

Session 8

How to Start Connecting with the Heart

Summary of the Video (from the Leaders Guide, page 42)

“Learn what makes a heart hard and ways to begin the softening process. Whether your child is 3 or 18, this session will give you practical ways to connect with your kids on a deeper level. Parenting is a challenge but a few things can make all the difference between distance and closeness. Put these principles into practice in your family and your kids will be glad you did.”

Introduction

- *Children can only handle as much pressure as the relationship can stand.
- *Parents often ask us, “Where do we start?” The foundation is forming a good relationship.
- *Develop closeness— this is a goal that will see fruit later in life, after the hard work of parenting.

Relationship Opens a Child’s Heart

- *Some kids have “hard” hearts. We want to teach many things, but kids don’t want to receive it.
- *In this session we want to show you ways to soften your child’s heart: Example from counseling: Gary had opted out of family life. Parents felt like they’d lost Gary. Behavioral management had worked to produce behaviors, but the relationship suffered.
 - *Began by consistently greeting Gary
 - *They looked for opportunities to connect
 - *Many weeks were required to see even little changes, but they occurred.

Connecting Emotionally Takes Work

- *When kids are young it is easy to connect; we cuddle, read to them, tickle and play games. Over time we move into harder areas of instruction: our connecting time can suffer.
- *We must look for opportunities – be proactive-- as kids get older.
- *Jesus’ example: 2 blind men—Disciples shushed them but Jesus touched them. When the disciples wanted to turn the children away, Jesus said “Let the children come.”
- *Consider the story of Mary and Martha—Jesus commended the one who chose connection and relationship, not the one who had a “to do” list.
- *Mary also brought perfume and poured it on Jesus’ feet—The whole scene could have been uncomfortable for Jesus, but he commended her.
- *Sometimes our children make us uncomfortable—they interrupt our agenda, they talk too much.
- *We need to meet them where their needs are, and when they reveal those needs to us.
- *Do you know how your children like to be loved?
- *Sometimes we need to be touched when we want to be alone.

Some Roadblocks to connecting with your kids:

Tired

Busy

Not knowing how to connect

Fear of rejection

*Look for ways to connect, even when they appear not to want it.

*Sometimes we jump in too strongly (preaching) and they close up. Don't criticize at the times our children open up.

*Five year old Jason was resistant to instruction and there was much tension. When he got sick, Mom held him and was tender to him (like in younger years.) Jason seemed less resistant for a time, then went back to old ways. Mom noticed these changes and made it a point to rock him, and do some of the things that would increase touch and connection.

Ways to Connect with Your Kids

H Have fun. Enjoy life the way your kids do

E Eating together in a fun environment (avoid always "teaching" manners or nutrition) Plan the social part of the meal. "Special" meals—end of the week meal, important event meals

A Arrange activities (teamwork as families),
e.g., service projects: Allow children to be part of planning, or even let them lead

R Remember the Good Times. Talk about fun times, good times, things they did when they were babies.

Creates a heritage of family memories.

T Talk and listen. Share your lives. Listen without criticizing. (Log the things you need to address later.) Be active listeners. Draw them out. Ask questions.

Share stories about yourselves. Let them see your human side. This softens their hearts. You will learn about them and what's important to them.

The Gratefulness Principle

*Gratefulness increases closeness.

*Engage in actions that inspire gratefulness.

*God does this: Recognizing how much God has done for use (forgiveness) helps us forgive others. Romans 12:20 says, "Therefore if your enemy hungers, feed him: if he thirsts, give him a drink: for in so doing you will heaps coals of fire on his head." By doing nice things for others, even hard hearted people may realize their need to change.

*Family unity is aided by gratefulness.

The Overindulgence Trap

Overindulgence is giving kids more than their character can withstand.

*This is different for different kids; it depends on their ability to handle gifts.

*The solution is to stop giving, or change the focus to giving relational things rather than material.

*Focus on connecting.

*Make kids work harder for "things" so they will appreciate them.

*We must connect even when we don't want to, when we don't feel like it.

*It's a challenge. Connecting requires extra energy.

Quality time often happens spontaneously. Be flexible. Connection happens when we least expect it. Remember that God wants to connect with us. The 'great commandment' is to love God with all our heart. This is His priority for us.