

## The Heart of a Child

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As a parent, it is easy, so easy, to set your eyes on your child's behavior and miss the deeper, more important heart issues of your child. The Bible tells us that the heart is the wellspring of life (Proverbs 4:23) and that foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child (Proverbs 22:15). Most—if not all—of us would agree that sin is in our children. But we see that sin almost exclusively as wrong behavior—your child tries a cigarette or looks at something on the Internet; you catch him in a lie; or, she treats you like you are an annoyance in her life. When our eyes lock in on behavior, we scramble to correct it and once we feel the behavior has settled down, we feel peace.

The battle over the spiritual wellbeing of your child is not about his or her behavior. It is what the Bible says in Proverbs, the battle is over the foolishness in your child's heart. It is not easy to think about your child's heart issues because of two reasons:

1. We want to believe that our Billy or Susie has a good heart.
2. It takes work.

When a problem (or behavior we do not understand) arises, we ask "what" questions instead of asking "why" questions. *What* did he do; *why* did she do that? So, if our sons look at something on the Internet he shouldn't, we put restrictions in place so he does not do it again. And, if our daughters go to the movies and we learn that once she got to Easton she took off her sweatshirt and went around in a revealing top, we ground her. We attempt to correct the behavior without asking, "Why does he look at those images?" or "Why does she dress that way?"

When we correct behavior without addressing the underlying heart issues, (the foolishness in the words of Proverbs) it is like mowing off the weeds in your yard and thinking, "There, that takes care of my weed problem. My lawn sure looks good now." If we don't do the hard work of reflecting on our child's heart, we cannot begin to pray effectively for them. And if we don't look at their foolishness, we fool ourselves by thinking our child's problems are someone else's fault. For sure, behavior counts. But we have to get under the behavior to see where it comes from.

One last thought. As parents, we have unwittingly accepted the teachings of contemporary psychology that the most important thing you can do for your child is love them unconditionally. Now, love is important. But let me ask you this—why does the Bible say over and over and over again, until it sounds like a broken record (those vinyl things that used to play music), that a parent is to inject wisdom into their child, but virtually says nothing to parents about loving their children. Could it be that the Bible assumes that, as parents, we will naturally love our children but we will fail to give them what they need most—wisdom for life?