

proportion to the level of its significance. They fixate on making all “A’s” in school, getting on the cheerleading squad, playing a video game, or wearing exactly the right clothes.

It’s understandable that our children want to escape pain. The problem is that the escape mechanisms of this world are all dead-ends. Jesus wants our children to “store up treasures in heaven where moth and rust don’t destroy.” He wants them to believe that “*It’s OK to desire pleasure but you’ll only find lasting pleasure in God.*”

FATHERING THE HEART BY GRACE

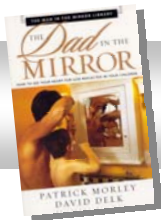
For too long, we’ve been administering Pepto Bismol when heart surgery is required. We try to get our children to behave without dealing with the beliefs of their hearts. Our fathering style has implicitly and explicitly led them to believe that their acceptance is based on their performance.

Children today are desperate to truly experience God’s grace. Look around and you will quickly see a brutal reality – for many children it is not their appendix that has ruptured, but rather their hearts.

APPLICATION

1. Which of these hearts, if any, best described you as a child? How has God helped you find healing and wholeness in Christ?
2. Which of these hearts best describe your children? What are the truths each child needs to learn? How will you seek to communicate these truths to them this week?

Pat Morley and David Delk have been working together to reach men for more than ten years. © 2003. Pat Morley and David Delk. All rights reserved. This article may be reproduced for non-commercial ministry purposes with proper attribution.



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A LOOK IN THE MIRROR™

EQUIPPING LEADERS IN THE BATTLE FOR MEN’S SOULS

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Understanding Your Child’s Heart

Adapted from *The Dad in the Mirror* (Zondervan)

Pat Morley and David Delk

Eight-year-old Kelly wasn’t feeling well when she went to bed. Mom went to the medicine cabinet and came back with a tablespoon of Pepto Bismol.

A few hours later, her mother heard crying and came to investigate, with dad not far behind. They put clothes on Kelly and rushed to the hospital, where she had surgery for a ruptured appendix.

What a powerful lesson for fathering! When we father for performance (behavior) and neglect fathering the heart (belief), it’s like taking Pepto Bismol for a ruptured appendix.

What does our culture do to a child’s heart? Here are four categories that can help you zero in on the state of your children’s hearts.

A child’s heart may become a...	What is this heart looking for?	How does Christ meet the needs of this heart?
Bruised Heart <i>Seen in: insecurity, lack of initiative, depression</i>	Approval Validation Attention Support	<i>It’s OK if life disappoints me because God will take care of me. (Hebrews 13:5)</i>
Inflated Heart <i>Seen in: talks too much, insensitivity, selfish, demeaning</i>	Happiness Power Admiration Possessions	<i>It’s OK that I’m not perfect because God sees me as perfect in Christ. (Romans 3:21-22)</i>
Hard Heart <i>Seen in: distant, loner, self-protecting, cold, mean</i>	Protection Truth Justification Approval	<i>It’s OK to allow myself to feel because, in the end, God will not let me down. (1 Corinthians 1:8-9)</i>
Addicted Heart <i>Seen in: hunger, fixation, desperation, drivenness</i>	Pleasure Escape Coping Possessions	<i>It’s OK to desire pleasure but you’ll only find lasting pleasure in God. (Romans 15:13; 1 Peter 1:8)</i>

A BRUISED HEART

At eleven years old and 175 pounds, Tommy didn't think he'd have fun playing baseball, but he actually began to enjoy it as the season wore on.

It was difficult for Tommy to swing and maintain his balance. He worked hard and, by the end of the season, could at least make contact.

Tommy came up to bat in the last inning of the last game. There wasn't anyone on base. He swung and hit a line drive over the pitcher's head into center field, then lumbered safely to first. Tommy was ecstatic.

He heard the coach yelling and motioning for him. Then the reality set in – he was being replaced by a pinch runner. Tommy went to the bench, buried his head in his hands and silently sobbed.

Our children will all feel like Tommy at some point. Suffering is inevitable in a fallen world. A child's heart becomes bruised when life slaps them down again and again. They believe they can never be good enough to live up to the expectations of others. They are ashamed, fearful, and insecure.

They become tentative and self-protective, believing that if they don't look out for themselves then nobody else will. They are overly sensitive and easily become emotional. They often enter a downward spiral of despair.

Jesus Christ has an answer for a bruised heart. It was said of him, "A bruised reed he will not break and a smoldering wick he will not put out" (Matthew 12:20). The message Jesus wants bruised or crushed children to remember is, "*It's OK if life disappoints me because God will take care of me.*" As the hymn goes, "God will make a way when there is no way."

AN INFLATED HEART

Angela practiced the piano an hour every day. She worked hard to prepare for the district competition, and both she and her teacher were confident she would win and move on to the state level.

Angela listened to the other students perform and knew she was the best pianist of the group. She played her Mozart sonata flawlessly. When the judges announced the winner, Angela was glad they recognized how well she played. She bowed to the audience before walking back to her seat.

Some children protect themselves by trying to be the best at something to avoid disappointment. Their hearts become proud. They are often condescending toward others. They seek approval from an "inner circle" of peers who can validate their performance and help them feel OK.

Ironically, an inflated heart is often a response to lingering feelings of inadequacy. A child gravitates to an area where he can excel, then invests so much of his identity into his performance that he is unable to admit any

weaknesses. He keeps up this façade by constantly being critical of others.

Jesus helps an inflated heart by giving us acceptance that is not based on our performance. God loves us not because of what we do but because of "the righteousness from God that comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe" (Romans 3:22). God's message for the inflated heart is, "*It's OK that I'm not perfect because God sees me as perfect in Christ.*"

A HARD HEART

"Jeff, I'm home! Jeff, where are you?" Jeff rolled over and turned the page in his comic book. He heard his father's footsteps coming up the stairs.

"Hey buddy, what are you doing?" Jeff continued to read.

"I'm sorry I missed the scout meeting tonight. Did you have fun?"

Jeff spoke without looking at this father. "It was alright."

"Well I promise I won't miss next week, I've got it on my calendar."

"Great, dad," Jeff said with a small sigh. He hoped his father would finish soon so he could get back to his comic book. The X-Men were in a really tough spot this time and he wanted to finish before it was time for bed.

Pain can harden a child. They are tired of feeling disappointment, and their response is to cut themselves off from their heart. They often do not display "normal" emotional reactions to situations.

When they allow themselves to feel, they are surprised at the depth of their anger. They lash out both verbally and physically at those around them. Emotions make them lose control and so they stuff their feelings. It's easier not to feel than to deal with a lack of control or the pain of disappointment.

This child must face that our lives will always involve disappointment. But they also need to know that this world is not our home, and that God has promised to bring us into an everlasting life of joy, peace, and fulfillment in the world to come. Jesus wants a child with a hard heart to believe that "*It's OK to allow myself to feel because, in the end, God will not let me down.*"

AN ADDICTED HEART

Alicia looked in the mirror and liked how she looked in her new outfit. She couldn't wait to hear what her friends had to say!

Everything went great until lunch, when Jennifer came in wearing a new outfit, and she clearly looked better than Alicia. As Jennifer approached the table, Alicia stood up, smiled, and gave her a quick hug, doing her best to hide the disappointment she felt inside.

Children sometimes latch on to people, places, or things to meet their deepest needs. They commit to an activity, person, or possession way out of