

"We can't believe the difference in our son that we never thought possible!!" – Jon, father of 4

CHANGE

Helping **ANY** Child at **ANY** Age
with **ANY** Problem



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The names of people who have come to the National Center for Biblical Parenting for help have been changed. Some illustrations combine individual stories in order to protect confidentiality. Stories of the authors' children have been used by permission.

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To obtain a complete resource list or have Dr. Scott Turansky and Joanne Miller present their material live, you may contact the National Center for Biblical Parenting, 76 Hopatcong Drive, Lawrenceville, NJ 08648-4136, (609) 771-8002 or visit the website at: www.biblicalparenting.org

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Chapter 1

Starting Strong

Parents and grandparents, please pause for a moment and reflect with us on the sacred adventure we're about to take: a journey into the heart of a child. We'll take you there, show you what the Bible says about it, and give you insight to help you work with your child in powerful ways.

In fact, this way of working with children is so powerful we use it to help ANY child at ANY age deal with ANY challenge. Parents are often surprised by the results they see in a relatively short period of time. Here's what Lisa said about her ten-year-old son who is strong-willed.

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I can't believe the change we've seen in two months while working this plan. I thought my son was doomed to be resistant to me for the rest of his life. The home therapy practice sessions we did using these principles have given us new hope. He's not perfect and we're still working on things, but we no longer have the pattern of saying no or being defiant. Yesterday I told him he needed to vacuum the living room. He said, "That's not my job." I reminded him that we're working on cooperation and he stopped opposing me and he did it. I am so excited about the progress. We will definitely continue to use these strategies in other areas of his life as well.

Lisa and her son will continue to make significant progress in the way they relate to each other. Furthermore, this young man is developing life skills at home that he'll use for the rest of his life.

When you enter the heart of a child, you're entering a sacred space. After all, God created people to be different than animals. He gave them spiritual hearts. So, before we proceed, please consider the holiness of this moment.

God asked Moses to do something similar when, through the burning bush, he said, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." (Exodus 3:5)

When Saul saw the blinding light he fell to the ground (Acts 9:4). When Isaiah had the vision of God on his throne, he humbly proclaimed, "Woe to me!" (Isaiah 6:5)

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Why compare the heart of a child with those glimpses of God's presence? It's because God has made a significant shift in his work with people from the Old Testament to the New. Under the Old Covenant the law was written on tablets of stone. God's presence was embodied in the ark of the covenant (Exodus 25:22) or in the tabernacle (Exodus 25:8) or in the Holy of Holies in the magnificent temple (Exodus 30:6).

But even in the Old Testament God promised something new and fresh, something very personal about his presence. He promised that someday, and that day is today, that he would write his law on our hearts (Jeremiah 31:33).

The heart of a person has become the place where Jesus wants to live (Ephesians 3:17) and where the Holy Spirit works (1 Corinthians 3:16).

In this book we will guide you on a tour past the behavior of your child into the heart. The potential is endless. When you get into the heart you see desires (Psalm 37:4) and emotions (John 14:1), two things that get kids into trouble a lot of the time. For example:

A fourteen-year-old son wants things to go a certain way and when they don't, he mistreats others including his parents. His desires dominate his reactions.

A three-year-old has a hard time with transitions because she emotionally invests in her activity of the moment. Those emotions are generated in the heart.

A seven-year-old has fits of rage when corrected, or a two-year-old has a temper tantrum when you say no. Fixing outward behavior rarely helps children address the deeper issues.

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All children have desires. That isn't bad. The problem comes when those desires become so strong that kids become inflexible, can't consider needs of others, or refuse to give up their agenda to be responsible. Furthermore, many kids invest their emotions into their desires so that when they don't get their way, they feel internally overwhelmed resulting in volcanic reactions.

Desires and emotions are just two things that get kids into trouble. Next, we come to beliefs. Those also take place in the heart (Romans 10:9-10). Kids often believe strange things about life such as, "My job description in life is to have fun." So, when asked to do work, kids react poorly. Or, some kids believe, "If my brother is annoying I have the right to punch him," or, "Homework is a waste of time," or "Chores are Mom's work and she's trying to pass her work off on me." Those kinds of misbeliefs result in attitude and behavior issues.

What's in the Heart?

Trying to change behavior is not enough. Lasting and deeper change takes place when we address the heart. The heart also contains motivations, passions, decisions, and commitments. In short, the heart is a holy place, and when we start to work in it, as parents or grandparents, we're standing on holy ground.

That's why the things adults say are so important. A critical comment or a harsh word can cut straight to the heart and do damage that takes hours, days, and sometimes years to overcome. At the same time, an encouraging word or a supportive comment can bring hope into a child that fuels change.

We all need a "Samuel encounter" to revolutionize our parenting. Samuel, in search of a king, was taught by God that, "Man looks on the outward appearance but the Lord looks on the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7).

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“But it’s their behavior that gets them into trouble,” you might say. And yes, that’s definitely true. But behavior problems start in the heart. So, addressing them there produces more powerful results.

Bill was fourteen years old. He was disrespectful to his parents, often cutting them off and making sarcastic remarks. Dad and Mom had made several attempts to correct and confront him. They removed video privileges, increased his chores, and grounded him. But the most progress happened when they used a heart-based approach. Here’s what they did.

Mom and Dad had a meeting with their son. They said, “Bill, we want to have a close relationship with you. We enjoy being with you. But sometimes you treat us unkindly. That compromises our relationship and adds tension. Sometimes you’re right when you disagree with us, but by being mean, you cross the line. That line is very important and you’ll need to be aware of it in other relationships as well. If you can work on this with us you’ll be more successful, not only in our home now, but also at school, and then in the future when you have a job and even your own family.”

Dad and Mom laid out a plan. It would require practice sessions of interaction around getting common things done at home. They also used the tools of firmness and visioning with their son. A fascinating thing happened that first week. They saw their son start to change. They had connected on a heart level and the combination of tools were having an impact on his reactions. In fact, on Wednesday, after a rather challenging incident he came and sat next to Mom and said, “I crossed the line there didn’t I?”

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Wow! Mom was shocked. Bill's behavior is changing because his heart is changing. Both Mom and Dad are pleased with the progress. They're adding other new strategies and they're thrilled with the results. It wasn't just one meeting with their son or a particular consequence that did the trick. It was a combination of several tools at the same time based on a strategy of change that focused on the heart.

Sometimes parents, in an attempt to bring order into life look for more techniques. "What can I do to my child to bring him in line with what I know is best?" Unfortunately, techniques are only as powerful as the strategy they represent. A heart-based approach to change involves strategy. You'll learn more about that in this short book. In fact, it's our prayer that this book will begin a revolution in your parenting.

A Prayer for Change

In the same way that Samuel of the Old Testament experienced a paradigm shift, we too must think differently about our children and grandchildren. We're going to show you how to do just that. But before we do, would you please pray with us. We designed this prayer to maximize our thinking as we call out to God for his grace in our family life. This prayer is one that parents or grandparents can pray to prepare themselves to work with children. Notice how it uses scripture in the prayer, praying that scripture back to God.

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Lord,

I pray for this child you've placed in my care. You know the plans you have for this child, plans to give hope and a future. This child is fearfully and wonderfully made by you with unique gifts and abilities to be used in a powerful way. I pray your blessing on this child that your grace would expand the opportunities for both of us to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with you.

Today Lord I pray that you would give this child a soft heart. I am confident of this, that you have begun a good work in my child and will carry it on to completion. I know you want to use me. Help me know when to be firm and when to offer grace. Give me wisdom that I may lead effectively, to know how to challenge the tough areas and how best to encourage the strengths. Clothe me today with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience, so that I can tolerate the imperfections and have the determination to hang in there to overcome resistance.

Lord, I ask that you would bless me and increase my opportunities. Let your hand be with me as I seek to impact this child's heart for you. Walk with me in this day. I humbly dedicate myself to you now as your servant to do your work, in your way, and in your timing. Here I am, Lord, send me. Use me today in the challenges and opportunities I will face.

Amen.

(Inspired from Jeremiah 29:11, Psalm 139:14, Micah 6:8, Philippians 1:6, 2 Chronicles 1:10, Colossians 3:12, 1 Chronicles 4:10, and Isaiah 6:8)

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God has given you the awesome privilege and responsibility to impact a life, and as you do, you'll want to do it in the most powerful way possible. That's why we start here by preparing your heart. This is a book about tools and strategy, but don't be in a hurry to get down new ideas before you set your own heart to be right with God.

The Bible never says that parents can change the heart of a child. Only two people can make that change. The person can determine to change. The Bible calls that "repentance." And, of course, God can change a person's heart. Parents can't change a child's heart, but they can do a lot to influence that change. Parents and grandparents are the most influential people in a child's life. You can maximize that influence as you use strategies and techniques that are designed to actually do heart change. Continually throughout our parenting programs we seek to rely on God and his grace to bring about the desired results.

Trust in God and work hard at the same time. Both are important. Lose one of those truths and you'll be like a bird flapping only one wing. There are many things you can do as a parent or grandparent to bring about change in a child. We'll guide you through that process to find the best tools that will work in your situation.

We have many practical techniques to share with you. We know that you want it broken down in a way that makes sense. We will do that for you here. However, don't forget that techniques must fit into a strategy. The next chapter will provide you with that strategic approach and it will provide a strong foundation as you begin to develop a plan for change.

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Chapter 2

Making a Major Shift in Parenting

I (Scott) was approached by Concordia University Waupun, WI, to create a Parent Training Class for the school's Masters Level program. Every student seeking to obtain a Family Life Education degree would be required to pass through this class to learn how to train parents. We developed a program that would help these students become Parent Coaches. During the course every student is required to work with a parent, bring the challenges of one child into the classroom environment where we discuss solutions using a heart-based approach.

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I still teach the course for Concordia but we've also taken the program and offered it to people through the National Center for Biblical Parenting. Each coach goes through an intensive eight-week training, reading, watching videos, and interacting about parenting issues. During that period every coach works with a parent and brings the parent's challenges with one child into our group. Parents too watch videos, fill out reports, and practice new techniques with their child.

I've seen amazing changes take place in families for many years. The question here would be, "Can I transfer these ideas to others and see similar outcomes?"

The results are simply stunning! Well, maybe "simply" isn't the best word. It is a lot of work. Parents practice new tools in their homes. Every family is different. Sure, each child has a heart and that means that there are common approaches that bring about the best results, but every child is unique. Each parent has particular convictions and a personality that must be considered.

As parent coaches, we all feel like the disciples during the feeding of the 5,000. Jesus did a miracle and those men had the privilege of being part of the process and watching God work. We are in the same position. God changes people and we have the privilege to watch God's grace and miraculous power in action. It's very humbling.

In the end, major changes take place in the lives of children. We see miracles take place in homes. Here are just a few of the success stories from recent weeks.

A 10-year-old with Down Syndrome develops more independence than parents thought possible.

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An 8-year-old adopted girl who used foul language and would hit her mom makes huge strides in her ability to cooperate in family life and parents can't believe the change. She is now much more calm and responsive.

An angry 14-year-old who blames others learns to take responsibility for his offenses and now responds better to correction, something parents thought would be impossible.

A 7-year-old girl learns to be less selfish and actually looks for ways to help and add energy to family life instead of draining it.

An out of control 3-year-old learns to follow instructions without a tantrum.

And the list goes on and on.

ANY Problem

You pick the problem you'd like to see addressed in your child. We'll show you how to work with that child and see major changes quickly. Many parents consider it a miracle! When parents say, "Wow, I can't believe the change," we get excited. The strategies in this program work! They change children. We've been helping children change by working with parents for over 25 years now. We have developed a lot of confidence in a heart-based approach. So much so, that we now can say:

We can help ANY child at ANY age with ANY problem.

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And here's why:

1) Good theology.

We start with an understanding of how God created people and how he changes them. We then apply those same ideas to the parent/child relationship. We use a multi-faceted approach to change.

2) Focused period of time.

Parents focus on their parenting for eight weeks. It's amazing what can happen when parents concentrate on family dynamics for that length of time.

3) New techniques.

Parents learn new tools and practice them with their kids. Parents often need to make some adjustments in the way they work with this child, not because what they've been doing is wrong. It's because their current strategies aren't working.

4) Practice sessions.

The home therapy activities change the tendencies in both children and their parents. Heart change takes work. Don't underestimate the amount of time needed to move things in the right direction.

5) Parents track progress.

Each week parents identify successes and challenges. This helps them chart their progress.

6) Accountability.

Those who choose to do so, report in and have the accountability of weekly reports and meetings with a Biblical Parenting Coach either in person or over the phone. Other parents get a partner or work with a mate to have regular strategy meetings.

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This isn't magic. It's hard work. But many parents see the need to address the challenges they see in their kids. They want help. They're ready for a change, even one that will cost them time and energy. It's an investment in family life.

Just imagine. An eight-week investment that will pay off hugely to reduce tension in your home. But more importantly, the work will give your child some life skills to use forever and heart change that is much needed.. It's huge!

Will your child be an angel by the end of eight weeks? No. But here's how one parent described it. "Our family problems used to be at a ten but now they are at a four. And that has totally changed our family. We are not the same. We are extremely pleased with where we are now and hopeful about where we're going. We finally believe we have the map to understand where we need to go and the tools to work on the heart."

The Biggest Change

So let's begin by talking about the foundational change that many parents need to make as they start to understand a heart-based approach and how it's different from merely changing behavior. We find that all too often parents rely on reward and punishment to motivate kids to change. It goes like this...

"Clean up your toys and you can have a snack."

"Finish your homework and you can go out and play."

"Straighten your room and you can have a friend over."

"If you don't clean up that mess, you can't watch TV."

"If you treat me with disrespect, I'm taking your iPad."

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Reward and punishment often work for the short term, but they have serious side effects. Here's what's happening inside the child's heart. A steady diet of rewards for desired behaviors and punishment for undesired behavior appeals to the selfishness in a child. It teaches kids to do things to get something in return. In short, kids start asking the wrong questions about life.

"What's in it for me?"

"Are you going to pay me for that?"

"I did what you asked, so what do I get?"

"What's the minimum I need to do to get back to my video game?"

"Is the punishment worth it?"

Many parents have come to that frustrating point where they can't think of any more reasonable things to do to motivate their kids to action. Have you gotten to that point? If you haven't, we suspect you will soon. Reward and punishment always fall short of true and lasting heart change.

The change must begin with you. And that's good news because then you are in control of at least the first step. We know that all parents want to reach the hearts of their kids. The big question then is "how?" What does it mean to use a heart-based approach?

Some parents think that reaching the heart means to talk more to their kids. Others think that it means more physical touch. Still others think that a heart-based approach means being mushy, or praying more with their children. All of those things are helpful, but the heart is a complicated place and true heart-work goes much deeper.

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In short, the heart is the central processing unit of a person. It's where emotion, beliefs, desires, and convictions come together to produce passion, commitments, and attitudes about life. It's also the place where God has chosen to live, impacting the deepest part of the human control center.

The Scriptures tell us that behavior comes from the heart. "Out of the heart the mouth speaks." **Matthew 15:18-19**

Every child is unique. But each child develops certain patterns of thinking and acting in response to life situations. Many of those patterns need adjusting and parents are in a strategic role to help make that happen. When you work on the heart, then behavior changes.

In reality most children need a multi-faceted approach to change. In fact, you never know exactly what tools are actually going to reach your child and bring about the necessary adjustments. That's why it's important to understand good theology and embed parenting strategies into biblical truth. God's Word describes the challenge of using a heart-based approach this way:

Proverbs 20:5 says,

"The purposes of a person's heart are deep waters, but one who has insight draws them out."

Even though every child is unique and different, each child has a heart. God is interested in that heart and when parents use a heart-based approach, major changes take place. In fact, the changes are so great that many parents are surprised that so much change could take place so quickly.

Working with one of our Biblical Parenting Coaches, Karen gave this update:

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“As a single mom, I never seem to be able to get everything done that I want to do. I knew that my three kids could be more helpful and that my twelve-year-old was the key. It was just a few weeks ago that he was so self-focused, always playing with his video game and giving me a hard time about anything I asked him to do. He would be disrespectful to me, cause tension with his brothers, and think only about himself. I’m so grateful for this past eight weeks. Our family is working more as a team than I thought possible. We have a long way to go, but I’m excited to continue on our current path.”

The solutions that Karen used can improve your family as well. Just imagine the possibilities. Sometimes parents don’t get help because they can’t imagine doing anything else. After all, they are doing the best they can!

We agree that many parents are doing good things. The problem is that the good things they’re doing aren’t working. Parents need a toolbox of strategies, techniques, and ideas, because every child is unique. Each one needs an individualized plan. We will help you develop that plan.

So, what does your plan look like?

Let’s start by helping you understand the map for your child. If you get the map idea then you’ll be able to plot the course for change.

Chapter 3

The Map Mentality

Thinking about your child's heart is like looking at a map. This approach will give you some immediate direction. A map has a Point A, where you are now, and a Point B, where you want to go. So, let's start by identifying Point A. That's the problem area your child is experiencing now.

Pick a problem you'd like to address in your child. Choose anything. Be bold and adventurous. Dream big. Let's look at making major changes in your child. We're not trying to change a child's personality. Rather, we're going to bring character to balance out the challenges a personality might present. Here's the difference.

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Personality is the God-given unique characteristics of a person. One's personality might be more active or quiet, talkative or contemplative, compliant or liking to be in control. There's nothing wrong with a child's personality.

However, sometimes a child, because of personality strengths and uniqueness, develops tendencies that need balancing. That's where character comes into the picture. We all need character to balance out personality. Maturity is often the process of honing down strengths and weaknesses by building character.

Think about what a character quality is for a moment.

Any character quality is simply a pattern of thinking and acting in response to a challenge.

The patient person thinks and acts differently than a person who lacks patience. The compassionate person thinks and acts differently than a person who lacks compassion.

We'll use both the concepts of personality and character as we help children change on a heart level. Sometimes parents see the weaknesses in their children and become discouraged. Keep in mind that sometimes a weakness is just a character quality being misused. Here are a few examples.

A child who is...	Might also be...
Analytical	Picky, petty, critical
Content	Unmotivated, apathetic, lazy
Creative	Deceptive, manipulative, mischievous

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Determined	Hard-headed, stubborn, obstinate
Expressive	Talkative, wordy, dominating conversation
Honest	Blunt, brutal, shares too much
Persuasive	Manipulative, pushy, demanding
Sensitive	Touchy, easily offended, moody

That's why every child needs training. If the process is starting to feel complicated because your child's personality or character weaknesses are challenging, then pause for a moment. Go back to your mission as a parent and your relationship with the Lord to remind yourself of the resources you have. With God's grace, anything is possible! Do you believe that? If so, then let's apply Philippians 4:13, "I can do all this through him who gives me strength," to your situation starting today. Here's how you'll know what to choose to work on first.

Step #1 – Identify a Tendency

Choose one of your kids and let's ask this first question to get things started.

"What tendency do I see in my child that makes me feel uncomfortable?"

Tendencies are indications of heart problems. If your child is disrespectful once that may be an accident. If he's disrespectful a second time, that might be a coincidence, but if he's disrespectful a third time, you better start looking at the heart because it appears that a tendency is developing.

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We will call this problem or challenge Point A. It's where we are now on the internal heart map of your child.

Jesus was on a mission to teach us more about the heart. He said it this way:

“Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.” Matthew 12:33-35

We're not trying to make a point here that your child is full of evil. The point is that challenges that children have, aren't just about behavior. It's about the heart.

God gives parents an intuitive radar that's sensitive to a child's weaknesses. You'll feel uncomfortable because you know that this current pattern your child has, if not changed, will hinder the child's success. Or, if this current pattern continues, this child is in for some big problems. That parental sensitivity is important because it gives parents an indication of where to work in a child's life. That uncomfortable feeling might reveal itself in you as confusion, frustration, or even anger.

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For example, some parents identify these heart issues:

My son has a tendency to pick on his sister.

My daughter tends to be self-focused and complains and whines continually.

The anger I see in my child is much greater than the situation warrants.

Every time I ask my son to do something, I get disrespect in return.

My child is failing at school because he won't apply himself.

My son is consumed with electronics.

Take a moment and on a piece of paper or in a notebook write down one concern you have with your child. With that concern, list a few examples that confirm the problem you are experiencing. Right now you're putting your attention on Point A to try to define the challenge more clearly. One Mom wrote it this way.

"I know exactly what my son Tyler needs to work on. He has a temper tantrum when things don't go his way. If he doesn't like what I tell him to do, he yells at me or does it with a bad attitude. If his sister takes the remote control, he blows up and yells all kinds of mean things to her. When I tell him it's time to go, if he's involved in his project, he reacts in a disrespectful way."

Let's step back for a moment and look at what's happening inside Tyler's heart. Tyler has desires. Psalm 37:4 says, "Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart." That passage clearly points out that desires exist in the heart. Secondly, Tyler is experiencing some strong emotions. Verses such as Nehemiah 2:2, Proverbs 12:25, and John 14:1 all reveal that emotions exist in the heart.

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Tyler's problem is that he's investing his emotions into his desires so that when he doesn't get what he wants, he reacts. That pattern needs to change. We all know adults who have similar problems. Kids don't typically outgrow these problems but instead the challenges can get worse. We we can help Tyler make changes, but it's not just about adjusting his behavior. We must work on the heart.

Kids want things they can't have or want things a certain way. Those desires, when not met, can prompt emotional outbursts. The problems are made worse of course when kids invest emotions into their desires so that now the emotional investment increases the dramatic episodes, further complicating the issues. Thus we see the root of the problem is heart issues that must be addressed.

Furthermore, this combination of emotions and desires can create in children a rather narrow tolerance level for life challenges. When things don't go a particular way or expectations aren't met, then the child feels overwhelmed with emotion. The anger or sadness then overflow dramatically.

We helped Tyler's mom know exactly what to do to change this tendency. Tyler made significant improvement in eight weeks. Here's Mom's report.

"I am so pleased with the changes I see in Tyler. He still is emotional but we're not seeing the extreme reactions we saw just a few weeks ago. He's learning to slow down his emotions and manage himself better. The idea of the Break was hard at first, but now he sees that it's an adult skill and he's more eager to do it on his own. We're continuing to work on this and my role as a coach instead of a critic has helped a lot."

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Behavior tendencies in children come from internal challenges. Jesus taught further about these things in Matthew 15:18-19, “But the things that come out of a person’s mouth come from the heart, and these defile them. For out of the heart come evil thoughts—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.”

In our children we see heart issues erupt into behavior problems including bad attitudes, disrespect, meanness, resistance, defiance, blaming, and tantrums.

So, what tendency would you like to see your child change? That’s Point A on your map.

Some parents feel so overwhelmed when they see a child’s weakness that they want to get the child into therapy. They know that this child is in serious trouble and that seeing a counselor might be productive. So, let’s confirm your concern right now.

Your Child Needs Therapy

Every child needs therapy. But you’re the best therapist for your child if you have a plan. We believe that the best counselors for a child are the parents. It’s God’s design. If parents can develop strategies that reach the heart, then their daily interactions become the therapy kids need to overcome those challenges.

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Therapy involves practice sessions. If your child couldn't walk, you'd be getting him physical therapy. If your child couldn't talk, you'd be getting him speech therapy. The work we do in the heart involves practice and it strengthens character. We call it character therapy.

As parents, we must focus on the hearts of our children in order to see them overcome their challenges. As you identify a tendency, you are invariably touching a heart issues. And when you start using a heart-based approach you have a whole toolbox of solutions you can use to bring about significant change. That means we have to now look at Point B to find out where we need to go.

Step #2 – Choose the Target Quality

Many parents make the mistake of focusing their energy on extinguishing negative behaviors and trying to get rid of them. They are hyper-focused on getting rid of Point A. The result is a lot of negative parenting. “Cut it out.” “Stop it.” “If you keep that up I’m going to...” And it’s all about stopping Point A.

In fact, many parents have in their minds a justice mentality that says, “If you do this then you get that,” both negatively in the form of punishment, and positively in the form of a reward. Unfortunately they miss the heart. That’s back to a behavior modification system that might produce some immediate change but it will hinder long-term growth.

What you want is an adjustment in the child’s heart. God uses a term in his Word to describe this. It’s called repentance. Repentance can be defined biblically as “a change of heart.” It’s not just stopping a negative behavior but it’s a 180-degree turn replacing the wrong actions with the right response or action. And in the center of this strategic theological idea, we discover our next parenting step: Choose the target quality. We identify this as Point B, where we need to go.

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Instead of investing your attention on what your child is doing wrong, ask yourself, “Where do we want to go?” or “What heart quality does my child need to develop in order to overcome this weakness?” The child with anger episodes needs to develop self-control. The child who is mean, needs to develop kindness. The child who reacts poorly during transitions needs to develop flexibility.

This one step alone makes parenting more positive and helpful. Instead of focusing on what you want to get rid of, you’re now looking toward the goal. With this approach you’ll now help your child develop life skills to face those challenges forever.

A character quality is a pattern of thinking and acting in response to a challenge. Once you have identified the positive heart quality then you can go to work to help the child learn to think and act differently.

“But what if my child isn’t willing to change?”

That’s a great question. We have lots of tools for change that a parent can use. It’s always helpful when the child is eager to change and some of our tools focus on developing that desire. However, change isn’t totally dependent on a child’s receptivity. Some kids resist change. We also offer parenting tools that help a child change whether he wants to or not. Strategic persistence can overcome that resistance.

When kids have major problems, some parents immediately think of giving big consequences. “That will do the trick,” they think. Although consequences may motivate change, parents can use a number of other tools to bring about change with or without the child’s immediate cooperation. Some children are, or become, more responsive than others. But we’ll even help the child who doesn’t want to change. After all, that’s what God does with us.

CHANGE

Even people in the Bible resisted God's leadership and he helped them change their minds to overcome their resistance. Take Jonah for example. He was resistant when God told him to do something he didn't want to do. He needed a little persuasion. Then he went and did it. Jonah needed to change his heart and God helped him do that.

There are a lot of ways to help children change. It reminds me (Scott) of the plumber that came to my house to clean out a drain. He started with a small tool to stick into the drain to remove the clog. But that didn't work. So he went out to his van to get another bigger tool that hand cranked a wire down my drain. But when that didn't work, I started to get concerned. So, I asked him, "What if that doesn't work?" His reply to me is the same one I say to parents who are concerned that their current strategy isn't working with their child and ask the same question. Here's the plumber's answer:

"If this doesn't work, I always have something else that will."

I laughed and watched as he brought in this huge motorized tool that he stuck in my drain. He turned it on and let it work and in just a few minutes my water was flowing again.

Don't get discouraged because the things you're doing aren't working. They might even be good things. They might work with the neighbor's kids. They might even work with other kids in your family or they might have worked with you when you were a kid. The fact is, this child may need a different approach. There are lots of strategies and ideas that work. That's why you'll often need a multi-faceted approach. And, it's why you might want to try some different techniques. Parents are often amazed at the results.

CHANGE

Since we've started talking a bit about consequences, let's make something clear. We believe that parents move to consequences too quickly. Firmness is important in a heart-based approach and there are many other firmness tools besides consequences. Furthermore, consequences have a different function in a heart-based approach than they do in a Behavior Modification approach. It's another example of how a heart-based approach is completely different and why it works so well.

But before we can get to the actual tools, we must have a way to make your plan measurable. After all, you want to know if you're making progress. So read on in the next chapter.

CHANGE

Chapter 4

The Arena

Now that you've identified a tendency you'd like to work on in your child and you've determined a heart-quality that will address it, you'll want to do one more thing before you continue toward your plan. You'll want to identify the arena in which you'll practice it.

The arena is where the action takes place. The ice skaters skate in the arena. The basketball players play in the arena. The boxers fight in the arena. Identifying the arena means that you'll want to determine where the problem takes place. It will also be the place where you'll begin to implement change and practice new patterns. Don't think of physical places such as "home" or "school." Think in terms of the heart. When is your child tempted to act out with the negative tendency? For example:

CHANGE

Shanna, age five, gets angry. When we ask her parents what the arena is, they say, “All the time.” Although that might be true, we need more specific information in order to develop a plan and to make the plan measurable. As we listen to the parents describe Shanna’s challenges we learn that she gets angry when given an instruction that she doesn’t want to do, reacts when corrected, and explodes when she receives a “no” answer. That gives us three arenas. There are likely more, but at least we can start with one of those.

We chose one arena to work on first: responding well to instructions. As we work on that one arena we’ll see change take place in the heart. We may have to move to other arenas over time, but sometimes the responsiveness of working on one arena affects the others as well.

Here’s what’s happening on a heart level. Shanna lacks the ability to give up her agenda when she’s told to do something. She has her own ideas, expectations, and plans, and Mom’s instructions get in the way.

Dad and Mom determined that their daughter needed to develop cooperation. That was the target quality and the arena they chose to work in was when she was given an instruction. In Shanna’s heart you can picture the arena like a boxing ring. When she’s given an instruction, she’s in that arena. In one corner is the temptation to resist, act out, and display anger. In the opposite corner is her ability (or lack of) to fight the temptation. Why is Shanna always losing the battle in this arena? It’s because she doesn’t have a plan to fight the temptation.

The temptation exists without a plan to address it. Every child needs a plan to address negative tendencies in the heart. Sometimes you can sit kids down and tell them a plan, but that rarely works. Most children learn best by experience, so providing practice sessions to bring about change actually teaches more than a lecture. Discussions are valuable because they frame the picture and help kids understand the process, and the therapy or practice sessions make the strongest impact.

CHANGE

Shanna needs a personalized, individual plan in order to be successful in the arena of following instructions that she doesn't want to do. Presently the temptation to erupt with anger is winning because she doesn't have a plan that works for her. As parents help Shanna develop that plan and practice it, Shanna will change and increase the necessary character to manage herself in that arena.

Does she have to want to change? No, not exactly. But she will change because the plan will help her want to change whether she wants to now or not. You see, one of the tools is firmness. It's not the only one, but the new structure required of a child often produces a change in the tendency. There are many other tools. We just don't want you to falsely believe that this process is all about dialogue with your child or that somehow you're convincing your child to make the change through discussion. Sometimes it is, but kids change when parents use a multi-faceted heart-based approach.

Choosing an arena to focus on makes the plan measurable. Remember, we want to see change in eight weeks. If we're too general, then we won't know if we're making progress. Furthermore, the arena gives the parent a specific time and place to work on practice sessions.

It's going to take work but a direct focus on an arena in a child's life can bring about a miracle. We don't use that word "miracle" lightly. A miracle is an unexpected, unnatural event, often prompted by God's direction. Parents often look back on their eight weeks of work and say, "I wouldn't have imagined that we could make this much progress in such a short amount of time." They're often surprised with the reduced tension, heightened cooperation, and better working relationship. It's that reaction that we view as a miracle.

CHANGE

This is big. Notice what we've done so far.

1) We identified the tendency a child has. This draws attention to a problem. Point A.

2) We identified a target heart-quality that will move the child in the right direction. Point B.

3) We've identified an arena where the heart-quality will be worked out in order to meet the challenge in the child's heart.

Now let's plot these things on the map. We think you'll find the map mentality encouraging because it provides a clearer picture of where they are and where they need to go.

Just this one idea often changes the attitude of many parents. Now, instead of focusing on a behavior to get rid of, you're focusing on a life skill to develop. Drawing attention to the positive heart quality helps you move from punishment to discipline. That distinction is significant in a heart-based approach.

- Punishment focuses on past problems. Discipline focuses on future success.
- Punishment is often motivated out of anger. Discipline is motivated out of love.
- Punishment seeks justice. Discipline means to teach.
- Punishment is negative. Discipline is positive.

CHANGE

The parent's positive stance now gives a new perspective to the daily interaction. Viewing your child's heart on a map means that your child is currently at point A and needs to move to Point B. As a parent or grandparent you identify the heart quality at Point B and then coach, teach, and require that your child make progress toward that goal.

Many parents see the map mentality as a contrast to what they are doing presently. Parents may use a justice mentality that says, "You did this, so you get that." On the positive side, they are trying to reward their kids for positive behavior and on the negative side, they threaten or punish. This approach to parenting is weak at best and it's often counter-productive.

Although you may get a fast response from a child by giving a reward or punishment, The new behavior is likely just superficial and short-lived. Kids want the rewards and are less focused on doing what's right. It doesn't take long to see that children who are raised with a justice mentality end up mistreating their parents or they try to bargain with them over even the most basic things.

Caden is eight years old and has Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. His mom and dad want to do what's right but they're puzzled, confused, and often frustrated by their son's lack of impulse control and high energy.

As is often the case, the reward/punishment suggestions they received from books and counselors weren't working. Here's why. Using external motivation for kids who are highly internally motivated rarely works. Caden is already internally motivated. He's driven with strong desires. Using reward or punishment might work for the short term, but it doesn't usually bring about long-term change.

CHANGE

Caden's parents came to us for help. In the first week we saw hopeful changes and in eight weeks Caden had developed character that was helping him manage his impulses. Here's how we helped this family.

ADHD is a biological problem. The electro-chemical transmissions in the brain aren't functioning effectively so kids often have a hard time focusing or controlling impulses. Furthermore the "hyperactivity" component means that the brain is issuing messages to the muscles in the body to move in order to relax. Kids with ADHD need a multi-faceted solution. With practice sessions and training, we used a number of tools. We help these children strengthen their consciences, providing internal messages to increase impulse control.

We also helped Caden develop "others thinking" to become more sensitive to how his actions affect those around him. Then we helped him develop more self-control using practice sessions and by creating more structure in the relational routines that involve following instructions and correction. We targeted Caden's heart by increasing his character to match the biological urges he experienced.

Major changes took place as Mom and Dad practiced intently with their son. Caden is still active, but he's much more pleasant to be around. His heart is more sensitive and he is growing in his ability to manage his behavior. In fact, remarkably, his school teacher said, "I see you put Caden on medication." The same changes she saw in Caden were typical of other children who used medication to address the issues.

CHANGE

We're not opposed to medication. All we're saying is that we find it helpful to try other solutions. Often when parents use a heart-based approach kids change so much that they get off medication or don't need it. You'll have to make that important decision with your doctor. Don't rush it. Just work on character and see what happens.

The point is, we can help ANY child at ANY age with ANY problem change. When you target your parenting using strategy and heart-based tools then change naturally follows.

CHANGE

Chapter 5

The Value of Following Instructions

Sometimes people wonder why, in our program, we start by building cooperation in kids. In fact, almost any presenting problem will find significant change when kids learn the important life skills that are taught when people learn to work together to get things done.

When parents measure their family's cooperation level, most wish that things were better. Children sometimes resist instructions, argue about tasks, and sometimes even are defiant. In fact, take a moment and measure your child on the cooperation index.

CHANGE

Those who don't learn to follow instructions well miss out on valuable life lessons, often develop attitudes of entitlement, and have to learn hard lessons later on in life.

Character is built in the simple areas of family life such as being able to accept no as an answer, receive correction well, get along with siblings, and how to follow instructions without drama.

Cooperation teaches essential life lessons to children. In fact, the Bible calls this process obedience. God has hidden within obedience the secret ingredients kids need to be successful in life. Important life lessons are learned in the home.

As you're reading this, you're likely nodding your head and recognizing that all of this makes perfect sense. But let's take this a step further. At the National Center for Biblical Parenting we help parents with all kinds of problems they experience with their children. Among the challenges are things such as lying, sibling conflict, anger episodes, impulsivity, lack of focus, disrespect, and the list goes on and on. Some of those children have specific diagnoses such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, Emotional Explosive Disorder, and a host of other emotional and behavioral labels.

Those are real problems. Some involve biological factors and others are patterns of relating to life developed over a period of time. The good news is that every child has a heart. Of course all parents recognize that and want to reach the hearts of their kids, but somehow something disconnects when a child is given a diagnosis. It's as if the heart now isn't as important and parents turn to other solutions that focus on behavior change or biological solutions such as medications, diet, and supplements.

CHANGE

We're not opposed to any of those solutions, but the greatest change takes place when parents use a heart-based approach. It's amazing how beneficial it is to work on a strong Instruction Routine with kids. Often we see major problems diminish as parents zero in on the very important group of skills required for cooperation and obedience.

When we practice following instructions in family life, the child who doesn't have integrity to tell the truth begins to develop that internal strength necessary to do the hard work of being honest. The child who has a narrow tolerance and is easily angered increases flexibility and doesn't get angry as often. Even the child who has a hard time focusing practices following instructions and develops a greater ability to stay on task and manage attention better. So many good things happen inside the heart of a child when practicing the Instruction Routine. This is why we make it the very first step in our Biblical Parenting Coaching Program and we work on it intently for the first week.

Here are several examples that illustrate how the Instruction Routine builds something inside the heart.

Jack is four years old and ignores parental instructions. Mom has to repeat herself several times and even has to yell before her son gets up and starts moving. Here's the problem inside of Jack's heart. He doesn't feel that internal sense of obligation when given a task to do. Obligation is the basis for responsibility. It's that internal feeling that mature people have that gets their bills paid on time, locks the doors at night, or gets the oil changed in the car. Children can begin to develop obligation at age 2. "When I'm done playing I need to put my toys away."

CHANGE

Jack needs some therapy in order to strengthen that sense of obligation. So, parents start the first step of the Instruction Routine and practice it 30-40 times a day. They teach Jack to come when called. First they explain to him about this new plan and how valuable it is and how it's going to improve their relationship and give him some very important things in his heart. Then they start practicing.

Several times an hour Mom calls Jack by just saying his name. Jack is expected to come. If he does she encourages him by pointing out the heart quality of cooperation he's developing. If he doesn't come the first time, she goes and gets him in order to increase the discomfort inside because his name was called. This is not discomfort with the parent. It's the uncomfortable feeling of obligation that responsible people feel when called or given a task to do.

Obligation is a function of what the Bible calls the conscience. It's a sense of duty and is described by Paul in this way as he was challenged by the Sanhedrin in Acts 23:1. "My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day." Notice that one of the functions of the conscience is to provide a sense of duty. Jack should feel like he is on duty from the time he hears his name called until he is finished following instructions.

Notice that we're working deep in a child's heart by practicing a Point B quality of cooperation. Jack is developing a greater sense of obligation. Once we get this working to a certain level it becomes a valuable quality to help in other areas.

Take the child who has ADHD for example. One of the challenges in this brain issue is that the child has a hard time with impulsivity. With a lot of work on the Instruction Routine we can actually see a tipping point take place in a child's heart. Obligation overcomes urge. Notice that the heart based solution of building obligation helps a child with a biological challenge cope more powerfully.

CHANGE

You might ask, “But what if Jack doesn’t come when called? What consequence do I give him?” First of all, the very question indicates a reward/punishment way of thinking. The question assumes that children learn from consequences. Sometimes they do but a more effective approach is training by practicing the Point B quality. So, we often suggest to parents that the consequence of not responding is more practice.

There are times we use consequences and in this case Jack might have to sit and change his heart and come back when he’s ready to cooperate. When he does come back though, the very next thing is to practice coming when called.

The Instruction Routine in family life is a practical way to teach children obedience. Sometimes parents and young people react to the term obedience and so we use cooperation as well. The term obedience is a good one and comes from God’s Word but sometimes kids have come to associate the word with an authoritarian approach. You can decide whether it’s best to use “obedience” or “cooperation” or a combination of the two. The point is that many valuable things are learned through the Instruction Routine and that’s why it becomes great therapy for kids.

Here are some of the significant benefits of working on following instructions in a home.

1) God has hidden within obedience and honor the secret ingredients for a child’s success. That’s why he’s given them a two-fold job description in the Bible.

CHANGE

2) Virtually all families benefit in the “Getting Things Done” department with lots of practice in the Instruction Routine. Tension decreases and relationship increases, setting the stage for a positive working environment to address other issues.

3) The Instruction Routine builds very important things into a child’s heart. It builds an internal sense of obligation or duty. This is primarily fed by the conscience. The conscience needs training and it’s part of the basis for internal motivation. This inner sense of obligation gives children the ability to manage other areas such as impulse control, or simply to overcome desires or emotions.

4) We must address the many challenges children experience: anger, lying, defiance, lack of motivation, sibling conflict, etc. But first we need working routines in family life. They become the tools we use in our strategy to develop the heart qualities necessary for change in those problem areas. The Instruction Routine is just one of the relational tools parents and grandparents need in order to handle ANY problem a child is facing, whether it be biological, emotional, or simply immaturity.

5) The Instruction Routine teaches kids to get outside of themselves. Whether it’s a sixteen-year-old who is making wrong choices or a three-year-old who is emotionally out of control, one main challenge is a self-focused mindset. Practicing the Instruction Routine starts to break that down. Kids learn how to think about others, not just themselves. This is where humility is learned. Philippians 2:8 says that Jesus humbled himself by becoming obedient. Lack of humility is at the heart of many emotional challenges kids face, including things like sibling conflict and disrespect. So, we start building humility in an unlikely place: the Instruction Routine.

CHANGE

7) Much practice on the Instruction Routine exercises a heart muscle that will be needed forever. After flexibility is developed then parents can negotiate a few extra minutes before obeying. That might come in a few months. Some kids can't give up their agenda at all so they need work in this area.

8) Self confidence and self concept are strategic for any child. In the Instruction Routine there are several opportunities to affirm children every time they follow instructions. More important than parental praise though is the internal sense of satisfaction provided by the conscience. This is one of the greatest God-given sources of self-confidence available. It's developed through the Instruction Routine.

We could go on and on about the benefits of the Instruction Routine. The point we're trying to make here is that we aren't just trying to teach parents how to give instructions differently, although that's often a helpful byproduct. What we are saying is that kids need practice at Point B to change tendencies that they have developed at Point A. We encourage parents and grandparents to each practice the Instruction Routine with a child twenty times a day, or as many as they can. Why? Because they are using structure to build new tendencies in the heart.

Will your kids respond well? Maybe not at first, but the character starts to grow and good things happen in many areas of the child's life. Consider this Bible story that comes from Number 9:15-23.

The Israelites were wandering in the wilderness for 40 years. During that experience they were being led by a cloud that could move at any moment. The passage says in 9:22-23, "Whether the cloud stayed over the tabernacle for two days or a month or a year, the Israelites would remain in camp and not set out; but when it lifted, they would set out. At the Lord's command they encamped, and at the Lord's command they set out. They obeyed the Lord's order, in accordance with his command through Moses."

CHANGE

The Israelites had to watch the cloud. They had to follow the cloud every time it moved and they never knew when it would move. Their job wasn't to get to the next level in the video game before obeying. They were learning obedience.

Why? Were they going somewhere? No, they were wandering for 40 years. They had no place to go. They were practicing obeying. Here's the back story. The Israelites are wandering in the wilderness because they came to the Promised Land and didn't have the faith to obey God and go in and conquer the land. Essentially God told them that because they couldn't trust him and obey him that he would give them practice obeying for 40 years. Trust is developed through obedience. And of course, by the time they were done with the 40 years, they were ready to go to the Promised Land and conquer it.

One of the things that's developed in children as they practice obedience is that they develop trust. This is necessary for all children but those who are adopted often need special help in this area. Most children who were adopted have trust issues. We help these kids develop a strong heart by practicing the Instruction Routine.

The Instruction Routine is a powerful tool for every child. And most every family needs work in this area to establish good relational patterns. Parents who work hard at developing good, healthy, positive cooperation in children reap huge rewards in the other challenging areas they face. But most importantly, children learn the skills they need to be successful in life.

CHANGE

Chapter 6

Next Steps

So far, we have helped you plot your child and the challenges on a map. It's a heart map that helps you know where you are at Point A and where you need to go at Point B. But you don't yet have the directions that will get you there. We call the next step "The Plan." It's like the directions that take you from Point A on the map to Point B. Here are some things that you'll use in this next step.

CHANGE

As you develop The Plan, you'll learn...

- how having a strategy can help you move away from reactive parenting. That's why many dads like our program. They like strategy.
- specific techniques to move your child from Point A to Point B.
- how to overcome resistance and move forward with the plan even if your child doesn't want to.
- how to build character in a way that will help you get things done in family life (instructions) and get kids back on track when needed (correction).
- an effective way to communicate all of this to the child in a manner that often creates a partnership relationship for change to take place.
- how to transfer responsibility to the child for a change of heart.
- ways to address emotional episodes that seem to get in the way of progress.
- how to turn your relationship with your child into that of a coach instead of a policeman.
- new skills to parent children of any age according to their developmental abilities and needs.
- approaches that help get both parents on the same page, realizing that dads always do it differently than moms.
- more tools to work with your child to reach the heart.

CHANGE

It's these and more topics that are answered in the twelve session video training program called CHANGE. It's a Bible study, mixed with theology lessons, coupled with down to earth techniques to use with your kids. And it's designed to use in a church setting over six sessions or in a family over twelve sessions.

For some, the development of a plan is a complete parenting makeover. For others, it affirms techniques they are already using and shows how they fit into a bigger heart-based strategy. The new plan to move your child from Point A to Point B often requires that you learn new skills, practice new techniques, and modify the way you work with your kids. But it always requires practice.

Some parents find it challenging to set aside the time to advance their parenting. That's why we've created this twelve session program to bring about major change. Yes, it's still an investment of time and energy. It's a lot of work, but more and more parents are willing to back off their busy lifestyles for a concentrated period of time as an investment in their child.

Miriam, a mother of six kids said it this way:

"I've been to parenting seminars before from other speakers. I've read lots of parenting books from various authors. This stuff works. I've seen it in my own family. I'm sold on this approach by Turansky and Miller and I'm encouraged by its biblical basis. I feel like my parenting is grounded in my faith like never before. If you can get into this program, I encourage you to do it.

Life is busy. Not only is it complicated with work, chores, and other tasks, but kids have a lot of opportunities. School, sports, hobbies, and activities all provide good influences in children's lives. Unfortunately, sometimes family life starts to morph into something that seems unsatisfying and even unhealthy.

CHANGE

While trying to give kids the best by getting them involved in so many good things, the family itself sometimes weakens. Tension may increase, bad attitudes crop up, and relationships often become strained. It's at that point that some intentional work on character and family dynamics becomes imperative. Of course, any family would benefit from strengthening itself, but those under pressure recognize the need even more.

The good news is that if you're willing to dedicate the time, then we've streamlined the process. Just imagine a healthier family in a matter of weeks. Less tension, more direction, and closer relationships.

This program brings hope. Just look at your own situation and what's happened in you as you've read this book. You're already experiencing hope. Why? Because the solutions are biblical, practical, and ring true in your own heart. This program works because it changes children from the inside out and puts parents in an excellent place to influence that change. It's all about strategy.

Parents need tools for the journey. All parents want to reach the hearts of their kids. They even know what the problems are. They just don't know how to get from Point A to Point B in the most efficient and effective way. Anger and ineffective strategies often increase tension and weaken a parent's effectiveness.

Parents find the CHANGE video series to be encouraging and hopeful. It provides new strategies, ideas, and techniques that inspire hope. It's practical, helping you know exactly what you need to do to bring about change in ANY child, at ANY age, with ANY problem. It brings new vision to your parenting and helps your family significantly.

CHANGE

In addition to the video series, some parents will want more. Imagine having a coach walk you through specific tools for your family and personalized action plans to bring about change in your home. The Biblical Parenting Coaching Program teaches you an approach to parenting that maximizes change. You'll use the process over and over again with each of your children. God wants to empower families with his grace. It starts with a willing parent.

Here's what the Biblical Parenting Coaching Program involves. Once you sign up, you'll have access to a web-based Parent Portal where you'll watch three weekly videos of teaching by Dr. Scott Turansky for each of eight weeks. You'll download worksheets and fill out weekly journal reports. You'll have suggested reading from four books from the National Center for Biblical Parenting. Each week has a different focus that helps you create the plan, develop the skills, and work them into family life with your child. Each week you'll have practice sessions with your child, work on character development, and track progress.

The independent study program is web based so you can do it at your own pace. Right away in Week 1 you'll be working on new techniques with your child as you focus in more directly on the Instruction Routine. At the same time, you'll be learning new approaches, why they work, and how to present them wisely to your child.

You also have the option of meeting with a Biblical Parenting Coach to give you further input and guide your progress. You'll meet several times during the program on the phone or in person with that coach. The additional wisdom and accountability helps parents get the most out of the program. Each coach has been trained by Dr. Scott Turansky.

You can learn more about your options at biblicalparenting.org/coach

CHANGE

Either way, you'll find practical, hands on advice that you can use now. We trust that this book has been helpful in and of itself and that it may whet your appetite for more. At the National Center for Biblical Parenting we are committed to providing biblical, practical solutions that parents can use now. We know that parenting is the toughest job in the world. It's our goal to make it a little easier.

Blessings,

Dr. Scott Turansky and Joanne Miller, RN, BSN



For more resources for your parenting visit biblicalparenting.org