

WINNING THE HEART OF YOUR CHILD

This is probably not a new concept to most of us; in fact, it may be in danger of becoming a cliché because of overuse. There is a lot of focus on this today and there should be. Few things are more important than the blessing of mutual satisfaction and communication from a healthy parent/child relationship. A home where the parents have the hearts of the children is a home that is ideally equipped to handle the stresses and turmoil of everyday life and simultaneously maintain an equilibrium of harmony, happiness, and stability. A godly home, at rest in the security of Christ, is the seed bed and foundation of our institutions and provides a launching platform of security for the future.

To win the heart of your child is a Biblical concept. This thought is mentioned specifically in Malachi 4:6. "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." It is implied many other times. For example: Proverbs 3:1-6 "My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments: For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee. Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart: So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man. Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." Also, Ephesians 6:4 "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." The Rechabites in Jeremiah 35 honored and obeyed their father's commands to abstain from wine even after a prophet of God encouraged them to partake of it. Obviously their father Jonadab had "won" the hearts of his sons.

Why is it important to win the heart of your child? Winning your child's heart gives Christian parents the blessing of observing the next generation perpetuate the faith that was delivered to them. When a generation stumbles and neglects the core principles of godly living and Biblical obedience, a break in the line of faithfulness occurs which sends aftershocks through generations. When the heart of a young son or daughter chooses the faith and practice of their parents and dispenses it into the next generation, a bridge is formed. We know that personal choice is involved as well, but when the hearts of children and parents are joined, many enabling blessings are realized.

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. The keys for success in winning the heart of your children are not found in Christian psychology, but in the Word of God.

Let us be sure – God's Word is not out of date in dealing with the needs of modern families and even traumatized and neglected children. Much knowledge is available in the form of counseling books, seminars, counseling centers and psychologists. And just because we may find these resources in the "Christian" section at the book store, it does not make them reliable. While a bit of it might be helpful, a steady diet will open one up to anti-Biblical concepts; these are inherent in modern psychology because it is based on the flawed platform of Sigmund Freud. Feeding at this trough will take us away from the brotherhood and the Word. Much information is available at our fingertips, even from Anabaptist circles. But even this needs to be closely scrutinized for errors.

Another danger with seeking help outside the brotherhood is that we tend to give credit to where we go for help. When help is given from these sources, we owe something to them (besides money). We have set them up as having the answers (they may have some). Our loyalty is in danger of being transferred from the brotherhood to nominally Christian organizations.

The question comes up at times relating to children with special needs or fractured homes: does the Bible method work for these children, or do we need training above and beyond what the Bible teaches? Two things to keep in mind: God's Word is never wrong in relation to raising children regardless of background; and, it is true that special needs at times need special training and extra helps, but it never sets aside the Bible. There is a place for sharing tips on relating to special needs and what has been proven effective. But a word of caution, do not we all have "special needs" in our children? Might we be tempted to excuse the hard work and discipline we need to do because of the "special need" my child has and exchange it for a "new way" of training?

So what are the Scriptural patterns that we need to adopt that will bind the hearts of the children to their fathers and vice versa?

Parents who love the Lord will show it in the way they live their lives. The church, the school, and every person they meet will be affected by this love.

A home that is a fortress of peace in the storms of life – even if it is "just a hut".

A home where there are boundaries that are enforced with a parental authority that recognizes the authority that it is under. In

other words, father and mother are showing the respect to their own authority that they are expecting from their children.

A home where the Proverbs way of discipline is not uncommon.

A home where respect for all humanity is taught and expressed.

A home that experiences daily joy and yet knows how to cry when sadness and grief touches.

A home where the Word of God is read, studied, and lived regularly in a personal and corporate way.

A home that understands that it needs the input of others. While fathers and mothers bear much responsibility, in many ways it takes a brotherhood to raise a family.

Parents that freely invest time and sacrifice hobbies and business trips for the sake of the family.

Parents that freely discuss with their children every issue and problem that adolescents and youth need to have explained.

This list is not meant to be exhaustive and many more points could be added. The core principles of parents living surrendered lives and having a vision for the church of tomorrow are fundamental to this cause. May God grant us the courage of Gideon and the wisdom of Solomon to win the hearts of our children in these last days. "Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain" (Psa 127:1). "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Gal 6:9).

~Dave Sweigart