

## Parenting a Rocky-Hearted Child

### I. Who is the Thorny-Hearted Child?

- The Thorny Heart accepts certain elements of biblical truth.
- But — unlike the Rocky Heart — the Thorny Child seems more interested in the “shiny” parts of Christianity. They’re distracted by . . .
  - the “cares of the world.”
  - the deceitfulness of riches.
  - the pleasures of life.
  - a desire for other things.
- Because this child’s heart is attracted to the pleasures and comforts of life, it’s very easy to become disenfranchised with a religion that promises more service, sacrifice, work, and persecution than it promises streets of gold. Once the luster has worn off the new toy and the child sees the world dangling the shiny offerings of self-worship, his feelings once again plead loyalty to another master. Or, because this child’s faith was grounded in the idea of comfort, when life gets even a little hard and the anxious cares creep in and the prayers don’t bring immediate comfort, it’s all too easy to go searching for warmer security blanket. And finally the Word is choked out and the child’s life continues to be unfruitful.

### II. Do you have a Thorny-Hearted Child in your home?

- Has your son or daughter seemed to respond well to spiritual things in the past, but recently seems distracted by trite experiences and materialistic pleasures?
- These distractions can include money, philosophies that are more morally comfortable, and instant gratification.
- Basically, if your child who previously seemed very passionate about spiritual things has jettisoned it all and appears to have returned to his old passions, you may have a Thorny-Child.
- Also, your child might be a Thorny Child if they seem enthralled with the following:
  - Emotional experiences.
  - Spiritual materialism. Spiritual materialism is a kind of spiritual gift collector. Some people are preoccupied with keeping track of whether or not they’ve had all the right religious experiences, acquired all the right spiritual gifts, and participated in all the right church ministries. Again, what makes the Rocky and Thorny Hearts so deceptively dangerous is that they really do seem to embrace the good things in life. But remember, behavior is nothing without motivation.

### III. How do you cultivate your child’s Thorny-Heart like Jesus did?

- First, we need to love our kids. If we’re not totally invested in what’s right for them, we may not pay attention to them the way we should. We watch them sway and sing and exult at church, we see how passionate they are to win that reward for verse memorization. We hear them talk about the blessings and future glories of Heaven, and we assume everything’s okay. And it may be, but it may not be.

- This is why we need to watch for signs of emotionalism and spiritual materialism.
- Keep the focus on the Truth of God's person. It's okay to talk about the blessings of being a child of the King, but don't overemphasize it or neglect the fact that we've been called to sacrifice everything in this life. In the account of the rich young ruler, Peter arrogantly points out that he and his buddies had forsaken everything for Jesus, and Jesus validated his claim. He even told them that those who sacrificed family and home and land will receive one hundred fold more in the future and here on earth. And part of that one hundred fold would include persecution.
- Continue having high biblical expectations for your child — specifically things that allow him to experience the harder realities of being a Christian. **Service, sacrifice, study, and sanctification** are a nice alliterated start.

### III. What happens when our children transition from now heart to another?

- One response is the Matthew 5 response. They realize they're spiritually destitute, they mourn over their state, they humble themselves before God and soften the soil of their hearts, truly become a follower of Christ and hunger and thirst after righteousness. And it doesn't matter what persecutions and testings and tribulations come their way, they can rejoice and be glad in it.
- Unfortunately the other response is to become a Hard Heart. Many times I've been used by God to show a Rocky or Thorny Heart their need for Christ, and they get angry or bitter because they feel like God somehow let them down. They feel like they crossed all their "t's" and dotted all their "i's" and God didn't keep His end of the bargain. It's similar to what many people will feel who hear Jesus say, "*Depart from me. I never knew you.*" And they become hard and they don't want anything to do with the Truth.
- But that's okay. Rocky, Thorny, or Hard, they're all unsaved. The huge blessing of having a Hard-Hearted Child is that you and she both know she's unsaved. It's not a question or a maybe. The cards are on the table. And then we revolve our priorities and start parenting their Hard Heart.
- And don't lose hope if your child's Thorny Heart is revealed and they respond incorrectly. God's called you to be an Ambassador Parent. If you don't know what that is, please check our episode 26. That is the only parenting style that glorifies God.
- And remember, your child may cycle back and forth through them multiple times. But as long as you stay aware and intentional and premeditated, you can provide them just the right seed and water and cultivation necessary to slowly soften their heart so that one day that will be in the perfect Matthew 5 position to really, truly, whole-heartedly embrace the Truth of God and bear fruit.