

“Hearken unto thy father that begat thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old. Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding. The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice: and he that begetteth a wise child shall have joy of him. Thy father and thy mother shall be glad, and she that bare thee shall rejoice. My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways.” (Pr 23:22-26)

As we’ll discover in our study tonight, many of the foundational principles for reaching our children’s hearts are found in Proverbs.

But it’s the New Testament that lays the platform for fathers and children to have hearts that can beat together. Consider this prophecy from the Old about the New.

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.” (Mal 4:5-6)

What was the platform that John the Baptist began and Jesus completed that turned fathers to children and vice versa?

The foundation is personal sanctification and holiness based upon individuals taking responsibility for their sins and looking to the Lamb of God for salvation. With this cleansing experience individuals can serve their Creator in the Kingdom of Heaven.

John then explains to us what this does to relationships. *“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” (1John 1:7)*

In Jesus Christ barriers of selfishness and pride are broken down. Parents have their eyes open to identify their carnality and find deliverance to be set free. They can say sorry when they have acted in a selfish way. They learn to express love to their children because Jesus sets them free!

It is true, not everyone has spiritual parents and a wholesome upbringing. But every true child of God will find in his relationship with God a well spring resource for relationships, “the grace of life.” (1Peter 3:7)

In this study we want to move through the seasons of a child’s life. Any wise parent will know that while reaching the child’s heart is important, it cannot be done by catering to the child’s lower nature.

As David Sweigart wrote in an article for the Pilgrim Witness with a similar title as this study, “While it is important to win the heart of your child, it does not stand alone. In other words, if you make winning your child’s heart a priority over establishing Scriptural patterns you will experience failure.”

What we mean by this is we cannot just give the child everything he wants and expect to have his heart in the end. A child who is spoiled by excessive catering ends up no different than a child who is neglected – left to himself.

So what we’d like to explore here is the balance of love and discipline in reaching your child’s heart. Having a heart of genuine love and care will express itself differently depending upon the season of development the child is in.

One of the key focus points in this study is when the evil nature of the child begins to emerge during toddler hood. Even before a child can walk he will learn to express his selfish nature. These are described as being:

- **Narcissism** - I am the center of the universe; everyone exists to serve me.
- **Entitlement** - If I want it, I deserve to have it.
- **Pragmatism** - Because I am entitled to it, rules do not apply to me, I have the right to get what I want.
- **Anarchy** - No authority has the right to stop me.
- **Irresponsibility** - It’s not my fault. I can’t help it.
- **Instant gratification** - I deserve the pleasure I want now.

The fact is, no matter how much a parent tries to reach his child’s heart, unless he first deals with these fatal qualities, his efforts at reaching his child’s heart will fail.

After a child is taught to hearken and has given his heart to his parents, the parents will want to pay attention that the child does not withdraw it again. When a child closes up his heart, it is a signal that something is amiss.

Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying.” (Pr 19:18) The word “hope” here literally means “a cord, a connection.” We all know life will lead the child into adulthood soon enough. Make sure you do not lose his heart though your sin or your oblivion to his journey.

Throughout the journey, we need the direction and aid of the Holy Spirit. We will remember, our children belong to God. He wants them to turn out right. If we keep His Word central in our experience, He will guide us.

~ H. Stephen Ebersole

Reaching the Hearts of our Children

Our conversation began as we discussed our weekend plans. Eldon told me of his plans for traveling to the neighboring county for the weekend. Then he wondered what I would be doing.

I shared that I was preparing to speak on the assignment we are looking at tonight, *Reaching the Hearts of our Children*.

“Say Eldon,” I asked, “Did your dad have your heart as you were growing up?”

His answer sounded like a retort, “Huh! How could he when all he could think about was making money?”

As a young father now busy with his own children, Eldon went on to discuss how in the early years of parenting what is most important often doesn’t seem like it is important at all; and things that don’t really matter in the long run are often too important!

“But aren’t you glad your dad will have several million dollars to leave to you all because of his hard work and wise investments when he dies?” I asked, knowing I was treading on thin ice.

Eldon looked at me with hurt in his eyes. “I’m making it,” he said. “But it’s a journey of forgiveness. I think I’m making progress, and then the hurt of growing up knowing we didn’t mean anything to dad hits me all over again.”

I suddenly thought of something that I had learned about Eldon the week before that had blessed me.

“Well one thing it did was give you a special heart for hurting people” I told him. “I was really impressed when I found out you have Louis over for supper fairly often.”

“Well you know since Louis’ wife won’t live with him he has no one to care for him! We just want to show him we care, that we have the love in our hearts for him.” Eldon brightened.

“And that’s how we find our way,” I encouraged, “Not by wallowing in our hurts, but by finding someone to encourage.”

In the Old Testament there are many Bible illustrations of fathers who succeeded. Sadly there are also many who failed. For our consideration here, we’ll limit ourselves to one passage.

Season	Discipline	Love
Infant (External Controls)	Very little active discipline needed at this stage of life. After a number of months of development, you will find it restful to train him to fall asleep without rocking him. This may be done by placing him in his own bed with all his needs met and letting him cry himself to sleep. As the infant begins to express his will by throwing himself around, you will hold him still. Also help him sit still in family worship time.	Your life will revolve around your new-born child, with unselfish service in feedings and keeping him warm and dry. You will show your love by making eye-contact, talking and cooing to him, seeking to bring a response of pleasure from him. These sacrifices may test the maturity of young parents. Having been used to seeking their own pleasure and gratification, they may resent and put off having children. However, the Creator's design in sending children at this stage of life is easily seen as good for young parents.
Toddler	As a toddler's personhood emerges, the fact that he is created in the image of God albeit with a very fallen human nature becomes very clear. Every child has traits of selfishness that make him a potential criminal. The most benevolent thing a parent can do for his child is train him to hearken to wisdom outside his own thinking. Unless the child is freed from his own selfish impulses and motives, he likely will live in bondage to his selfish nature throughout his lifetime. At an early age, the toddler should be given simple assignments and made to carry them through.	Even though a child is given corporal punishment, he should sense his parent's love for him as a person. For example, a spanking must "get through" to the child, so he is freed from himself and can look his parent in the eye with a clear look. When this has happened the parent knows he has shaped the child's will. Then he should scoop the child up into his arms and cuddle away the pain of the punishment. (That needs to come from the one who did the correcting.) The child will often cuddle up to the parent later, a reward for loving discipline. Correction should avoid mealtimes and public settings. The demands of frequent discipline may seem unending.
Scholar	The scholar has begun to develop his conscience but he will have events when his conscience only speaks to him after he has done wrong. Then he struggles, wanting to hide his deed but fearing that he will be found out. An observant parent will sense when something is wrong. Perhaps the child has the Cain expression of a "fallen countenance." The parent will need to dig to the bottom of the problem. After the child makes confession the parent will need to mete out an appropriate discipline. Spanking is still the preferred method in the younger school grades, as it sets the child free. The child will respond by having peace written all over his face!	A wise parent will take time to hear his scholar out. The child's world is expanding and now peers mean very much to him. But he still wants to talk about his happy moments, or his fears. By putting these feelings into words he can sort them out. They will not need to control him. A wise parent will not belittle a child when he opens his heart to him but be careful to hear him out. Touch is still an important part of this stage. Being hugged communicates to the child that he is loved. This is also an important stage to help a child understand what are appropriate zones where he may be touched, and where others (and to a degree himself) have no rights to see or touch. The child should understand that he is free to come with any questions at any time.
Adolescence	A parent needs to make sure his teenager receives his self worth by practicing self-discipline. This includes personal hygiene, regular chores, completing assignments, rising without being called, being punctual for appointments etc. Socially, the adolescent will become aware of the opposite gender, often being intrigued but hiding this interest behind a mask of disinterest. Boys especially (but girls too) need to learn to be open with their journey with personal purity (and romance). Illicit pleasures defile the conscience and may spoil the joy of becoming a Christian.	An adolescent begins to lose his ignorance and needs to awaken to the call of God in his life. Having been taught to pray at an early age, he now senses he is accountable to his Creator, and needs to receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of his life. The teen becomes increasingly peer conscious. Does he feel accepted? Is he finding his place among his peers, not having to be the center, but at peace to just have friends. These are a few of the subjects you will want to explore with him. They communicate that you really care. Since personalities are very different, some will find it easy to share while others may not even be aware they are struggling with these issues.
Youth	It is during this stage you will begin to sense if you have laid the foundation of your child hearkening to your direction in his life. If you have trained him to hearken, now you will build on this by sharing Bible concepts and principles that guide him in his choice of life vocation, friends and eventually a life companion. It will bring you great joy if you truly have his heart in this stage of life.	Your youth is now dependent upon you to open the doors of independence. You will wonder if his internal controls can guide him as he receives his driver license, his own cell phone and his own time with friends. You should have the understanding that if there is any matter that is on his heart, you have the time and you have the interest to help him sort things through. There is no greater joy than to reap the reward of a child who shows you his love by opening his heart to you and taking heed to your counsel.
Adult (Internal Controls)	Being self-disciplined your child now only needs your counsel. If he is not self disciplined, he likely will not hearken to you anyway. Attempting to control him now will frustrate both of you.	Your heart will always be bound up in the life of your child. But the most loving thing you now can do is set him free to do the Master's bidding. You will now reap the seeds you have sowed.

.....Balanced with.....