

Freedom WKND: Heart-Centered Parenting

Behavioral Change That Lasts a Lifetime

Hook

Main Point: *Lasting behavioral change needs to focus on the individual's heart, not his or her actions.*

There is no denying the influence that Hollywood has on normalizing certain perspectives on bravery, intimacy, family and even parenting.

Teacher Instruction: *Select five movies from the below list, and write the titles on the whiteboard. Ask the class to order them based on "Realism and Relatability." While you are doing this, ask the class for their explanation as to why they ranked them the way they did. Feel free to add some of your favorites if they are not on this list!*

Note of caution: If you have a favorite and want to deviate from this list, do not select R-rated films.

Cheaper by The Dozen

Finding Nemo

Pursuit of Happyness

Freaky Friday

Meet the Parents

Mrs. Doubtfire

INTRO TO VIDEO: Today, North Campus Minister to Adults James McKinney will kick off our discussion around "Heart-Centered Parenting," and then we will discuss as a LifeGroup Bible Study what this looks like in our everyday lives.

Teacher Note: *The provided video will help you set up your LifeGroup Bible Study conversation and allow you to focus on the practical integration of what is being taught. While we highly encourage you to use the video, you do not have to, and the curriculum below will guide you through the lesson.*

Should you choose to use the video, you can review the lesson for your own edification and simply use the content provided under "Took" to help provide practical takeaways for all in your LifeGroup Bible Study.

Book

Deuteronomy 6:1–9 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Biblical parents must be intentional.

Q: What are some commands given in these verses?

Q: How do we love God with our heart, soul and might as verse 5 calls us to?

Let's make sure there is a clear understanding of the "heart" as it is spoken of and addressed throughout the Scriptures. In fact, the verses we read from Deuteronomy are from a section of a well-known prayer that the Jewish people prayed every morning and evening for centuries, and still do. That prayer is called the *Shema* (pronounced *shuh-ma*). Within the full Shema are two references to "heart"; the Hebrew word used here for "heart" is *levav*.

Throughout the history of the world, every culture has had its own thoughts on how the heart worked and what it was for. For the Israelites, however, they knew the heart was an organ in the chest that sustained life. In fact, 1 Samuel 25:37 tells of an individual who had a heart attack.

They believed that all decisions and morality were derived from the heart.

Within the pages of Scripture, we read numerous verses that say "believe in your heart" (e.g., Romans 10:9). Jeremiah 17:9 shows us that it is the heart where connections and understanding is made, and in the entire book of Proverbs we see that it is in the heart where wisdom dwells. Throughout the Scriptures, the heart is where we think and make sense of the world.

Yes, the heart is an organ, but when we read the Scriptures and hear the words of Jesus (Luke 6:45) speaking of the relationship between our heart and our behavior, we see so much more than just an organ that keeps our blood flowing.

Within these verses in Deuteronomy, we are instructed as parents to be intentional in how we chase after the things of God, but also to be intentional in how we parent our kids to chase after the things of God.

Deuteronomy was written by Moses, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, as he was about to lead Israel into the Promised Land. This land was the fulfillment of a promise made to Abraham centuries before (Genesis 12). This promise had been passed down generation to generation for many years, yet Moses knew he would not be able to enter the Promised Land because of how he had offended God (Numbers 20).

So, here we are – Moses and Israel on the cusp of entering the Promised Land. If we stop to think about it, Deuteronomy is really like reading Moses' "last words." Anyone who has lost a loved one understands the significance of "last words." Moses knew he wasn't going to go with his people; think about how reflective he must have been about his life of following God.

In these verses, Moses urged the Israelites to chase after the things of God and to let that chase change their behavior forever. Moses urged them to live a changed life in light of how God saved them from slavery and decades of wandering. Even more so, to teach these truths to their kids so that they share the same devotion to God despite not having experienced the same journey with God directly.

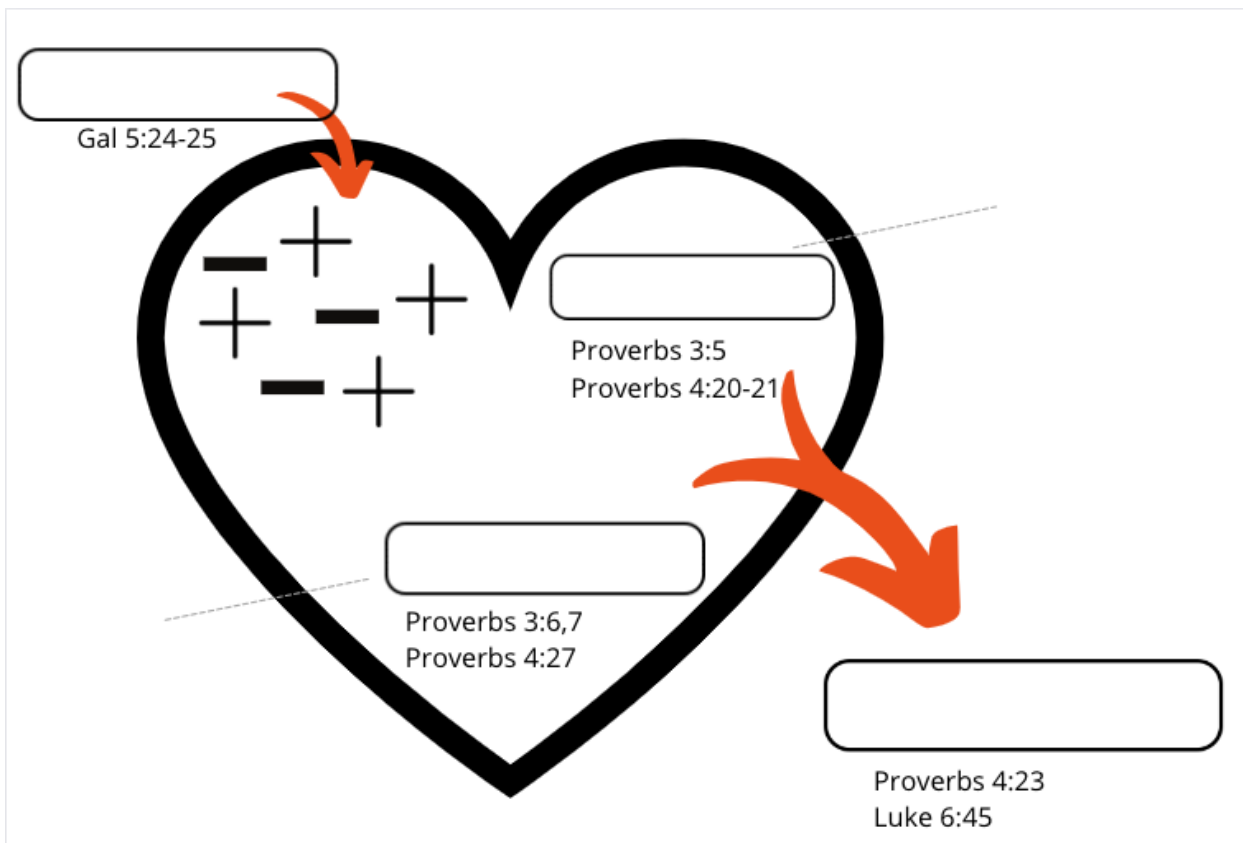
The reason these verses call us to love God with our heart, soul and might is so that every aspect of our being – our heart – is grounded on all things of God, because within Scripture, our heart is the center of our existence. That is why Proverbs 4:23 warns us so clearly to *“Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it”* (NIV). It is from our heart that:

- Our life is sustained.
- We discern right from wrong.
- We experience fear, depression, anxiety and joy.
- We make decisions.
- Desires originate.
- The Enemy can influence and manipulate us toward evil.

Q: How does the content of our heart actually become actions/behavior/words?

This leads us to “Heart-Centered Parenting.”

Teacher Note: *Whether you are using the video or not, the handouts are for the class to fill in as they listen to your teaching or follow along with the video.*



Luke 6:45 [Read]

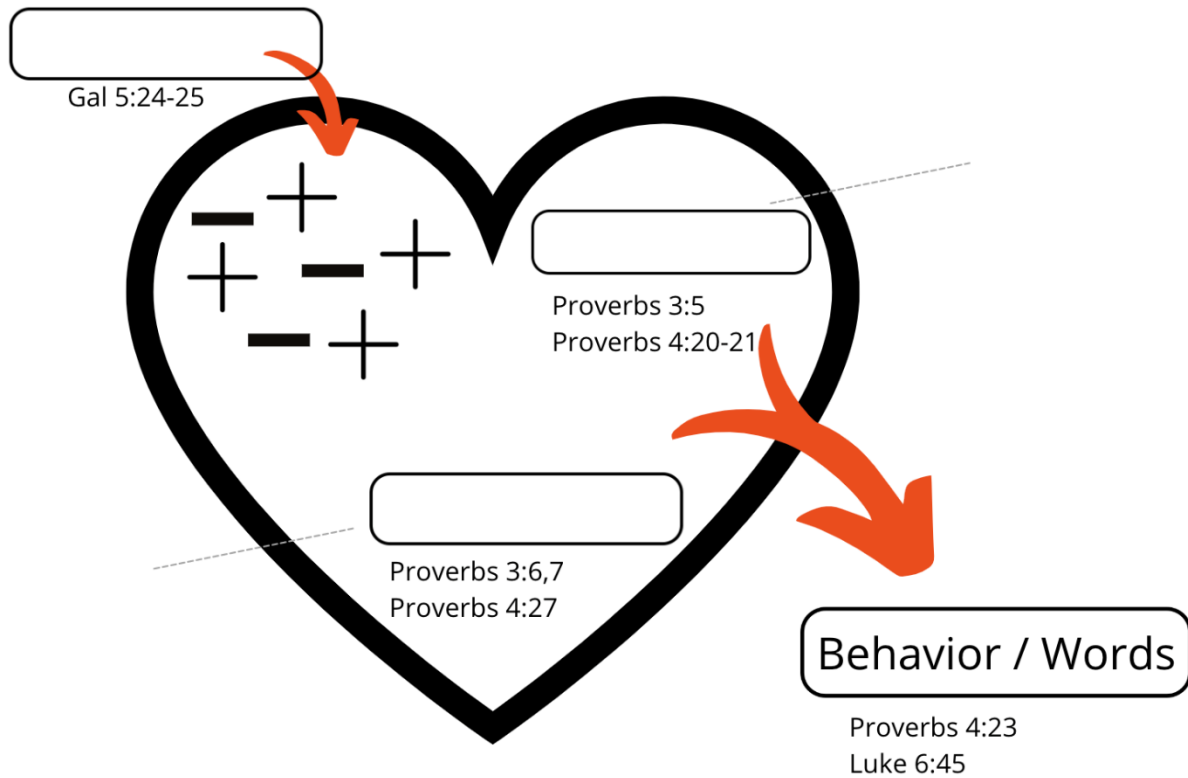
Talking Point 2: Our behavior is an overflow of our heart.

Q: What are we trying to accomplish through our discipline and the rules we establish at home?

Q: Based on these words from Jesus, what should we be focusing on if we want to see a change in behavior?

In the surrounding verses, Jesus speaks to many different behavior issues that are common to all of us. Issues such as loving and caring for people we like and don't like. He talks about the harm we experience in judging others while warning about being aware of our own shortcomings. He even talks about the upside of living a life built upon His truth ... not just an acceptance of His truth, but a full devotion to His truth. In this verse, in full clarity, Jesus tells us that it is the contents of our heart that produce our behavior and words.

Q: As parents, is there anything else we are constantly correcting besides the behavior and speech of our kids? *No, those two categories are everything!*



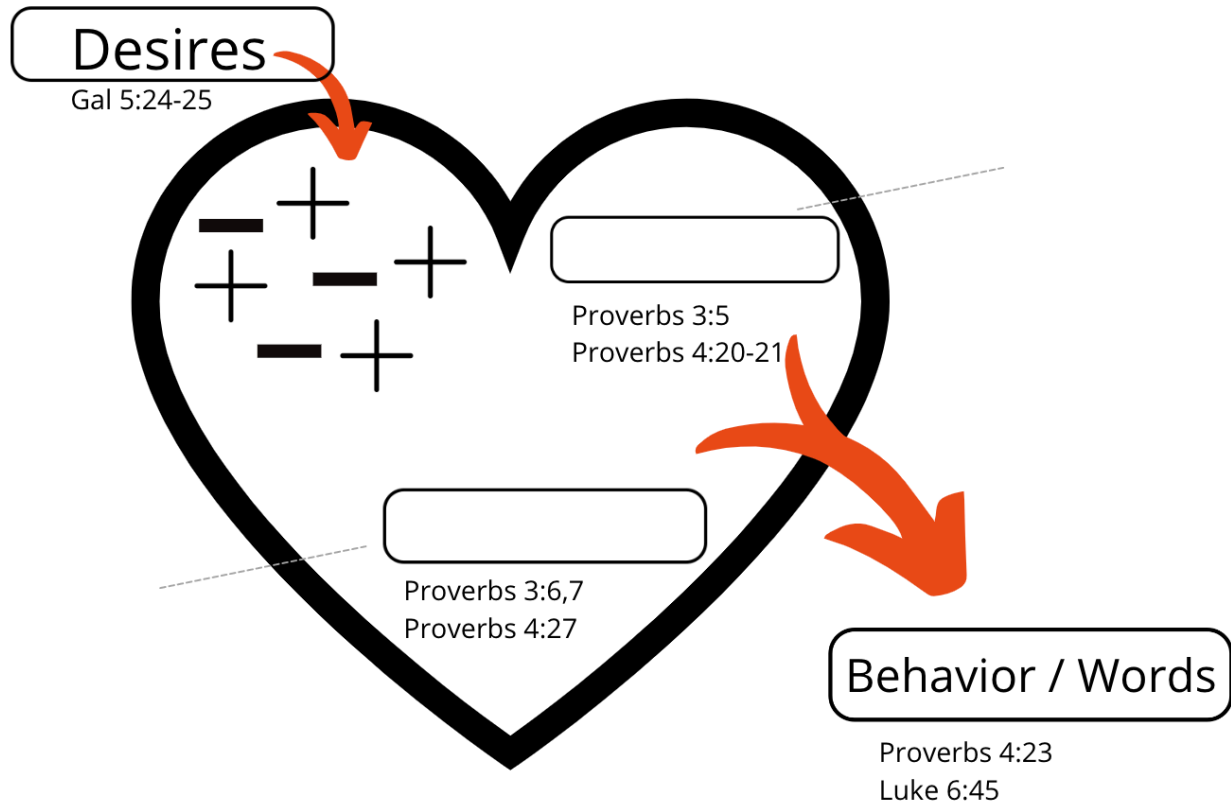
So if Jesus has identified the heart as the source of behavior, then let's shift our attention to what is *within the heart*.

Talking Point 3: Our heart is full of sinful and righteous desires.

Galatians 5:24–25 [Read]

Q: Who has made it this far into the day without sinning?

As long as you are breathing, sinful desires are going to create challenges for you because it is our desires, both good and bad, that take up real estate in our heart.



The goal is, over time, that the desires of our heart are more in step with that of the Spirit within us than of the flesh. That is the truth laid out in Galatians 5:24–25

And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

Paul is telling those of us who have surrendered our life to Jesus Christ that the enslavement to sin that once held us bondage has been crucified. We now have the ability to pursue righteousness. But he then goes on to add a condition to it with “if.”

There is a premise to the promise. We have to do the work and “live by the Spirit.” As we keep in step with the Spirit, the prominence of the righteous desires within our heart will overpower the sinful desires. Again, if we are breathing ... we are sinning. But walking in step with the Spirit, over time, strengthens us in our pursuit to be more like Jesus.

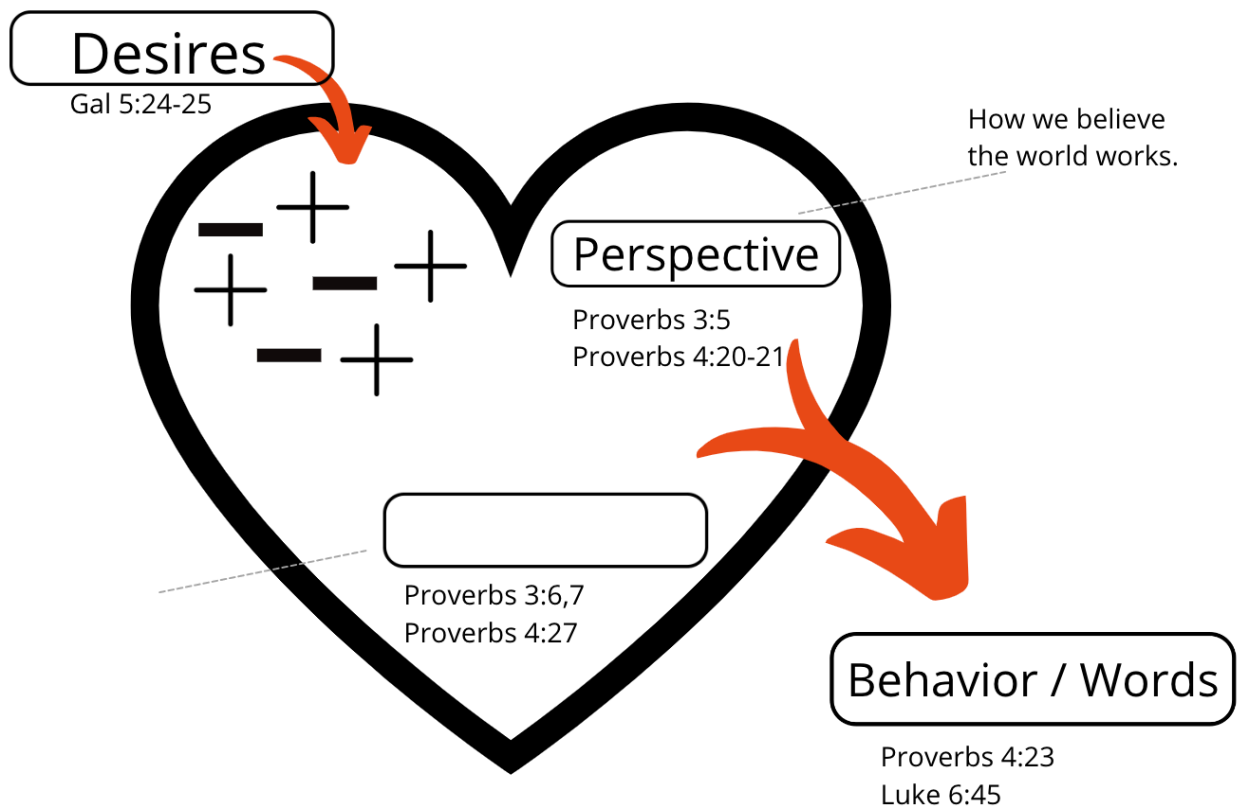
Q: So knowing that both sinful and righteous desires are going to take up real estate in our heart, how is it determined which desire will drive behavior and/or words?

That is revealed to us in Proverbs 3:5–7 (NIV):

Trust in the Lord with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways submit to him,
and he will make your paths straight.
Do not be wise in your own eyes;
fear the Lord and shun evil.

Within these three verses, we see two very clear decision filters that reside within our heart. The first is a filter of *perspective*, and the second is a filter of *values*.

Talking Point 4: Perspective reveals how we believe the world works.



It is this filter that stops us from jumping out of a plane at 30,000 feet without a parachute because we understand that gravity is a real aspect of the world we live in.

Within Proverbs 3:5, we are told very clearly that we are not to lean on our own understanding and that we need to “trust in the Lord with all your heart.” **With everything in our being we need to acknowledge the truth that we do not fully understand everything about how the world works.** We are not the Creator, and it is

foolish of us to assume we have a full understanding of His created world. Isaiah 55:8–9 also speaks to this truth:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Q: What shapes how we believe the world works (a.k.a., our perspective)?

There are many things in our world that shape our perspective. Our family upbringing, media, culture, overall personal experience, and of course, the Bible shape our perspective. Unfortunately, most Christians give more significance to their personal experience than the Bible when it comes to shaping perspective. Don't believe me? Just look at the category of premarital sex.

In 2011, a Christian magazine reported that 80 percent of self-identified Christians have had sex before marriage. At the time of this survey, the non-Christian segment reported back with 88 percent having had sex before marriage.

The Scriptures speak very clearly that sex is to be reserved for marriage, so why would 80 percent of Christians have sex outside of marriage? Well, James 1:14–15 gives us a glimpse as to why.

But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

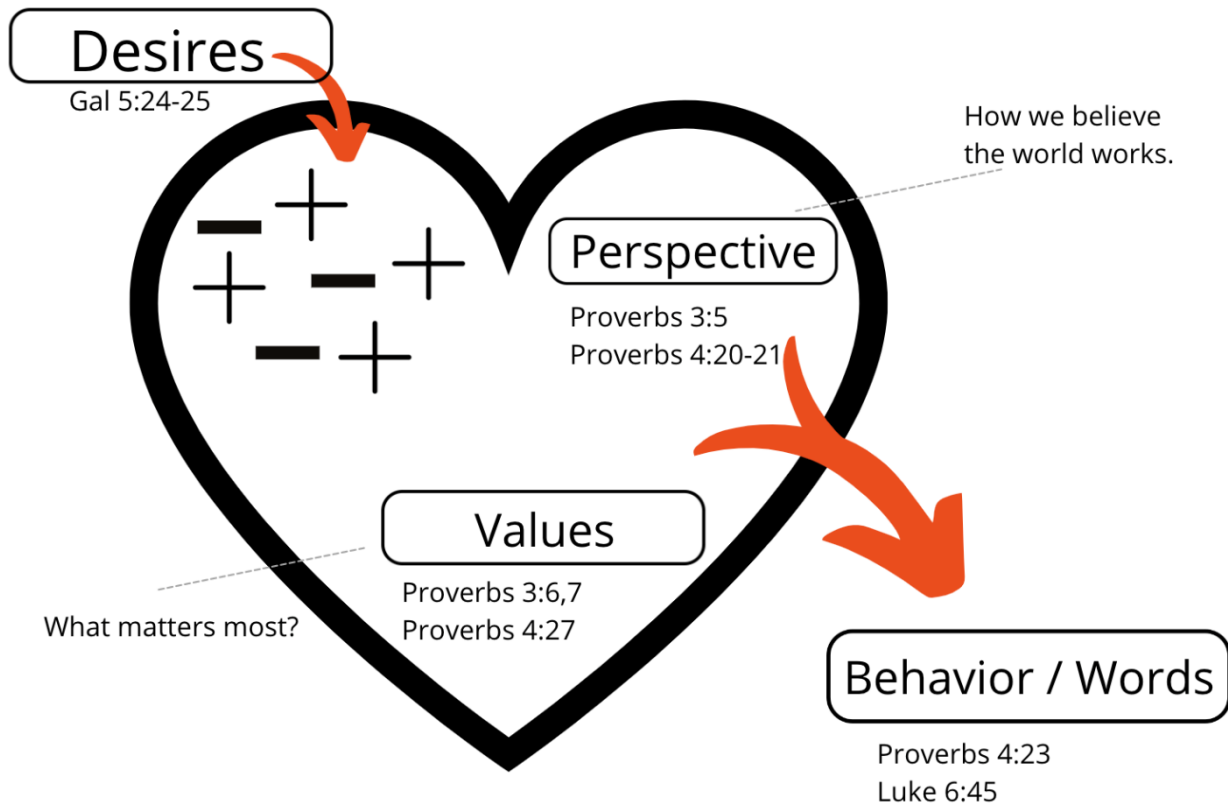
The reason that the Christian perspective on premarital sex is no different than that of an unbelieving world is that consequences are not always experienced immediately. James uses the term “fully grown.” This image points to the reality of a process.

Rest assured that if Christians experienced immediate consequences the moment they had sex outside of marriage, their perspective would be drastically different.

Yet our God doesn't want a relationship derived out of compliance, but one built upon love and obedience. We must trust that His design is best and that while we might not agree, or fully understand, we need to obey.

That surrendering of “self-importance,” that exercise of humility is what Proverbs 3:6–7 speaks of and where we see the *values* filter in play.

Talking Point 6: Our values reveal what is most important to us.



To go back to the premarital sex discussion, is there a chance that a believer might not actually know that the Bible calls us to purity until marriage? Yes, but if there is anything the Church has messaged well, it is that.

So the issue is not that Christians do not know what the command is, but that they *value* self-gratification far more than obedience. To be clear though, this is true for *every single one of us*. **Every time we exhibit a behavior that is in opposition to God's teaching and design, we are choosing self over obedience.** This was just as true in the Garden of Eden as it is now.

North Campus Pastor Connor Bales coined the term "sin of autonomy." The sin of autonomy is predicated on elevating ourselves above God's teachings, above God's design, and even above God Himself. The sin of autonomy places self above everything and has us believing that we are accountable to nothing or no one. **Every single one of us battles the sin of autonomy, and we exercise this sin every time we choose to value self over obedience to God.**

Just as there are numerous things that shape our perspective, there are numerous things that shape our values.

Q: Aside from self-gratification, what other priorities of our heart shape our values?

We value public opinion, importance, entertainment, happiness, inclusion, comfort, peace, and we even value honoring God. The problem though is that, more often than not, we value one of those other categories more than we value honoring God. Each of us values various things in varying degrees of significance, but within the United States, “entertainment” and “inclusion” certainly rank high.

Need proof? Gather some friends who claim Jesus is their Lord and Savior and ask them if they have watched numerous episodes or seasons of *Game of Thrones*, *True Blood* or most recently, *Euphoria*. If they are honest, many likely, if not most, will say yes. These television series gained massive popularity and were constantly talked about in the hallways at offices and schools, and in online forums.

Teacher Note: *Below is a real-life example used in the video. Please consider a real-life scenario from your own life should you choose to teach this material live instead of using the video.*

The church has always been significant in the life of my wife and me, and we’ve known about how important it is to model to our kids God’s call to participate in the work of the Church. Because of my years as a youth pastor, we also knew that there would be a time in which our perspective and values, as they related to youth sports and the church, would be challenged. That is actually why we delayed our son’s playing travel ball for so long. That’s what they call “select” in Southern California.

Well, one summer my son was invited to play on a travel team for fall mini season where no travel was required. We were so honored for our son, as if we had anything to do with it, that we accepted the invitation. Well, the success continued; the tournaments continued; and lo and behold, we found ourselves on a travel ball team. It was a slow progression that happened because of the appeal of having “our son be such an amazing athlete that he would be asked to play on a travel team.”

It was then that my wife and I set a rule that we would only miss church one Sunday a month for baseball. Well, about three months into this journey, the Holy Spirit prompted me with a conviction to look at my family calendar. In doing so, I realized that while either my wife or I had not missed more than one Sunday a month, my son had been missing more than half the Sundays each month.

Immediately my wife and I had a decision to make. Do we hold to God’s truth that about the importance of raising our kids in a way that our family priorities are to mirror His priorities, and therefore share our boundaries and guidelines with the coaching staff ... and risk being kicked off the team?

Or ...

Do we continue on the path we were on because I don't want to teach my son it's OK to quit on your team?

Both are valuable lessons, but both lessons are based on two different *values*. The first is based on valuing the truth of God and His priorities. And if we are really honest, the second is based on valuing the opinion of others. It's not really about grit and perseverance.

Well, because of the perspective of priorities that my wife and I shared, and the value of honoring God with our lives and our parenting, we approached the coaching staff and shared what our family guidelines were and if they wanted our son to be part of the team, they would have to be agreeable to them.

Guess what ... they were agreeable! There is so much to discuss on just the topic of parenting through youth sports with a biblical perspective, that we cannot cover it in just one lesson.

But know, that after our conversation with the coaching staff, we shared everything with our kids to show them how real life plays out so that *their* perspective and value filters can be shaped in alignment with God's perspective and values.

Do my wife and I always get it right? Not at all ... but this time we did.

Teacher Note: *Below are questions to leverage for discussion items within your class to help provide very practical and tactical takeaways. Feel free to augment as you see best for your class.*

Took

Main Point: *Lasting behavioral change needs to focus on the individual's heart, not actions.*

As a follower of Jesus Christ, our main goal (aka the Greatest Commandment) is to love God and love others. Jesus lays this out clearly in Matthew 22:36–40:

"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "**You shall love the Lord your God** with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: **You shall love your neighbor** as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

As parents, we are raising future adults. So if *our* main purpose, as laid out by Jesus Christ, is to love God and love others, then we need to be raising our kids toward this main purpose as well.

As we raise, as we discipline, as we correct, as we praise, and even as we simply hang out, we need to be showing our kids the *perspective* and *values* of God.

All of which is found in His Word.

Q: What are some of your parenting failures/struggles? *This can help ease tension and have people open up – we all fail from time to time and can look back and either laugh about it, or help others learn from our mistakes.*

Q: Parenting can be challenging. What are some of your parenting highlights? *Yes, it is OK to celebrate our “wins.”*

Q: Our highlights usually don’t include moments of correction and discipline. Reflecting on your time as a parent, how often do you find yourself responding to the behavior and not the perspective or values that drove the behavior?

Q: How many of us can confidently say we are being intentional about disciplining our kids? *[Be sensitive that this will make many uncomfortable.]*

The “Heart-Centered Parenting” model that James McKinney walked us through really is about discipleship. For so many of us, discipleship was never modeled for us, so there is a good chance that we have not been super intentional to disciple our own kids. As parents it’s never too early or too late to disciple our kids! If you don’t start early – someone else will disciple your kid into *something*, so it is up to you to point them to Jesus! If you start later in their lives, you might think it is too late ... but you’d be wrong!

Jesus called the 12 disciples to live and walk with Him when they were grown men. That discipleship relationship lasted for three years. During that time, Jesus continued to challenge the perspective and values of the 12 disciples and all who would listen.

God has given us our kids to point them to Jesus, and this responsibility does not cease when they head off to college.

Let’s commit this week to seize a moment every day:

Teacher: *Please feel free to augment this list based on the specific life-stage of your LifeGroup.*

- Ask them about a high point and low point in their day and ask, “What do you think God is doing in that?”
- Ask them what is going on in their life for which you can pray.
- Hug them and say something to the effect of “I’m so proud to be your dad/mom and that God created you to be [insert specific characteristic]”
- Ask them to pray for you in some way.

Bonus points for those who commit to read a passage of Scripture and unpack it as a family.

Challenges

THINK: Everything we've been discussing in this lesson is discipleship. Discipleship is simply orienting our life to be in alignment with the perspective and values of Christ. All of which is contained in the Scriptures. Were you discipled? Was discipleship ever modeled for you? Would you consider yourself a discipler?

PRAY: Pray for strength and protection right now! The Enemy wants nothing more than to discourage you, and those who respond to this lesson, so that no progress is made in pointing our kids to Jesus. Pray that our God would put a hedge of protection around you and all those He entrusts to you the weekend that this lesson is delivered.

ACT: Commit today to point your kids to Jesus in everything. In your praise, in your everyday conversations, and even in your moments of correction.