

“We have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.”

Parents need to control their child’s behavior. They must correct their behavior and give appropriate rewards and consequences. Parents are the God-ordained authority in their children’s lives. God commands us to discipline them for their own good and encourage positive behaviors. Proverbs 22:15 says, “*Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; The rod of discipline will remove it far from him.*” Future classes will cover how to discipline and correct with wisdom and mercy.

However, so much of our parenting aims at controlling behavior. Parents sometimes bribe or motivate their children with rewards – “I’ll give you ice cream if you play nice with your brother.” Parents threaten their children with penalties – “Every time you speak disrespectfully, I’m going to make you put a dollar in this jar.” Parents manipulate them with guilt — “It makes me so sad when you act this way after all I have done for you.” Sometimes parents exploit their fear of man or embarrassment – “That’s it! I will tell your teacher that you behave like this at home.” Or, parents force obedience – “say you’re sorry”; “share the toy.”

Paul David Tripp says this is like having an apple tree in your yard that only produces rotten apples. So, you “fix” the tree by buying new apples at the store and stapling them onto the branches. What is the problem with this approach? It doesn’t address the disease within the tree. The fruit is for show.

Jesus repeatedly rebukes the Pharisees for honoring God in their lips and showy behavior while rejecting him in their hearts. When we focus solely on outward behavior, we encourage our children to become Pharisees. In our sanctification, God is concerned with the heart, not only external behavior. Likewise, parents must be concerned not only with behavior but with their

“Power belongs to God, and that to you, O Lord, belongs steadfast love.” Psalm 62:11-12

child's heart—their motives, attitudes, worship, and desires. **We must expose the idols of their hearts and show them Christ.**

### 1<sup>st</sup>. **The Importance of the Heart.**

The Bibles speak of our “hearts” as our inner person, the real us. So, our behaviors are symptoms of a deeper disease. Our hearts direct our behavior. **Therefore, any ministry of change to our children must target the heart.**

Jesus said in Luke 6:43-45, *“For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, <sup>44</sup>for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart, his mouth speaks.”* There is an organic relationship between a tree's roots and its fruits. The fruit refers to our words and behavior, and the root refers to the heart. **Our words and behaviors come from the overflow of our hearts.**

God says in Ezekiel 14:5, *“I may lay hold of the hearts of the house of Israel, who are all estranged from me through their idols.”* Idols gripped the hearts of the rebellious people of Israel. An idol can be anything you are tempted to trust and obey more than God. When we sin, we exchange worship of the blessed God for the worship of a created thing. We sin because we love, trust, and serve something other than the Lord. **Tripp says, “Whatever rules the heart will exercise inescapable influence over the person's life and behavior.”** So, whenever we hear sinful words or see sinful behaviors from our children, we must evaluate and ask, **“What is ruling their hearts?”**

Jesus said in Matthew 6:26, “*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*” Everyone treasures something. A person’s treasure controls their heart, and, of course, the heart controls one’s behavior. Therefore, the heart is the primary target of all parenting. Proverbs 4:23 says, “*Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.*”

Our child’s misbehaviors are more than a mere inconvenience or nuisance. They are a map revealing their treasures. [Are you reading that map?](#)

## 2<sup>nd</sup>. [How Do We Get to the Heart?](#)

We must understand how children change (from the book, *The Gospel for Disordered Lives*). We cannot change the heart; only God can. [Parenting is not like following a mathematical formula.](#) However, you can be an agent of his redemptive mercy to your child. [God calls us to expose our child’s idols compassionately and present Christ to them consistently.](#)

**First, remember that circumstances and behaviors reveal heart issues.** When your child undergoes a trial, receives a blessing, has a conflict, or disobeys a command, they show you what rules their hearts. These situations reveal rotten fruits ([sinful attitudes, words, actions, and emotions](#)). [As a parent, your job is to discover the rotten roots \(sinful beliefs, motives, and false promises they believe\).](#) [God calls us not just to rebuke them but to engage them.](#) Engaging can be challenging, but it is critical to getting at the heart.

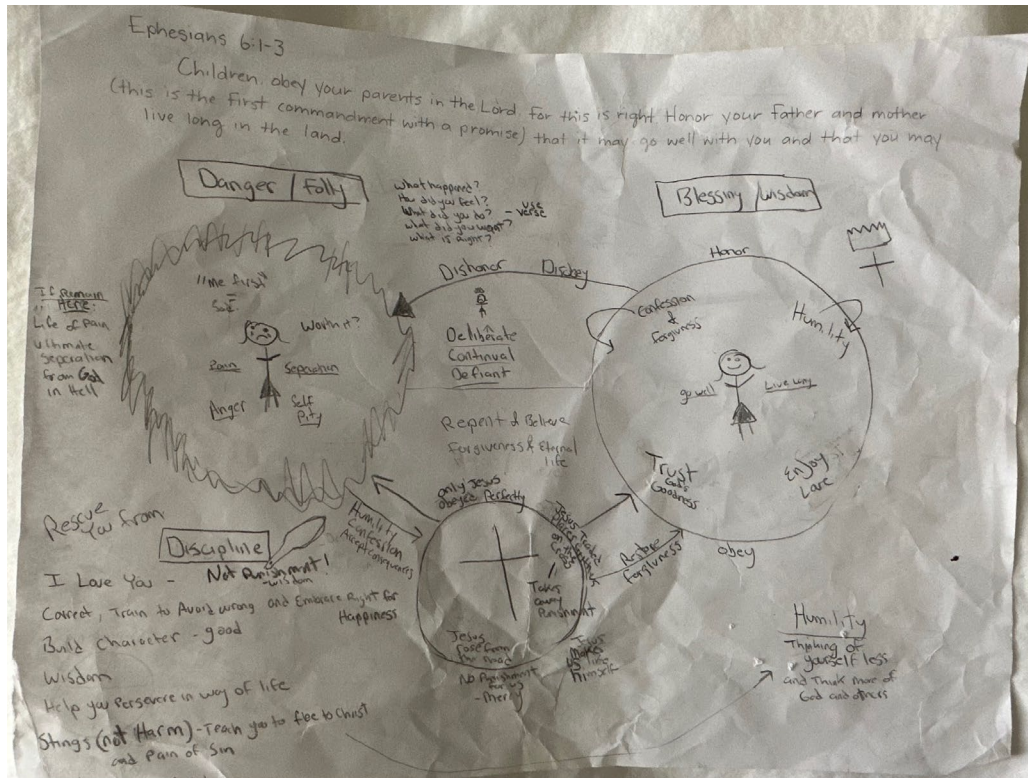
[Let’s say your older daughter hits their younger sister](#) (situation/behavior). Take them to a different room to avoid embarrassing the child and begins the discipline process, and remember, the parents must model the tone, words, and conduct you hope to see in them. **First, I**

**find it helpful to ask them, “What happened?”** She may reply, “sister took my toy when I said she couldn’t play with it.”

Many parents, including myself, immediately begin to challenge and correct their misbehavior. However, we must not be satisfied with an admission of behavior. **So secondly, we need to help them see the rotten root of the behavior. Another question proves invaluable to dealing with the real issue, “How did it make you feel when she did that?”** Why do you think a question like this will help the parent deal with their child’s heart? The parent must teach the child that their behavior is connected to their heart’s desires.

So, suppose the child responds, “It made me feel angry.” **Then thirdly, the parent asks, “What did you do when you felt anger?”** She says, “I hit her.” She loved her toy more than her sister (and God) and was willing to sin to have it. The parent must EXPOSE the false treasures of the heart and show them how the Scriptures describe their thoughts and actions.

**Fourth, we must now present the riches of Christ to them.** Jesus traded places with them and is the only one who perfectly obeyed God. Ultimately, we must look to him for forgiveness and help to obey God and honor your parents. We seek to motivate them by who God is and what God has done. They need more than behavior modification and penance before God. They need Jesus to give them new hearts.



**Fifth, we must remind them of the commands and promises to see good roots established (godly beliefs, motives, and past, present, and future promises). Use the Scriptures and Biblical stories to show them how to glorify God and walk in the truth of his promises.**

There is no other way to be happy than to trust and obey Jesus.

**Fifth and finally, we must give them practical instruction to see good fruit (godly attitudes, words, actions, and emotions). God calls them to trust and submit to their parent's authority and command parents, father in particular, to bring their child up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). Teach, command, instruct, and warn them (warnings that deal with the heart and are clear, logical consequences are not manipulative threats). We must still teach them to say "sorry," even when they are not sorry, because they must develop a framework**

of how to reconcile with others, sometimes meaning it comes later, and we want them to learn wisdom.

**Whether they receive this or not, they may learn to trust your authority.** Your authority is not contingent on the child's trust, but through these interactions, they come to believe they are safe and loved and that authority is good. Remember, God uses parents to expose and present: expose the dangerous folly and present the more glorious truth of Christ.

### 3<sup>rd</sup>. Common Questions.

**Lastly, I want to address some common questions.** First, should I expect obedience from the heart if my children aren't Christians? Yes, you must expect obedience to God's standard from the heart. But remember, God's law teaches us our need for grace and heart transformation. We rob our children of opportunities to see and experience God's mercy when we fail to uphold God's standards. Paul says in Romans 7:7, *What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."*

Furthermore, the law brings wisdom. Psalm 19:7 *The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.* It also restrains evil and guides the godly into good works.

**Do I do this every time they disobey?** Yes... and no. There may not be time; the behavioral issue may not require extensive discussion; perhaps the child understands the heart issue by now and doesn't need to walk through the whole thing again; or, sometimes, it is best to bring up the topic later. **But guard against falling into bad habits or laziness.**

[How can I stay encouraged?](#) You will probably get weary of getting to the heart sometimes, and this kind of engagement does not come naturally for many. However, your faithfulness, regardless of the results, glorifies God. It works for your child's ultimate good, and you will get more comfortable with faithful practice.