

- I don't know what to say to you, you don't seem to ever get it

d. Getting started – Remember:

- To get your heart right.
- Remember the desire to get to the heart.
- Remember God is faithful.
- Remind them of former instruction: Did we speak about this beforehand? What did daddy/mommy say to you?
- Help them to understand what they did wrong: What did you do? Why is that wrong?
- Move from the what to the why: Why did you do what you did? What was it you were wanting? Was that a good desire? What made it wrong?
- Did you want that more than you wanted to love God and obey daddy/mommy? How do you know?
- Why is that sin? Why does the Bible call that sin? Did you disobey mommy/daddy and God too?
- Appropriate discipline and further instruction.
- Repeat the above 1,000,000 times.

6. Every opportunity for shepherding is a gospel opportunity. The gospel addresses the heart.

7. The gospel helps them to cultivate conviction

- Your sin is against God, so confess your sin to God.
- Ask Him to help you to see your sin clearly and to help you feel godly sorrow.
- Express faith in Jesus' death on the cross for your sin, and receive His forgiveness and mercy.
- Thank Him for His forgiveness, help and love.
- Ask Him, by His Spirit, to help you change, to see and employ "the way of escape" the next time you are tempted.

8. Help them to apply the gospel

9. Evidences of the gospel's saving work

- Growing suspicion of self
- Less frequent outbursts
- More concerned about being godly than appearing godly
- Praying for and pursuing godliness
- Confessing sin you are unaware of
- Affection and respect toward you

B. Shepherd Your Children

“Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother (this is the first commandment with a promise), that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” Ephesians 6:1-3

1. You must be taking initiative in addressing sin at the heart level if your child is going to be led to conviction.
2. Shepherd in the home.
3. Shepherd in the community.
4. If you are married to a Christian, it is God’s will for you to shepherd together, with the husband’s initiative.
5. Do you have a gospel motivated, faith filled plan?

Shepherding Your Child's Heart Questions

1. What challenge in parenting do you find the most difficult?
2. What does Kenneth mean when he says, "Our goal is not behavior alone?" Why are heart issues so important to God? Can you demonstrate any scriptural support for the fact that God is concerned with the heart first? How does requiring obedience and shepherding a child's heart work together?
3. What is the difference between correcting behavior and shepherding a child's heart? Where have you been most effective in helping your children to see heart issues? How can you encourage godliness while you attend to heart issues?
4. Do you find processing situations at a heart level, as Kenneth did in his illustration, to be difficult? What is most challenging for you in helping your children address their heart?
5. In what ways have you sought to create a family culture of dealing with heart issues? How would you like to work on this? Are you confident that each of your children is converted? What is your confidence based on?
6. Ask your spouse these questions:
 - Am I consistently addressing heart issues in the discipline process?
 - If you were to evaluate my goals for discipline based on my words, what would you say is my biggest priority during correction?
7. How can we bring the gospel into our correction process more consistently?
8. Use the questions below to help you evaluate your child's spiritual health. Where would you have concerns? Are you taking initiative to explore these questions with your children? In what areas is God calling you to grow as a parent?
 - Judging by their use of time, the topics of their conversations, and the interests they passionately pursue, what are the things your children value most highly?
 - Who are their friends? Who is influencing them?
 - What are they talking about and doing with their friends? Why do they enjoy relating to them? How do they resolve conflicts with their friends?
 - What are they wanting from relationships? What are they concerned about?
 - How do they respond to authority? How do they receive correction from other adults?
 - Do they speak about God, his Word, and his ways?
 - Do they ask questions about the Sunday message?
 - Are they expressive in worship?
 - Are they looking for ways to serve others?
 - Do they pray?

Suggested Reading List

1. "Get Into the Story: A New Testament Family Devotional" by Marty Machowski
2. *Instructing a Child's Heart* by Tedd and Margy Tripp
3. *Shepherding a Child's Heart* by Tedd Tripp
4. *Everyday Talk: Talking Freely and Naturally about God with Your Children* by John Younts
5. *The Heart of Anger* by Lou Priolo
6. *Big Truths for Young Hearts* by Bruce Ware
7. "Leading Your Children Towards Gospel Repentance and Faith" booklet by Marty Machowski