“Shepherding a Child’s Heart” by Tedd Tripp

“Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.” Proverbs 4:23

This is the basis of this great book on parenting, which also helps you examine and work on your own heart. It teaches you how communication and discipline work together when parents love and guide (shepherd) wisely. Mr. Tripp states that if you only focus on behavior, you miss the heart. Straying behavior displays a straying heart. “Our kids are always serving something, either God or a substitute for God – an idol of the heart.” If the problem is the overflow of the heart, then the need for grace and Jesus is established. If we miss the heart, then we miss the glory of God. “One of the most important callings God has given parents is to display the greatness, goodness, and glory of the God for whom they are made.” Mr. Tripp’s prayer for us is expressed in King David’s Psalm 78, “that not only would you teach and model these truths for your children, but that even generations unborn would arise and teach them to their children, so they might put their hope in God.”

Introduction – Parents exercise their authority as God’s agents to direct their child on God’s behalf for their good, being true servants/authorities that lay down our lives – to empower our children to be self-controlled people living freely under the authority of God. “The central focus of parenting is the gospel, and our children need to understand not only “what” they did wrong but also the internal “why” they did it.” We can help our children see that God works from the inside out, and help them understand why they sin and how to recognize internal change.

Getting to the Heart of the Behavior – “The behavior a person exhibits is an expression of the overflow of his heart – the basic issue is always what is going on in the heart. A change in behavior that does not stem from a change in heart is not commendable. We must require proper behavior and help our children ask the questions that will expose the attitude of heart that has resulted in wrong behavior (for example, children fighting over a toy are both exhibiting a hardness of heart toward each other and selfishness). Unmasking your child’s sin/improper behavior, helps him understand his straying heart - leading to the cross and his/her need for forgiveness and our Savior.

Your Child’s Development: Shaping Influences – Shaping influences are the events and circumstances in a child’s developmental years that are catalysts for making him the person he is (structure of family life, family values, family roles, family response to failure, family history, family conflict resolution). Then the person he becomes is a product of his life experience and how he interacts with that experience.

Your Child’s Development: Godward Orientation – “Whatever the shaping influences of life, it is the child’s Godward orientation that determines his response to those shaping influences. The child is either worshiping and serving and growing in the understanding of the implications of who God is, or he is seeking to make sense of life without a relationship to God and worshiping idols.”

You’re in Charge – “Teach your children that God loves them so much that He gave them parents to be kind authorities to teach and lead them. It is God who is not being obeyed or honored when we as parents are disobeyed/not honored. We must insist that our children obey God, because obeying God is good and right.” We require obedience because God says we must. God has given us a duty to perform, so endorsement of our children is not necessary. Discipline is an expression of love – and are issues of character development and honoring God. We are God’s agent to show the need for God’s grace and forgiveness, and look to God for strength and wisdom in this task.

Mr Tripp recalls many conversations that went like this
Father: You didn’t obey Daddy, did you?
Child: No.
Father: Do you remember what God says Daddy must do if you disobey?
Examining Your Goals – Our goal is to lead our child to God (and not to his own resources) and to obey and perform for God’s approval (not for approval from the parent or others) – to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. If you teach your child to use their abilities and talents to make their lives better without reference to God, we will turn him away from God.

Reworking Your Goals – “It is our task to faithfully teach our children the ways of God. It is the Holy Spirit’s task to work through the word of God to change their hearts.” Mr. Tripp states that reading the Proverbs (book of wisdom and encouragement) daily is of great benefit to children and adults. His practice was to read 1/3 of a chapter of Proverbs before school each day (and he would often act out passages in the Old Testament when his children were little). Encourage your children to see and help/minister in the needs of those around them and seek to make peace (Romans 12:17-21 teaches us that the only weapon strong enough to overcome evil is good, and to leave vengeance to God).

Discarding Unbiblical Methods – “I didn’t turn out so bad” (just repeating your parent’s good and bad parenting), pop psychology (motivating for money or things, contracts with parents), behavior modification (heart is trained to greedy self-interest and obtaining rewards), emotionalism (shaming, fear of being left alone or isolated – child may develop lifelong desire to please parents or rebellious), punitive correction (hitting, yelling, grounding – to keep child under control through the negative experience of punishment and does not require ongoing interaction or discussion), erratic eclecticism (no consistency and just skips around to different methods of parenting). For example, it is not productive long term to respond to siblings yelling by yelling at them to stop yelling. Rather you need to address the heart issues of anger and bitterness in their hearts. When “experts” tell you that you must find what works with each child, they are saying you must find the idols of the heart that will move each child – we do not want to drive our children to idols, but to the gospel message and Christ! The gospel speaks to people as broken, fallen sinners who are in need of a new heart. God has given us his Son to make us new creatures - gives us open-heart surgery to produce change from the inside out, not a face lift.

Embracing Biblical Methods: Communication – Rich full communication takes time and is a dialogue focused on understanding, not a monologue. Communication is the expression of ideas with words, and we must be good listeners first to be able to draw out our children’s ideas and help them understand themselves, the world, and who God intends them to be. So if/when there is bad behavior, we can draw out the heart and lead them to Christ’s grace and redemption (for example in seeking to draw out the internal conflict of hitting a sibling – ask what were they thinking? What feeling? How did hitting make it better or worse? What else could they have done? How did it trust in or not trust in God?).

Embracing Biblical Methods: The Many Types of Communication – Encouragement (find courage, hope, and inspiration from God), Correction (insight into what was done wrong and what may be done to correct the problem), Rebuke (censures behavior), Entreaty (earnest pleading for his child to act in wisdom and faith), Instruction (providing a lesson to understand their world and the ways of God), Warning (alerts us to danger while there is still time to escape unharmed), Teaching (actively imparting knowledge), Prayer (hearing our children praying and us praying communicates our faith in God to our children)
Embracing Biblical Methods: A Life of Communication – “The wise parent talks when the kids are ready to talk, and is first a good listener. Insightful and penetrating conversations take time, and you must regard parenting as one of your most important tasks while you have children at home. Admit when you are wrong/have sinned/weaknesses, and be prepared to seek forgiveness for sinning against your children. Acknowledge your joys and fears and how you find comfort in God. Live a life of repentance and thankfulness.”

Embracing Biblical Methods: The Rod – Proverbs 22:15 “Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him.” The fool is one who will not submit to authority or God, but is driven by his wants and passions. Proverbs 23:14 “Punish a child with the rod (spanking) and save his soul from death.” The rod = spanking is to be done by parents, an act of faith in God’s wisdom, an act of faithfulness toward a child, is a responsibility by parents obeying God, is a careful and controlled use of physical punishment, and is a rescue mission (failure to obey Mom or Dad is a failure to obey God and to persist in this disobedience to God places the child at great risk). Hebrews 12:11 “No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.” The rod (spanking) returns the child to a place of blessing. Parents need both the communication and the rod methods given by God to work together for childrearing.

Embracing Biblical Methods: Appeal to the Conscience – “Your child has a God-given conscience which is our ally in discipline and correction. The child’s conscience must be instructed with the truth of God and His ways. The central focus of childrearing is to bring children to a sober assessment of themselves as sinners and understand the mercy of God, who offered Christ as a sacrifice for sinners. You accomplish this by addressing the heart as the fountain of behavior, and the conscience as the God-given judge of right and wrong. Jesus’ redemptive work entails forgiveness, internal transformation, and empowerment to live new lives.”

Infancy to Childhood: Training Objectives – A child must learn that he is an individual under authority. He has been made by and for God and has responsibility to honor and obey God in all things. Ephesians 6:1 “Honor your father and mother that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.” Children must be taught that they can stay within God’s circle of blessing and safety by honoring and obeying and submitting to their parents, and the function of communication and the rod is to rescue them from their disobedience back into God’s blessing. Obedience is willing submission of one person to the authority of another (and often means doing something that we do not want to do). A child must be taught to do what he is told – without challenge, without excuse, and without delay. You can teach them to make an appeal, but only when they – begin to obey immediately (not after an appeal), be prepared to obey either way, appeal in a respectful manner, and accept the result of the appeal with a gracious spirit. Knowing our native resistance to authority (selfishness) and inability to always do what God has commanded, we are confronted with our need for the grace and power of Jesus Christ. Training our children to do what they ought, regardless of how they feel, prepares them to be a person who lives by principle rather than mood or impulse. Genuine submission to Godly authority bears good fruit.

Infancy to Childhood: Training Procedures – Consistency is mandated if our children are to learn that God requires obedience (we cannot become lax). “The ‘when’ of spanking is so simple that parents miss it. If your child has not obeyed, he needs to be spanked. If he has failed to respond to your direction, he has moved out of the circle of safety. If you accept challenge, delay, or excuses, you are not training in submission. You are, rather, training your children how to manipulate authorities and live on the ragged edge of disobedience. Your children must understand that when you speak for the first time, you have spoken for the last time.”

The How of Spanking – take your child to a private place, tell him specifically what he has done wrong, get him to acknowledge what he has done wrong, remind him of the function of spanking (to restore him to God’s blessing), tell him how many swats he will receive, remove his pants so the spanking is not lost in the padding of his pants, after you have spanked him take him up onto your lap and hug him (and tell him how
much you love him, it grieves you to spank him, and you hope it will not be necessary again = restoration and no carryover), pray with him (Christ’s forgiveness, and Christ can empower and enable him to obey in the future)

**The Why of Spanking** – Discipline addresses the heart, which is the battleground. The spanking comes only because it is God’s method of driving foolishness far from your child’s heart. Read the book to find out the answers to – what is a spanking issue? When is my child old enough? When is my child an I use time-out instead of spanking? (Mr. Tripp states we do not have the right to substitute what God has commanded with the popular ideas of culture.) What if my child says he did not hear me? Will I be spanking all the time? What if I am too mad? What if we are not at home? What if I know my child is lying? What if I am not sure what happened? What if it is too late?

**Childhood: Training Objectives (ages 5-12)** – The big issue during these middle years is developing Godly character. You want your child to learn dependability, honesty, kindness, consideration, helpfulness, diligence, loyalty, humility, self-control, moral purity, thankfulness, and a host of other character qualities. You need to review and help your child and his relationship with God, with himself, and with others. “The alternative to addressing character issues in your children is to structure things around rules. You produce children who learn to keep rules, and become smug and self-righteous. They become modern Pharisees whose cup are washed and clean on the outside, but are filthy on the inside.”

**Childhood: Training Procedures** – addressing the heart (the when, what, and why), appealing to the conscience (what is right and get to the root issues and sinfulness), developing character (living consistently with who God is and who I am – if you don’t call him to be what God has called him to be, you end up giving him a standard of performance that is within the realm of his native abilities apart from grace and then you reduce his need for God), interpreting behavior in character terms (daily proverb reading helps with this), and a long range life-time vision

**Teenagers: Training Objectives** – The teen years are years of monumental insecurity and often years of rebellion. While his need for direction has never been greater, the teen will resist overt attempts to corral him. Proverbs 1 provides us with the three foundations for life we need to teach and model for our children – fear of the Lord (rather than the fear of man – true freedom is found in a holy indifference to the opinion of others/peer pressure and instead being God-centered), adherence to parental instruction (as trusted guides and people of integrity who are living daily life in the rich truth of the word of God, and family worship addressing the interests and need of the teens), and dissociation from the wicked (the most powerful way to keep your children from being attracted by the offers of camaraderie from the wicked is to make home an attractive place to be)

**Teenagers: Training Procedures** – Internalization of the gospel (the process of your children embracing the things of God as their own living faith and developing autonomous identities as persons under God – requires the work of the Holy Spirit in your child), Shepherding the Internalization of the Gospel (appealing to the conscience, focusing on character issues in correction and discipline, addressing the heart as the spring of life, and refusing to give them a keepable standard that would eliminate their need for Christ), Developing a Shepherding Relationship With Teens (authority vs. influence, shepherding through doubt, positive interaction, developing an adult relationship, waiting for the right time, deal with broad themes, allowing room for disagreement, beyond internalization, entrusting your children to God)