

Text: Dt 6.1-9

In our series so far, I've emphasized the need to have a Scripture-saturated life, to have a Scripturally informed life by developing godly habits and modeling Scriptural application to life.

Today we will continue with the same theme with this emphasis: your opportunities to effect a formative influence on others (especially children) is every moment you are present with them.

I will restate some things I said earlier, but I plan to expand on the subject in a different way than the earlier messages.

The passage is Dt 6.1-9.

Our title today is:

Attempting to Form Lives on the Time-share Plan

A reminder, we face an opponent for hearts and minds, our worldly culture.

A few thoughts on culture:

“Culture ... means the integrated pattern of knowledge, belief and behavior that underlies [any] interpretation of [life].”¹

- Why do people do things in similar ways in our culture?

You see this when people move here from another culture — our ways seem strange to them, theirs seem strange to us.

- Some of our cultural behaviours are merely “common ways to function in a society” — like table manners: vary by culture, but spiritually/morally neutral.
- Much of our current culture reflects the evil spirit of our age.

² Tim 3.1-3 ¶ But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. ² For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good,

¹ Paraphrased from Tedd Tripp and Margy Tripp, *Instructing a Child's Heart* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 2008), 32.

“We are raising children [building disciples] in a dangerous culture that is impossible to quarantine. It seeps into our homes through cracks. The electronic game and entertainment industry offers a toxic culture to our children. If we are not self-consciously providing a culture rooted in truth, our children will be more influenced by the majority culture than they are by God’s truth.”²

I. The idea of formative instruction

A. Definitions from Tripp (remember, I am expanding “children” to “disciples” in these definitions)

“Formative instruction ‘forms’ or ‘shapes’ our children. It is not a single event, but a lifetime of interaction that is based on God’s revelation.”³

“Formative instruction is teaching that ‘forms’ our children. It enables them to root life in God’s revelation in the Bible. It provides a culture for our children, a culture that is distinctly Christian. It shows our children the glory and excellence of God. It helps them understand the dignity of mankind as God’s image bearers. It provides a way of interpreting life through the redemptive story of God, who reconciles people to himself.

“Formative instruction is ‘before the problem’ instruction. ...”⁴

B. The function or goal of formative instruction

Dt 6.1-2 ¶ “Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the judgments which the LORD your God has commanded *me* to teach you, that you might do *them* in the land where you are going over to possess it,² so that you and your son and your grandson might fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged.

1. That you and yours might have a reverential relationship with God

² Tripp and Tripp, 36.

³ Tripp and Tripp, 18–19.

⁴ Tripp and Tripp, 31.

2. That you and yours might have a successful life before God, in his service

“The goal of formative instruction is so that we and our children and our grandchildren may fear the Lord and walk in his ways, enjoying a long life.”⁵ [Or your disciples’]

II. The method of formative instruction

A. The “every-opportunity” approach (Dt 6.7)

Dt 6.7 You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.

1. From the text
 - a. When you sit down
 - b. When you walk by the way
 - c. When you lie down
 - d. When you rise up
2. Formal occasions: family worship, church worship/teaching, etc., planned teaching times
3. Informal occasions
 - a. At play or social events
 - 1) Simpler with children in your own home: play time, game time, holiday time
 - 2) More purposeful with adult disciples: “coffee at Tims,” engaging in sports [softball league, bowling, etc.]
 - b. In companionship events: traveling together for some reason, working together

I’m just mentioning a few things, we’ve mentioned things like this before.

I will say that one of the things I appreciated most about my father was his involvement in our lives. When we were kids, he would take us out for walks, take us to the

⁵ Tripp and Tripp, 37 [emphasis theirs].

park, go to the river to dig up sand for our sandbox... and take us with him on the trip.

When I was a teenager, he often took me on business trips and we had hours of conversation in the car.

B. A point of disagreement with Tripp

“Our times of corrective discipline are not the best context for teaching God’s ways to our children.”⁶

1. There is a sense in which this is true (more later)
2. However, if corrective discipline is administered carefully and biblically, it can carry much formative instruction
3. Now, children are primarily in mind here, but disciples endure discipline in some ways also
 - a. If in a formal class, whether one on one or in a group, attendance requirements, written assignments = a form/opportunity for corrective discipline
 - b. Personal interventions (rebukes) can also be formative

However, there are right ways and wrong ways and horrible ways to perform this aspect of training.

III. Short-circuits in formative instruction

A. The short-circuit of solving problems

1. Life is full of problems needing solutions
 - a. Children will come to you with problems [big and small]
 - b. Disciples will bring up problems they are having

“Simply solving the immediate problems will short-circuit our labors. We will be too focused on getting the problem behind us and getting on with life.

“Don’t think survival — think kingdom!”⁷

⁶ Tripp and Tripp, 33.

⁷ Tripp and Tripp, 37.

B. The short-circuit of isolation in company

1. We live in a very individualistic culture (fed by our media)

Cartoon of heaven, one angel talking to another while observing new arrivals: "I can't seem to get to them, they keep looking at their hands." (as if holding cell phones)

2. We can all be alone while together: we need to engage one another
3. That does not mean we must be "in teacher mode" all the time, but we must be involved in lives all the time

You know, I am saying these things and cringing inside, because I *like* being alone. *Doing my own thing...*

C. The short-circuit of assuming correcting bad behaviour is enough

1. You can give some instruction by correcting bad behaviour
2. If your only instruction is correcting bad behaviour, you aren't giving real formative instruction

[really a selfish perspective: "I want MY life to run SMOOTHLY."]

Conclusion:

We could say more, but it is time to close. I am just hitting highlights from the third chapter of the book. I'll close with this illustration:

"One evening when we were building our house, we found ourselves racing home in the midst of a thunderstorm. Just as we passed our neighbor's barn, it was struck by lightning. The lightning rods did their work, so no harm was done. But the flash of light dazzled us with its blinding brilliance. We immediately began talking about God who lives in unapproachable light. Remember, God says that the lightning bolts report to him and he sends them on their way (Job 38.35)."⁸

Our world has many such things that reveal the glory of God

- Stones, buildings, roads, sand, paths, rivers, and seas

⁸ Tripp and Tripp, 39.

- Bears, cattle, sheep, trees, grass, and flowers
- Sickness, tears, health, strength, youth, and old age

“He has done [all] this [and more] in order to display his glories to us. Everything in creation leads to God. Every opportunity to talk infuses life with an understanding that the ways and words of God are everything.”⁹

⁹ Tripp and Tripp, 39.