

Accepting Our Inability to Change Our Children's Hearts
Moms, Tots, and Beyond—Knox Church
January 11, 2017

"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me."

--Psalm 51:10

Our Responsibility to Our Children

- Serving as Christ's ambassadors in reconciliation (II Corinthians 5:20)
- Teaching them God's commands (Deuteronomy 6: 6-9)
- Training them in the way they should go (Proverbs 22:6)
- Bringing them up in the knowledge and discipline of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4)
- Spurring them (and other believers) on to love and good deeds (Hebrews 10:24)

Big Idea: "You have no power to change your child . . . Parenting is not about *exercising power for change* in your children. Parenting is about your humble faithfulness in being willing to *participate in God's work of change* for the sake of our children. God has given you *authority* for the work of change, but has not granted you the *power* to make that change happen. But we buy into the delusion of thinking again and again that the power is ours . . ." (Tripp 61).

Key Concepts

Definition of *heart* in the Bible: the inner self, the part that wills and desires

- Behavioral issues are matters of the heart. What humans really need is "heart change."
- Only God can change a person's heart. He doesn't lay that burden on us as parents because He knows we are incapable.
- As parents, we are freed to abandon our struggles for power (by inappropriately using fear, guilt, and even rewards) and instead serve as His instruments of change in the lives of our children.

Bible Passage for Study

Ezekiel 36:22-28 *New International Version (NIV)*

²² "Therefore say to the Israelites, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: It is not for your sake, people of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone. ²³ I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name you have profaned among them. Then the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Sovereign Lord, when I am proved holy through you before their eyes.

²⁴ “For I will take you out of the nations; I will gather you from all the countries and bring you back into your own land. ²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. ²⁶ I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. ²⁸ Then you will live in the land I gave your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God.”

Ezekiel 36: 26 *The Message*

“I’ll give you a new heart, put a new spirit in you. I’ll remove the stone heart from your body and replace it with a heart that’s God-willed, not self-willed.”

1) What is the difference between a “heart of stone” and a “heart of flesh”? Think creatively about these images. See Zechariah 7:8-12 and Jeremiah 24:7, if you like.

2) What does this Ezekiel passage tell us about God’s motivations for purifying us and giving us new hearts?

3) Think more about your inability to change your child’s heart. How does this reality sit with you? In what ways does this truth feel uncomfortable, challenging to accept, or even painful? In what ways does this truth bring you freedom and hope?

4) How do you sense that God may be speaking you today about your understanding of change in your child’s heart? Have you been too quick to accept behavioral change rather than heart change? How do your children’s dispositions play into this topic? Do you need to repent of parenting strategies that are power-seeking? What would it look like to parent with more freedom and trust in Him?

Prayer for Our Children

“Lord, please give _____ a new heart and put a new spirit in her. Remove her heart of stone and give her a heart of flesh. Cause _____ to follow your decrees and keep your laws. Let her know that she belongs to you, and that you are her God.”

--Ezekiel 36:26-28

Also Psalm 51 (“create in me a clean heart”), Ephesians 1:18 (“eyes of the heart opened”)