

The Goals of Parenting (Part 1): Shepherding the Heart

PARENTING SIMPLIFIED: BIBLICAL COMMANDS AND FALSE GUILT

1. Briefly summarized, the Bible's instructions warn parents not to rule their children harshly, but to raise them tenderly with fairness, firmness, & fondness. Parents should:

- a. Instruct their children in the way of the Lord.

"Fathers, don't stir up anger in your children, but bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4; cf. Col. 3:21; Deut. 6; Prov. 1–9)

- b. Not exasperate them (be loving, patient, kind).

"Fathers, do not exasperate your children, so that they won't become discouraged" (Col. 3:21; cf. Eph. 6:4)

- c. Discipline them when they disobey.

"Don't withhold discipline from a youth; if you punish him with a rod, he will not die. 14 Punish him with a rod, and you will rescue his life from Sheol" (Prov. 23:13–14).

"Endure suffering as discipline: God is dealing with you as sons. For what son is there that a father does not discipline? 8 But if you are without discipline—which all receive—then you are illegitimate children and not sons" (Heb. 12:7–8).

- d. Provide for their material needs.

"But if anyone does not provide for his own family, especially for his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Tim. 5:8).

- e. Be thankful for them; welcome them; cherish them (don't view them as an obstacle).

"Sons are indeed a heritage from the Lord, offspring, a reward. 4 Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the sons born in one's youth. 5 Happy is the man who has filled his quiver with them" (Ps. 127:3–5).

Parenthood

Lesson 4

2. The brief biblical directives guide parents in an extended process with their child:

- a. *a process of nurturing a relationship—a close friendship—with their child,*
- b. *a process beginning with a tight leash of parental control, a leash that lengthens and slackens as the child learns to exercise personal responsibility,*
- c. *a process requiring the parents to seek God 's grace to help and strengthen them to bring up their child, as they seek God's grace to save their child,*
- d. *a process of training the child to walk in the way of the Lord that leads to life rather than the way of the world and of sin that leads to death,*
- e. *a process to form the character of the child, so that the child, following Christ, may be useful to others in the world and prepared for the world to come,*
- f. *a process of parents bringing them up, careful to avoid exasperating and provoking them to anger.*

PARENTING COMPLEXITIES: BIBLICAL COMMANDS AND WISDOM

It is crucial that we distinguish a biblical **command and obligation** that comes to us as parents from the Scriptures from the **application** of that command which requires wisdom in particular circumstances and which may be applied in different ways in different families. Two ditches to avoid:

1. **Falling into legalism and false guilt.**
2. **Assuming wisdom has nothing to offer us.**

THE PARENTING TASK: SHEPHERDING THE HEART

1. **We are not simply trying to control a child's behavior but are continually focused on the orientation of our child's heart toward God and others.**

"Guard your heart above all else, for it is the source of life" (Prov. 4:23).

"For from within, out of people's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immoralities, thefts, murders, 22 adulteries, greed, evil actions, deceit, self-indulgence, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. 23 All these evil things come from within and defile a person" (Mark 7:21–23).

"A good person produces good out of the good stored up in his heart. An evil person produces evil out of the evil stored up in his heart, for his mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart" (Luke 6:45).

Parenthood

Lesson 4

2. **We can appeal to sinful temptations or idols of their heart in order to achieve the behavior we want for our own convenience.**

- a. Bribery
- b. Emotionalism
- c. Punitive correction

SHAPING INFLUENCES AND HEART ORIENTATION

1. **We can't ultimately control the hearts of our children. We may be able to basically get our child to do what we want him or her to do. But we can't change his heart.**

"Start a youth out on his way; even when he grows old he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6).

"The one who corrects a mocker will bring abuse on himself; the one who rebukes the wicked will get hurt. 8 Don't rebuke a mocker, or he will hate you; rebuke the wise, and he will love you. 9 Instruct the wise, and he will be wiser still; teach the righteous, and he will learn more. 10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Prov. 9:7–10).

2. **We can make two opposite mistakes in interacting with shaping influences** (Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, 15):

- a. Determinism—Viewing shaping influences deterministically
- b. Denial—Viewing a child as unaffected by his early childhood experience

3. **We are dependent on the sovereign grace of God.**

"For he tells Moses, I will show mercy to whom I will show mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. 16 So then, it does not depend on human will or effort but on God who shows mercy" (Rom. 9:15–16).

PREPARATION FOR NEXT LESSON:

- Read "The Most Solemn Mandate" by R. C. Sproul at ligonier.org/learn/articles/most-solemn-mandate
- Read "God Saves Kids" by Tedd Tripp at ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/god-saves-kids