**A Spiritual Plan for Children**

**Applying Spiritual Principles to Real-life Situations**

*I will meditate on your precepts, and contemplate Your ways. I will delight myself in your statutes: I will not forget Your word*. *(Psa. 119:15-16; NKJV)*

*Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart.(Psa. 119:34; NIV)*

*I have inclined my heart to perform Your statutes forever, to the very end. (Psa. 119:112; NKJV)*

While engaged in conversation, a female classmate informed Jack that she wore a bikini when swimming. Jack proceeded to admonish the classmate and advised her that such attire was “not modest.” Later, at home, he informed his mother of the conversation and of what he had told the girl. In closing the story to his mother, Jack stated “I wish bikinis **were** modest!” Jack was 5 years old when this incident occurred!

What lessons might we learn from Jack? First, that even a 5-year old can be taught underlying Biblical principles to guide his judgment of right and wrong. Second, that, regardless of one’s age, we face the need to be equipped to combat Satan’s seductions.

Just as God’s Only Begotten Son dealt with life events by applying spiritual principles taught him at an early age, how much more do God’s adopted children need to be equipped to apply spiritual principles when faced with issues of life? Stated another way, responding to events in life by applying Christ-like character traits will better assure that we effectively face the related challenges.

When faced with the need, and they will face it, will your children be adequately equipped to answer the question “What would/did Jesus do?” (“WWJD?”/”WDJD?”) Will they be equipped to make righteous judgments? Children need to be taught early how to apply spiritual principles found in God’s Word.

What is the key to making righteous judgments? In a word, “wisdom”! It is the vital ingredient in successfully applying any of God’s spiritual precepts in our response to life. While knowledge and understanding of God’s Word are requisites, it is the exercise of wisdom in the application of that knowledge and understanding that will yield right judgments, resulting in a life that pleases the Father. It is wisdom reflected in Christ-like character traits. Stated another way, knowledge and understanding alone are insufficient to cope with life’s challenges and Satan’s temptations. Thus, the objective should be to arm children with the ability to wisely employ Biblical principles in a pragmatic way, i.e., to equip them to demonstrate Christ-like character traits in any circumstance. [Hint: The Book of Proverbs is an excellent place to begin as you guide your children toward wisdom.]

How about you? Christian parents need to be capable of rendering wise, righteous judgments regarding their own behavior. They need to be guided by godly principles which govern how they view certain activities and how they want your children to view them? Christian parents cannot rationalize and see just how far they can push the secular envelope, either intentionally or unintentionally. For example, to those parents who deem themselves to be a “culturally sophisticated” or “cool” or “hip” parent, my appeal to you is to reject such a juvenile, immature attitude and consider your self-perception from the perspective of God’s expectation of you and the impact on your children’s spirituality. Remember, their spiritual development should be a motivating force for your own behavior.

We face an epidemic in the church that is manifest by the abandonment of their faith by nearly one-half of our children. As we search for answers, many questions need to be asked. So, I first pose this question: “Is it possible that some Christian parents have allowed themselves and their children to embrace behavior which, while it may not be eternity-affecting, approaches dangerously close to the line?” If so, for what purpose? There is no response to this question that is sufficient to justify an attitude of heart that yearns for the opportunity to engage in behavior which potentially compromises one’s relationship with Jehovah God! Could this attitude explain the abandonment of the faith by so many children at the first opportunity to do so?

Regrettably, unless properly instructed, children may find it too easy to rationalize their behavior. How much wasted time and effort is devoted to the pursuit of justifying behavior, rather than strengthening one’s resolve to live righteously before God? Christian parents must understand that more important than the pursuit of authorization of behavior is focusing on equipping their children for eternity.

Regarding “life’s experiences,” what types might your children face? How might the choice of response to various situations impact a child’s relationship with God and Christ or with you and others? Is the circumstance such that an unwise response could be eternity-affecting?

As children “experience” life, they will encounter situations that will test their commitment to yielding to God’s Word and will. Some situations may be effectively dealt with by employing a direct “Thus saith the Lord . . .” or an “It is written . . .” response, which either clearly sanctions or clearly forbids a particular behavior. Others, however, will require the application of a principle constructed from underlying spiritual truths. Having developed Christ-like character traits will further equip children to respond as God would have them do.

Some unhealthy and potentially toxic situations may result from being attracted to, perhaps even captivated by, certain activities characteristic of a humanistic, secular society. Such superficial allurements can re-orient the child’s “spiritual compass/gyroscope,” thereby challenging the commitment to a Christ-like response. Still other tests will arise as “routine” situations characteristic of daily living. For example, reacting in a Christ-like manner to a situation which dictates “turning the other cheek” can be as difficult as resisting the temptations of a depraved culture. In either circumstance, if the wrong choices are made, Satan has achieved his objective and he wins the battle. If he continues to win the battles, then he positions himself to, indeed, win the war.

Consider the following types of situations and corresponding decisions which require a wise, prayerful, and pragmatic application of God’s Word:

* modesty and purity in attire and behavior
* secular activities in which to engage, e.g., choice of entertainment, music, hobbies, etc.
* experimenting with or engaging in the “recreational or social use” of potentially addictive substances
* abusing the body via a variety of socially/culturally acceptable methods
* management/stewardship of God’s blessings
* choice of language to express oneself
* mistreatment by others
* behavior motivated by selfishness
* disappointment in self and in others
* serious illness, personally or a loved one
* death of a loved one
* behavior which could compromise one’s integrity
* permitting non-spiritual interests to displace assembling with God’s family to worship Him
* choice of a lifetime mate, especially choosing someone with whom the child does not share a “common faith”
* yielding to anything which encumbers one’s relationship with God and willingness to submit to His will (Reference the wealthy young man in Luke 18:18-23.)
* etc.

It is not my purpose to attempt to identify every circumstance which your child might face for which there is no clear and direct “Thus saith the Lord . . .” Nor is it my purpose to render a personal judgment regarding how God views a particular issue. Rather, my prayer is that you, as a parent, will arrive at judgments based upon wise, thoughtful application of Scripture, rather than on what today’s secular culture finds acceptable or on what may even be embraced by some brothers and sisters in Christ.

Prepare and equip yourself to be able to address such issues in order to provide spiritual guidance to your children, based on the application of divine concepts. Prepare and equip your children to respond in such a way that they honor you by embracing your wise counsel. (The spiritual truth of “honoring and obeying parents” is discussed at *Scriptures and Comments on Truths to Believe* at [www.mrcc.gov/spfc](http://www.mrcc.gov/spfc).)

Regarding engaging in activities such as those mentioned above, might we say that applicable over-arching principles by which a child of God is to render a judgment could be drawn from truths such as the following, that are demonstrated in Christ-like character traits?

* *Abstain from every form of evil. (1Thess. 5:22); Flee immorality. (1 Cor. 6:18, NASB)*

Those who have a “heart condition” and difficulty with sound judgment will tend to want a definition of “evil” and “immorality.” Or at the very least, they will seek a list of behaviors which are universally acknowledged as evil and immoral. It is when one leaves the world of “black and white,” and enters the world of “gray,” that judgments must be made on principle – and with wisdom.
* *Do not set foot on the path of the wicked or walk in the way of evil men. Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn from it and go on your way.* *(Prov. 4:14-15, NIV); So you will walk in the way of good men, And keep to the paths of the righteous. (Prov. 2:20, NASB); . . . lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us . . . fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith . . . (Heb. 12:1b-2a, NASB)*

Is it really that difficult to evaluate activities in which a child of God should not engage? Why do some of them appear so appealing? If children are not developing a submissive attitude such as that of our Savior, they may not resist the temptation to push the proverbial envelope.
* *. . . whatever things are true . . . noble . . . just . . . pure . . . lovely . . . of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy – meditate on these things. (Phil. 4:8)*Does this not represent a sufficient principle for determining in which activities a disciplined child of God could/should engage? If these criteria are applied when faced with a decision, will not the judgment be rendered more easily and submissively?

How would this principle relate to choice of entertainment, including music and recreation? Consider the following criteria:
* Does it rest and strengthen the body and the mind?
* Does it make resistance to temptation easier or harder?
* Does it increase or decrease love for virtue, purity, innocence, etc?
* Does it provide inspiration or does it dull the intellect?
* Does it produce more love of God, a more prayerful attitude, more devotion to the church,
 more Bible study, a more spiritual nature?
* Will it draw the child nearer to Christ?
* What kind of fruit does it bear?
* What kind of influence will one have if engaged in the activity?
* What are the risks involved?

Entertainment which conforms to the guidelines of Philippians 4:8, will contribute to the child’s spiritual growth, while thwarting Satan’s efforts to make other forms of entertainment more captivating.

* *Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and your spirit, which are God’s.* *(1 Cor. 6:19-20)*

What better principle than this for guiding Christians’ decisions regarding participating in activities which would not glorify God in their bodies! What better principle than this for determining how one should treat one’s body so as to present it a holy sacrifice to God! If this principle doesn’t work for your children, consider the potential health impacts of certain activities, including cancer (mouth, tongue, throat, lungs, etc), diseased pancreas, cirrhosis of the liver, emphysema, diabetes, heart disease, congenital defects, gastrointestinal problems, personality changes, sexually transmitted diseases, etc. Can a true heir with Christ glorify the Father by taking poison into his body and mind which will ultimately destroy his physical health and ruin the mind, to say nothing of his spiritual health? The “poison” can take many forms, some of which are not physically ingested, but have no less impact on the body, soul and spirit of the “victim.”
* *Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak . . . When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. (1 Cor. 8:9, 12, NIV))*
Paramount in decisions made by our children should be a demonstrated love and concern for the potential effect on someone else, especially another Christian. Failure to do so elevates selfishness to its highest place and renders selflessness impotent.
* *Do not quench the Spirit.* *(1 Thess. 5:19; NKJV)*
Engaging in behavior which quenches the Holy Spirit i.e., “puts out the Spirit’s fire,” will be eternity-affecting. Ensure your children understand the type of behavior encompassed by such an admonition. (Caution: such behavior is not confined to “sins of commission.”)
* *Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this . . . to keep oneself unspotted from the world. (James 1:27; NKJV); Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. (2 Tim. 2:22; NIV)*
Not too difficult to understand. Sometimes difficult to honor. What one person considers behavior which would compromise pure religion, another justifies it to satisfy himself. Teach your children that they cannot be “too pure.” And, note the contrast between “flee” and “pursue”? Even in the face of peer pressure and perhaps humiliation, God’s will is more important than anyone or anything else. When in doubt, don’t! Rather, take positive action and pursue righteousness, etc.
* *“Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God.” (Matt. 5:8; NKJV); . . . prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent [pure], children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse [depraved] generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.* *(Phil. 2:15, NASB)*

A principle for the faint of heart? A principle for one desiring to push the envelope? A principle for one wanting to be part of the popular crowd? Or, is it, rather, a principle for one who accepts, yes lovingly embraces, the role of a child of God? Your role is to instill within your children the understanding that being a child of God brings with it so much more than what is offered by the secular world in which they live. And, you must demonstrate your own desire and determination to “prove yourself to be blameless and innocent/pure . . .”
* *. . . present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy acceptable to God . . . And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Rom 12:1(b)-2; NIV)*

Doesn’t sound too difficult to comprehend and to use as a principle for making decisions regarding activities in which a child of God can/should participate. If a child’s only goal is to live a life of sacrificial service to God, won’t decisions regarding acceptable behavior be made more easily? When satisfying God’s will is the driving principle in one’s life, can the false “lure” of the secular culture really be that appealing?
* *. . . Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. (James 4:4(b); NIV))*
No Christian parent wants a child to be an enemy of God! Would it not be exceedingly better for children to err on the side of caution and restraint, rather than engaging in behavior which would move them ever closer to being considered by God to be a friend of the world, i.e., His enemy? Where is the attitude of heart and willingness to please God? Where is the desire to demonstrate gratitude for all that God has provided? Are your children equipped to make a sound judgment in identifying the border between being a friend of the world vs. a child of God, i.e., an enemy of God vs. His obedient child?
* *. . . I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly . . .* *(1 Tim 2:9(a), NASB)*

Consider the shift over time in what is considered to be modest clothing. The shift has not been a positive one and has been concurrent with the relaxation of standards for modest behavior, spawned in large part by the entertainment industry and the “sexual revolution” of the 1960s. Disappointingly, those who would be God’s children have not always rejected the relaxation of standards as they should have. Where once the adorning of immodest clothing was categorically shunned by Christian women, such attire is now worn to worship God! Do you remember when God through Jeremiah (Jer. 6:15(a), 8:12(a), NIV) chastised the people because they were not ashamed of their conduct and He offered the following observation: “. . . No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush.”? And, the church has to debate what constitutes immodesty! Can that be pleasing to Him? Where is the heart of submission and one’s responsibility to not place at risk a weaker brother or sister in Christ?
* I find no support in Scripture to forbid a Christian from either marrying someone who is not a Christian or marrying someone with whom there is not a sharing of a “common faith.” (I am not addressing Scriptural re-marriage.) Nevertheless, I submit that to contemplate doing so should be approached cautiously. Let me explain. At a time when even the union of two Christians results in too many divorces, the addition of one more potential strain on a marriage needs to be considered prayerfully and accompanied with the exercise of prudent judgment. While numerous successful examples exist, many more attest to the risk associated with marrying someone who is not a Christian, or with whom one does not share a common faith. Regrettably, not all such situations are resolved with a resulting mutual understanding of God’s Word. When one is “in love,” recognizing the potential problems within such a marriage can become an improbable task. And, consider the potential impact on children born to these marriages. They can find themselves placed between mother and father, with the result being the abandonment of any opportunity for becoming Christians themselves. This is an issue which requires wise instruction from the moment your children can begin to understand the principle. “Wisdom be my companion!” Good luck!

Until and unless firmly grounded, children may struggle with making righteous judgments in regulating their behavior in situations such as these, and in all manner of other potential “encumbrances” in life. When faced with decisions and choices, some of which could be relatively minor in their impact or could be life-changing, if not eternity-affecting, ideally the wise application of spiritual truths and concepts would flow unrestrained from a child.

Let’s shift briefly to those occasions in which life presents the child with situations for which there exists a specific “book, chapter and verse” to govern the child’s response, but which still requires wise application. Just as Christ was able to say “It is written . . .”, so, too, can your children. In equipping children to respond to life’s situations, there exists no better preparation than knowing God’s Word. Moreover, not only knowing it, but knowing it so well that passages applicable to the situation can readily be called to mind to determine an appropriate response. Of course, understanding when and how the respective passages apply is key! (Sometimes the response will require extraordinary behavior uncommon to ordinary human inclination. Enter Christ-like character traits!)

Some challenges occur when desiring to respond to Deity’s expectations, as outlined by Jesus during His discourses with the disciples and the multitudes, most notably those found in Matthew 5-7 and again in Luke 6. Consider the several times in which he says “You have heard it said . . .**but** I say to you . . .” [emphasis added] in which He instructs His disciples in dealing with personal relationships. However, because the guiding principle is often in direct conflict with typical human behavior, the “Thus saith the Lord . . .” seems to be a “hard/difficult saying” and not so easily obeyed. For example, do children understand not to constrain the instruction in the “Sermon on the Mount” to behavior only achievable by Christ? Are parents unwittingly teaching children to treat those and similar Scriptures as just so much rhetoric? Or, do we accept that they represent God’s expectations of His offspring and that we are to apply the precepts day-by-day as we have occasion to do so?

Consider situations such as the following:

* *“. . . whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also.” (Matt. 5:39(b)*; *“. . . love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.” (Luke 6:27-28, NASB)*; *“Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back.” (Luke 6:30, NASB)*
How difficult is it for us to comply with these passages? Are our children learning how to apply these expectations of God as they encounter such circumstances? How difficult is it? Extremely difficult! More difficult for some than others, to be sure. In a culture in which children are viewed as weak if they do not retaliate or defend themselves, a response driven by “WWJD” can create even more problems for the child. And, how do we as parents react when those whom we love are treated unkindly by other children or unfairly by a teacher or coach? I still remember how difficult it was to respond as Jesus would have wanted us to do when our children were mistreated. And, no, we did not always succeed! Yet, because Christians are to be different from the world, can we do otherwise than follow the instructions of our Lord? We are to respond to life situations as did Christ.
* *“Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does no seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”(1 Cor. 13:4-7; NIV)*

A similarly difficult passage for many of us is that of 1 Corinthians 13. Are Christians really expected to free themselves of unkindness, jealousy, arrogance, self-centeredness, etc., just to demonstrate the manner of love which God expects? I confess to you that I have yet to fully apprehend some of the attributes of love revealed by Paul. However, these verses leave little room for interpretation or debate as to their meaning. Rather, they provide an “It is written” moment when circumstances demand a Christ-like response.
* *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, . . . but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven” (Matt. 6:19a, 20a); “. . . do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on . . .” (Matt. 6:25a); “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness . . .”(Matt. 6:33a) (NIV)*

Consider also the response expected by God when your financial situation is not as you might prefer. (Many Christians suffered financially as a result of “The Great Recession.”) Teach your children to not build their faith and trust in “treasures on earth,” to “not worry about life” and to “not be anxious for tomorrow,” but rather to “. . . seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. . .”. The apostle Paul echoed that sentiment in Philippians 4:6(a) (NASB), “Be anxious for nothing . . .” He had apparently mastered placing His trust in God and Christ when he stated in verse 11 “. . . for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.” Demonstrate that same faith and contentment to your children. By your own behavior, teach them to trust in God, remembering that “. . . no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ” (2 Cor. 1:20, NIV).
* *“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . Yet, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.” (Rom. 8:35, 37; NIV); “You are the light of the world. . .” (Matt. 5:14; NIV)*

And what about those times when life in general seems more than one can bear? Problems at school? Emotional distress? Devastating illness? The loss of a loved one, perhaps a parent? Remind your children how much God loves them and, again, teach them to trust in His promises. Also, these are times that they can influence others for Christ and bring glory to the Father by how they deal with these types of situations.
* Disappointingly, the influence of an ever-increasing secular culture has caused and is causing some who declare themselves to be children of God to ignore “thus saith the Lord . . .” or “It is written . . .” concerning certain behaviors such as abortion, homosexuality, pornography, pre-marital sex, etc. Hopefully, you are not one of those individuals and are prepared to counsel your children according to God’s view of the issues. God’s will is clear in such areas if your children will but accept it and honor it when situations arise. (Rom. 1:18-32; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Gal. 5:19-21; 2 Tim. 3:1-5)

The answers of how to respond to “life” are indeed found in Scripture. Never forget that confidence in knowing the constancy of God’s Word can provide needed security in children’s lives. And, do not forget the importance of memory recall in order for your children to be able to say “It is written . . .”!

Perhaps these comments have only re-stated the obvious. But, unless you equip your children to be able to render wise judgments when faced with circumstances, many of which could be life-changing, if not eternity-affecting, you may not be able to return them to God from whom they came! Satan has many schemes to ensnare his victims. Children need to realize that they will face difficult situations thrust at them by Satan. While clothing many of life’s seductions/allurements in otherwise attractive packaging, Satan also attacks in areas vulnerable to our human nature.

Without guiding principles upon which to render wise judgments, children can be too easily convinced that certain decisions and activities will not jeopardize a relationship either with God or their parents. Neither will they soberly consider the resulting impact either on their future happiness or on their eternal dwelling place.

Aware that others have authored many volumes which address this topic more fully than is possible in this work, I have limited my effort to attempting to encourage you to give serious attention to the need for the wise, prayerful, pragmatic application of spiritual principles demonstrated in Christ-like character traits. In addition to providing you with some thoughts, which I hope are of value, my objective is to present the idea as being one more tool which you can incorporate into your arsenal to use in “training up your child.”

May God bless your efforts!

**Additional Scriptures:** Book of Psalms; Book of Proverbs; Jesus’ Parables; Matt. 5; Matt. 6:19-34;
 Luke 6:27-38; Acts 10:35; Rom. 12:1(b)-2, 14, 20-21; 1 Cor. 6:18-20;

 1 Cor. 8:9-12; 1 Cor. 13; 1 Cor. 15:33; Eph. 6:11; Phil. 2:15; Phil. 4:8;
 1 Thess. 5:19, 21-22; 1 Tim. 2:9(a)); 1 Tim. 6:6-8, 9-11; 2 Tim. 2:19, 22;
 James 1:19, 27; James 3:8-10; James 4:4(b); 1 Pet. 2:11; 1 John 2:15-17

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