

“Formula-free parenting: greater freedom to be formed by Christ”

Remember, we are ambassadors of Christ, who himself was acting on the Father’s behalf. We do well to remember his character, study his heart, and follow his lead as we seek to parent our children as he would.

Understanding the heart –

From the moment we become mothers, understanding our child’s heart is a mystery:

- *Why are they crying?*
- *Why does she do that?*
- *What makes him say such a thing?*
- *What were they all thinking?*

Scripture tells us this is nothing new, and even that:

*“The heart is deceitful above all things
and beyond cure.
Who can understand it?” Jeremiah 17:9 ... BUT*

“...you (God) alone know every human heart...” Isaiah 8:39 ... AND

*“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all
without finding fault, and it will be given to you.” James 1:5*

Given these truths together, we can be assured that we are not only encouraged to know our children’s hearts, but that by the grace of God, we are equipped to know them through the work of God. He is the giver of wisdom and we can seek him in our moments of confusion.

**An illustration from the world of fashion. ☺

*How do you envision the pattern of your own heart? The heart of your child? Where do you tend to simplify things or brush past the background present?

How often do we long for a clear formula in our parenting?

*If “X” sin pattern arises, then say/do “Y” to bring about confession “Z.”
If the result is not confession “Z”, pursue disciplinary action “D” until “Z” is produced.*

Multiple variables in our hearts and the hearts of our children make that difficult. How do we see God parenting his children in scripture?

1. Zechariah and Mary – how do they respond to surprising news? – (Luke 1: 5-38)
2. Peter and his streak of defiance. (Matt. 16: 21-26 ; John 13:1-17 ; Acts 10: 9-16)
3. Jesus’ faithful care toward Peter in the midst of his failures and sinfulness.
(Luke 22: 31-34 ; Matt. 14: 25-31 ; 26: 36-41 ; John 18: 2-11 ; 21: 15-17)

Groups 1 & 2:

1. Briefly, what is the background of each situation?
2. What similarities/differences do you see in the human action/words presented in the the passages?
3. What is the response from God (Jesus) in each case? Are all responses equivalent? Why/why not?
4. How can we learn from God/Jesus' response to the hearts of his people?
5. Can you think of other biblical examples where similar situations play out?

Group 3:

1. What types of sin patterns/behaviors are being revealed in Peter's heart?
2. How does Jesus respond to Peter's actions and the condition of his heart?
3. What similarities/differences do you see in God/Jesus' response to Peter's heart?
4. How can we learn from God/Jesus' response to the hearts of his people?

All: How do these Biblical examples discourage formulaic parenting of our children?

The "Heart Chart" as a tool for knowing what is going on beneath the surface and pursuing gospel parenting.

*A careful exploration and understanding of our children's hearts, their sin patterns, and the background of their hearts (both in the immediate situation and historical background) is important as we move forward to thinking through the role of godly discipline in response to sin.

Questions/activities for reflection:

1. How have you noticed yourself relying on a formulaic mode of parenting? What actions could you take this week to consider the heart (yours and your child's) more carefully before acting?
2. James 1:5 says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God..." How often are you bringing your children before the Lord, asking him for understanding into their hearts and needs?
3. Take some time this week to identify a sin pattern in your child's heart (or your own!), and work through the heart chart to try to dig deeper. What typical parental responses to sin do you notice most at play in your own heart?
4. How can you work toward gospel centered communication in your home this week?
5. As we prepare to study how God disciplines us as his children next week, ask God to be at work in your heart, strengthening you to serve as his ambassador in the hard work of loving discipline.

*Prov. 20:5 "The purposes of a man's heart are deep waters, but a man of understanding draws them out."
I Thessalonians 5:14 "Warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone."*

"The Heart Chart"

A Child's Heart:

Bad Behavior	Peter at the Last Supper: Telling Jesus "No" to washing his feet (John 13:8)	Child grabbing for the "best" position or thing		
Overflow of the Heart: Luke 6:45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resistance for noble reasons? • Confidence in own knowledge • Desire for control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insecurity, fear • Thinking only of self • Competition 		
God's Truth: What Scripture teaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obedience is better than sacrifice (I Sam. 15:22) • His ways are higher than ours (Isaiah 55:9) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loved! (Jer. 31:3) • 1st last/last 1st (Mark 9:35) • "How much more..." (Luke 11:13) 		
A Heart Full of Gospel Grace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to take even hard truth/instruction with grace. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to rest in other's authority • No need to control outcomes 		
Parents' typical response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What? How dare you question me! • Do you have any idea who I am/ what I can do? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who had it last time? • Who cares? • If you let him have it, I'll give you this instead. 		
Deep listening -- Drawing out the deeper waters: Proverbs 20:5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pause long enough to understand the situation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can tell this is really important to you. Can you help me understand why? • What is it you are most wanting? How does X fit into that? 		
Rich, full communication: Teaching, instruction, entreaty, encouragement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quiet patience toward Peter -- "If I don't... you'll have no part..." • Gently identifies disobedience • Peter's heart is changed! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeing that the toy is really important to X too, how can you respond in love? • You have lots of other good toys here. Let's find one you'd like to play with now. 		