

*The Newborn Promise Podcast*

*Episode 20: "Shepherding A Child's Heart" with Dr. Tedd Tripp*

Audra Haney: Thanks for tuning in to the Newborn Promise Podcast. A production of Graham Blanchard Incorporated. You are listening to an interview with Dr. Tedd Tripp, called Shepherding a Child's Heart. This is part one of a two part interview. For today's show notes, transcript and more information about your Newborn Promise Project, please visit [grahamblanchard.com](http://grahamblanchard.com)

Thank you so much for joining us. I am Audra Haney. From the very start of pregnancy, great parents are constantly learning how to best protect, nurture and enrich their children's lives. We find the right doctor. We eat the right foods. We get the safest car seat. We learn how to best foster their cognitive and social growth at each stage of development. But how prepared, how skilled are we at handling a human heart? That core, which the Bible describes as a well spring of life. Shouldn't we be as intentional about preparing to care for our child's heart as we are dedicated to preparing a physical and social safe haven for them?

Dr. Tedd Tripp has championed this message for over 25 years through his book, *Shepherding a Child's Heart*. Dr. Trip has his doctorate in ministry and counseling from Westminster Theological Seminary. Today, through his biblically found teachings, Dr. Tedd Tripp reminds us that it's not enough to simply shape our child's environment, or only handle surface behavior issues. We have to do the hard work of shepherding the heart. A very special thank you to our guest interviewer, Graham Blanchard Project Director, Ansley Kynes, for conducting this interview while I was on a short sabbatical. We hope you enjoy her discussion with Dr. Tripp.

Ansley Kynes: Dr. Tripp, it is such a pleasure to have you with us today. Before we dive in and talk about your book, *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, do you mind telling us about your family?

Dr. Tripp: Yes, I have three adult children, all in their 40s. We have nine grandchildren. We are very uniquely blessed as a family. We all live within five miles of each other. So we spend a lot of time with our kids and our grandkids. That's something that's been a real great privilege for us. Our grandchildren are ages 20 to 10. We have a lot of teenage grandchildren these days. It's a fun time of life. We enjoy spending time with them.

Ansley Kynes: Dr. Tripp, you and your wife Margie founded Shepherding the Heart Ministries. What prompted you to step out into that work?

Dr. Tripp: I served a church for 33 years. It was during that time that the book *Shepherding a Child's Heart* became really a best-selling Christian book and really reshaped my ministry in many ways. And our ministry as a church, 'cause the church embraced it as an expression of our contribution as a church to the larger body of Christ. We had at one point 120 preschoolers in our church. We had periods of four or five years where we had at least one baby born every month. We had a lot of kids in our ministry. We started a Christian school. I was raising three kids, myself.

We were very focused on children and trying to understand how to get beyond just simply dealing with behavior. But really dealing with the heart. It was really in the context of taking a doctor of ministries degree and pastoral counseling, that the whole idea of the heart at the centrality, the heart was so drilled in to me. Our focus has been not just managing behavior but really nurturing kids and focusing on the heart.

Ansley Kynes: And your book, *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, which has become a Christian best-seller for over 25 years now, was really just a product of your doctorate of ministries and counseling degree, right?

Dr. Tripp: I wrote the book *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, really for that reason. I had no intention of ever having it published. I graduated in 1990. I was busy in pastoral ministry. I got a bound copy of my Dmin project, the library got a bound copy and we were on with what we were doing. It was after that, that the library contacted me and they said, "We have a waiting list, it'll take us 18 months to loan your project out to people who have signed up to read it. There really is a great deal of interest in this book. You ought to give some thought to having it published." So we worked on it for a couple of years. Margie really was my editor, trying to simplify it, trying to make it as a popular book rather than an academic book.

Eventually, in 1995, it was published. We really thought when we published the first 5,000 copies we thought our grandchildren would be giving these away. Here, my grandpa wrote a book, would you like a copy of it? But there was such a huge response to it that it really ended up reshaping our ministry. It was really written, I didn't set out to, boy I'd really like to write a book on child rearing. It was written in response to a course requirement for the Dmin program I was in.

Ansley Kynes: That definitely turned out to be a helpful topic for your project. Our audience is new and expecting parents. So what is the top advice that you would give them as they transition into this new role?

Dr. Tripp:

Boy, that's a great question. I think that certainly ... So many things pop into mind. Certainly, a stability of one's own walk with God and relationship to God and the stability of the family. The parent's relationship with one another is so central for a child because a child derives so much security from understanding that mom and dad love God and they love each other. That's really foundational for kids.

I think in addition to that, I think even having a focus in the very beginning, that my goal as a parent is not just managing behavior. My goal is to shepherd the hearts of my kids. The focus of nurture from the earliest days, I think is a very important point of focus. Because see what happens if I focus on behavior, which is where parents tend to go. We see behavior. We hear behavior. It requires a response. If we focus on behavior, then we immediately turn to what are those things I can do to manage behavior to get a behavior I want? We think in terms of incentives, disincentives, prizes, rewards, threats, punishments, all those things will enable us to manage behavior.

What the Bible teaches is that the heart is a wellspring of life. Proverbs 4:23 Above all else guard your heart, for it is a wellspring of life. Does the things my children say and do flow from the heart? Jesus says in Mark 7, it's from within, from the heart come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, deceit, envy, slander, arrogance, folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man or we could say child, unclean. If I focus on the heart then it turns my focus in a totally different direction. I'm not just managing behavior. I'm trying to help this child understand his heart and how profoundly he needs grace and forgiveness and transformation that God brings.

I think even from the earliest days with children, we want to have that kind of focus on the heart. Now obviously you can't talk to a little child about his motivations. Why did you do that? He has no idea why he did it. He can't answer that why question. He's not self-conscious about motivation. He lacks the vocabulary. He lacks the insight. Even from the earliest days, I can talk to him about heart attitude. Even with a little child that pushes his sister over and takes her toy, I'm going to address behavior, "Honey, no, no, no. You can't do that. You must give the toy back to her. She was playing with it."

But I'm going to use the language of the heart to describe the behavior, because I want this child to understand my real concern for him is both profound in what he just did. My concern is for what's going on inside. So I'm going to say, "You can't take the toy from her honey. You're not serving her. You're serving yourself. You're not loving your sister. You're loving you. You're not being kind to her. You're being unkind. You must give the toy back to her." I'm helping this child, even though it's a little toddler, understand that my concern for him is more profound than just his behavior. My concern is what's going on inside.

Ansley Kynes:

That is such rich and wise advice. Looking back, what is some advice that you wish someone had given you as a new parent?

Dr. Tripp:

Oh boy, there's so many things. I guess one thing that comes very quickly to mind. And this may sound kind of surprising thing to say, I think the realization that I cannot save my children. That God works powerfully his grace in the hearts of my kids. I'm not going to be able to save them. I cannot do this job well enough to guarantee my children's salvation. You'd faithfully do all the things that God has called me to do. But ultimately, what happens with my kids and whether they know God and love God and grow up as people who are Christians who believe in God and trust God is a work of grace in their hearts. I think that humbles parents. I think it puts us on our knees. I think it also humbles us to realize, I can't just muscle this kid and get him into the kingdom by sheer force of my will.

I think when I started out parenting, I had very much that perspective. If I get all the things right. If I get it right. If I do all the right things. If I train him in the right ways. If I manage my life and our family life and the child's life correctly, then I'm guaranteed that he's going to respond and be a Christian. I realize that's simply not true. That God's grace, it's the grace of the gospel that saves our kids. It's not our effort. I think humbling parents to realize this is a journey where I'm going to be cast on God, on God's mercy for my kids. I'm going to be praying for them. I'm going to do everything God's put my hand to do. I want to train them. I want to read the Bible with them. I want to teach them God's ways. I want to speak to them when they've done things that are wrong and point them to the need of Christ.

But ultimately, I've got to have this position of humility that recognizes it is God who saves sinners. I don't have the ability to reach inside and flip a switch and make my child into a believer. I think the humility of realizing that is one of the things I wish I had realized from the very beginning. I think related to that is what I've already mentioned about the heart. My goal as a parent is not just to manage a behavior. 'Cause as soon as I become a behaviorist, managing behavior, the gospel will never be central in my interaction with my kids.

There are people all over this country who are managing their kids and doing an excellent job of raising children who do the right things and say the right things and they're doing it with both forms of behaviorism. You don't need the gospel for that. But if my focus is on the heart and their need of grace, then I have no hope but the power of the gospel and the grace of God. It really shuts me up to that and puts me on my knees to be in prayer for my kids and to be pursuing them in very evangelical ways.

Ansley Kynes:

Dr. Tripp, what would you say is the biblical role of a parent?

Dr. Tripp:

In a nutshell, I would say the biblical role is to shepherd the hearts of your kids. It's to be showing them their need of grace. Their need of God. Their need of God's mercy. Helping them to understand that there are things about us that are wrong because we're part of a fallen race. It's only God who can free us and deliver us and enable us to know him. I think shepherding their heart, those are the things I put on the category, shepherding the heart. I think is the primary responsibility of the parent. Not just managing behavior. Obviously, I'm assuming things like, food, clothing, shelter, all those kinds of things, obviously we need to care for their needs in all those ways. But I think in terms of the parental nurturing of a child, shepherding the heart is really a key.

Ansley Kynes:

How can that concept play out in everyday parenting?

Dr. Tripp:

Think through the decisions they make. Understand, helping them to understand motivational things. No one has better resources than a Christian, for motivation. Take things for example, like pride rather than humility. Love of self rather than love for others. Anger rather than peacemaking. Hatred rather than love. Rebellion rather than submission. Envy rather than generosity of heart towards others. There are so many motivational contrasts we have in the scriptures that help us to understand human motivation.

I think I want to help my kids understand those things. But I also want to help them understand that is the grace of God. It is the power of God that enables us to do what is right. I saw a wonderful illustration with that one time with one of my sons. We were at their house. They were having a large party, probably 60 or 80 people at their house. His three year old son got bowled over by some other kid. He was upset. My son picked him up and he hugged him and said, "It's upsetting when someone's unkind to you, isn't it?" This little was quivering lip and nodding yes, to his daddy. "Who can help you to forgive? Who can help you to move on and to be happy today anyway?" He said, "Jesus." "That's right. Jesus can help you. We're going to pray for you and we'll pray that Jesus would help you."

He prayed with him. And the child was able to get through this feeling of being upset over being really wronged. And move on. I think that was a very beautiful picture that nurture that is helping a child realize, you're struggling right now, with feeling hurt and upset. You want to just wallow in it. He didn't use those words. But that was the issue. Jesus can help you. Jesus can help you forgive the person that sinned against you. Jesus can help you to move one. We're going to pray and ask him to do that.

I think that taking things to God and identifying those struggles is so important. And even identifying those struggles in ourselves. Living with integrity with our kids. Because sometimes we'll give kids insights into

their struggles by being transparent enough to share our struggles. Identity the things we're struggling with. I think shepherding kids and even helping them, modeling for them, going to God in our times of anxiety and fear and even be willing to talk about that with our kids, I think it's such an important thing.

Ansley Kynes:

Could you give us some ideas of how to really dig deeper as parents and expose some of these deeper heart issues?

Dr. Tripp:

One of the things I recommend for parents, and of course, as kids get older, I know that your audience is an audience really anticipating childbirth and those early days. But as our kids get older, even with preschoolers as I already have illustrated, you could use the language of the heart to describe behavior and you're letting them know that not only that you disapprove of the behavior but your concern is what's going on inside. I think as kids get older, we can talk to them about heart attitudes. We can talk for example, about things like revenge rather than entrusting myself to God.

One of the things I recommend to parents is do a heart notebook with your kids. Talk to them about ... Look up every passage you can find about revenge. Write the passages out in your heart notebook. Look up examples in the Bible of people taking revenge. Think about what does revenge look like in a six year old. They'll be able to tell you. So that you're talking those things through and you're helping your children develop an understanding of those heart struggles that push and pull behavior. You could do that with revenge, love of self, pride, fear of man, anger, envy, covetousness, you could go through a whole list of illustrations of that.

If you look up passages of scripture, talk about the passages. Do this in non-confrontational times. Because I think, the greatest games we make with our kids in understanding God's ways are not in times of confrontation. 'Cause in confrontational times, we're upset, we're anxious, we're fearful, we're tense, [inaudible 00:18:51] defensive. Those are never our finest teaching moments. But non-confrontational times you can teach kids those attitudes of heart and those heart issues.

I think with early kids, early on, I think helping kids, for example, I think one of the key things in the first five years is teaching kids to be under authority. That you have to honor and obey mommy and daddy. 'Cause that's what Ephesians 6 says, children obey your parents of the Lord. Honor your father and your mother that it might go well with you. And you might enjoy long life on the earth. But the way we teach them that is not just by demanding obedience or demanding honor. I think the way we teach them that is by giving the world view that supports the idea of honoring and obeying mom and dad.

Reminding them that there's a God in heaven who's good. He's given your mom and daddy wisdom and maturity and life experience. He's put you in a family to be nurtured and to be loved and cared for and protected. It is a blessing for you to obey mommy and daddy. We insist on your obedience because we know that's what's good for you. So that we're making the presentation of the necessity of obedience. So it's not focused on you've got to obey me, it becomes a self-serving thing where I'm demanding a response from my kids.

But if a presentation of obedience is focused on the goodness of God, the fact that God put you in a family to be nurtured and cared for in submission to mommy and daddy in these early years is going to be a pathway of blessing for you. God promises it'll go well with you. You will enjoy a long life. I think the way we talk to them about obedience, even about their behavior and understanding their heart, all those things are so powerful in the day-to-day nurture of our kids.

Ansley Kynes:

Speaking to that, as you talk about obedience and submission and authority, some people may hear those words and think that it's license for control or even the abuse of our children. Why is that not biblical?

Dr. Tripp:

It's never appropriate for us to use our kids for our ends. Our kids don't exist to serve us. They don't exist to serve our pride or to serve our appetite for control or management or anything like that. We're in this role of nurturing our kids. That's why I think the emphasis really has to be on the goodness of God. That there's a God in heaven who's good. He put you in a family. Mommy and daddy's role is to nurture you and love you and care for you and protect you and teach you so that you can be a person who lives with wisdom. God put you in a family for that reason.

For you to obey mommy and daddy and honor mommy and daddy, it puts you in a place of responding to our correction, our nurture and our direction, which is good for you, 'cause God promises his wonderful blessings, it'll go well with you and you will enjoy a long life. Those are blessings you want. So mommy and daddy insist on your obedience not because we want to be served, but because we know it's what's good for you. We want to see these blessings come to you of having it go well with you and enjoying a long life.

I think we're really making a very gracious presentation of it. And the presentation is really rooted in God and God's goodness rather than just my desire to be served or make demands of you because I want kids that will respond to my voice commands. The other way that comes out, is when they disobey me and I personalize their disobedience, I get angry with them because they've disobeyed. I really personalize their disobedience. Who's it about? It's about me. I can't believe you did that to me. I can't believe you said that to me. Who do you think you are?

That's all about me. That's not about God and the glory of God. That's not about the good of the child. I personalized your disobedience and I've made me the object of it. I think that just undermines everything we want to do as parents.

Ansley Kynes:

That really highlights what we, as parents, are worshiping too. You talk about that in your book, how children are wired to worship. Explain what that means for our kids and for us as parents.

Dr. Tripp:

Temptation, if I can pick up on what you just said, the temptation for us as parents is, I want kids that will obey me and respond to me and do what I told them to do without giving me a lot of argument and lip because that makes my life convenient. It makes me look good. I'm full of pride. I want to look good. My kids are my calling card. Don't make me ashamed boy, you do what I say. That's all so incredibly self-serving and is really just focused on my idols of the heart, my pride, I want to look good, I've got the fear of man. I want to be improved by others. I want to be respected. I want convenience. I want ease. It's all incredibly self-serving.

I think we need to repent of that and continually be repenting of that, turning from all those motivations. I think the kids, kids are made for God, we're made for glory. We're made in the image of God. Part of what that means, I think, is that we're made for wonder and joy and delight and we're made to marvel and to be awed and to be filled with wonder over things that are spectacular and are outside of us.

Our tendency is to focus on this very narrow personal idolatry, pride and performance, pleasure and sensuality, possessions, power and influence. All those things that, those tawdry things. Rather than see the wonder of who God is, the way of God. Part of the parent's role is to show the wonders of who God is to our kids so that we're always talking to them about God and how great and grand and marvelous God is.

I am persuaded that you can engage even little children in that. Just even getting them to allow their minds to imagine a being that is infinite. We can never wrap our minds around that, but we can amaze our kids and dazzle them with that truth, that God is infinite in all of his attributes. He's infinitely good. He's infinitely powerful. He's infinitely wise, infinitely knowing, he's all-knowing. I think kids can be dazzled by those things and can be drawn into discussions of those ideas so easily.

I think parents miss those opportunities so often because we end up, our focus is so much on managing behavior and telling them what to do and not to do. Stop doing that. Leave her alone. That's the kind of stuff. We're not giving a bigger picture of this glorious and marvelous God to our kids. I think that's the kind of thing we want to be doing all the time with our kids and progressively. As they get older and older, we do it



with more and more complex concepts. Or delve more and more deeply into the attributes of God. Talking about God and who God is and helping them to see God in everything is such an important part because it really reaches the deepest needs of their hearts.

We're made for joy. We're made for wonder. It's in his right hand that there's pleasures forever more. Those pleasures of knowing God, delighting in God are inexhaustible. Even eternity will not exhaust the pleasures of knowing God and delighting in God because we'll never get to the end of the infinitely glorious attributes of God. 'Cause we'll always be finite creatures. We'll never fully scope him out. I think having kids raised with a sense of wonder and awe of who God is, is such a powerful thing for them, because it's reality. It's the reality in which they live. It meets the deepest needs of their hearts because they're made for God. They're made for God's glory.

Audra Haney:

That is all of part one for our discussion with Dr. Tripp, but please join us next week as we share the rest of Dr. Tripp's interview and as we explore our heart motives as parents and examine how we can best link communication and correction in our parenting. Please visit our website for today's show notes, transcript and more information about Dr. Tripp and his ministry. You can also buy our pre-parenting Bible study for couples and small groups, called Your Newborn Promise Project. For our special podcast listeners, you can get 20% off the book and other resources with the coupon code NPPodcast. You can find that at [grahamblanchard.com](http://grahamblanchard.com)