**A Spiritual Plan for Children**

 **Assessing a Child’s Spiritual Growth**

*Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the everlasting. (Psa. 139:23-24; NIV)*

*Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. (2 Cor. 13:5a; NIV)*

*Each one should test his own actions. (Gal 6:4a; NIV)*

God has always expected spiritual growth from His people, i.e., citizens of His kingdom. One cannot consider God’s expectation without also considering the concept of spiritual assessment. Where am I today, spiritually? Where was I last year? Last month? Last week? Where do I want to be next week, next month, next year? How do I plan to get there?

Individual Christians and congregations of the Lord’s body are on display for all to witness either the presence or the absence of spiritual growth. The same was true of Christ, Himself. His spiritual growth was on display even at an early age as He sat among the Jewish teachers of the day. So observable was His spiritual growth that “all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers” (Luke 2:47). Further, He was perceived to be increasing “in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men” (Luke 2:52). Indeed, our Lord’s spirituality was periodically assessed throughout His ministry.

So it is with the need to systematically assess our children’s spirituality. To most effectively guide them on their spiritual journey, there must be time allotted to evaluating where they are on that journey at any point in time. How can parents chart and shape a spiritual path without periodically assessing a child’s spirituality?

Have you given any thought to how to “measure” the degree of spiritual growth in yourself? Or, and more importantly, God’s assessment of that growth?

Occasionally, during my Bible study I encounter what appears on the surface to be an otherwise inconspicuous passage, yet one which seems to speak directly to me as it relates to my own spiritual growth. Two such passages have I encountered in Deuteronomy:

*The Lord our God spoke . . . saying, “You have stayed long enough at this mountain. Turn and set your journey and go . . .” (Deut. 1:6-7a; NASB)*

*And the Lord spoke . . . saying,“You have circled this mountain long enough. Now turn north . . .” (Deut. 2:2-3;NASB)*

Do you ever ask yourself “Have I stayed long enough at this mountain?” or “Have I circled this mountain long enough?” or “Is it time for me to turn and set my journey and go?” The question really becomes “Isn’t it time for me to advance spiritually beyond the point where I now find myself or, and more importantly, where God perceives me to be?” Expressed another way, “If I accept the premise that with greater maturity in Christ come even greater spiritual blessings, might it be time for me to ‘turn and set my journey and go,’ i.e., to proceed from where I am currently so that I might participate in more and more spiritual blessings?” Or we might ask ourselves, “Is the spiritual growth of the body of Christ being stunted because I have continued to circle this mountain?” As you monitor not only your children’s spiritual development, but yours as well, I encourage you to consider the application of the above two passages.

How, then, as it relates to spiritual growth, might we determine whether we “have stayed long enough at this mountain,” i.e., the place where we find ourselves along the path of spiritual growth or maturity? We are admonished to grow, to become more mature, more complete, more perfect. Yet how do we evaluate the extent to which the growth is or is not occurring? How is attainment of the attribute of spirituality manifest?

In my professional life, I was accustomed to operating with a set of metrics by which I could determine or measure whether progress was being achieved within the organization. I could observe whether we were improving and how rapidly we were moving toward the desired objectives. If we were not achieving the objectives, we would modify behavior within the organization to yield a more desired outcome. I confess to you that I sometimes wish I could measure my own spiritual maturity and growth, or lack thereof, that easily. In the absence of such metrics, we must continue to examine Scripture to understand God’s expectations of us and to then ask ourselves whether we are meeting those expectations.

As you guide, monitor and assess the spiritual growth of each child, consider the following as candidate “metrics” for evaluating spiritual growth. This is not intended to be an inclusive list. No doubt you have others that you will want to use.

* Fundamentally, is there evidence of a devotion to and a relationship with our Father and His Son?
* Is the child’s life demonstrating progress in loving God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength? (Mark 12:30) What does it look like?
* Does the child feel as did Isaiah when he recited the psalm: “My soul yearns for you in the night; in the morning my spirit longs for you”? (Isa. 26:9(a); NIV) (I acknowledge that such thoughts might emanate only from the more mature child. Nevertheless, are they nonetheless achievable?)
* Does the child identify and represent herself as “I am the Lord’s”? (Isa. 44:5) (What type of teaching must you do to instill this within your children’s minds?)
* Is the child “reflecting the Lord’s glory” and “being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory”? (2 Cor. 3:18; NIV) Again, what does it look like?
* Is love of neighbor as oneself evident? (Mark 12:31)
* Is it apparent that the child’s faith has grown and continues to grow? How can you tell? Is his faith yielding good deeds? Where is the child on the “faith continuum,” that which ranges from “little” to “great”?(Matt. 6:28-34; Matt. 8:5-10;1 Thess. 1:3, Jas 2:17-18)
* Is the child praying to “be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding,” while demonstrating a commitment to “live a life worthy of the Lord and please Him in every way”? Paul prayed for such for the church at Colosse. The measure of whether the church was accomplishing the goal was if it were “bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might . . . joyfully giving thanks to the Father” (Col. 1:9-12; NIV). (Again, achievement of such maturity will require your unwavering commitment.)
* Is growth in the grace and knowledge of Christ evident? (2 Pet. 3:18)
* If the child is a Christian, is she contributing to the edification and growth of the body? If so, how? If not, what might you do to encourage her to use her talents within the kingdom? (Eph. 4:15-16)
* Is there evidence of maturing spiritually at the rate at which God has given the child the ability to mature?
* Is the child transitioning from feeding on the “milk of the word” to more “meatier” aspects of God’s word? Is the child understanding the spiritual truths you are teaching him? (1 Pet. 2:2)
* Does the child understand and demonstrate the difference between “tithing dill, mint & cummin” versus the “more important matters of the law,” i.e., faith, justice, mercy?” (Matt. 23:23)
* Is possession of the fruit of the Spirit and of Christian graces apparent? (Gal. 5:22-23; 2 Pet. 1:5-9)
* How is the child responding to the “hard teachings” of Christ, e.g., turning the other cheek, not seeking the return of stolen property, doing good to those who mistreat him, etc. (Luke 6:27-36)
* Is the child growing in the generosity/grace of giving? (2 Cor. 9:8-15)
* If a child of God, is she growing up into Christ and in respect to salvation? (Eph. 4:15; 1 Pet. 2:2)
* Is he excited about going to heaven and living for eternity with God and Christ?
* Does the child demonstrate zeal and a spiritual fervor for serving the Lord? (Rom. 12:11)
* Is the child demonstrating the ability to exercise self-discipline in rendering judgments regarding participating in behavior uncharacteristic of a child of God?
* Is the child developing an abhorrence/hatred of evil, while nurturing a love for that which is good? (Rom. 12:9)
* Does the child experience “godly sorrow” at behavior, i.e., sin, that disappoints God and does not meet His expectations?
* Is the resolute pursuit of the attributes of Deity evident in the child’s life?

Thus, spiritual growth is manifest in a myriad of ways, too numerous to cite here. Many passages exhort us to not be content with our “degree” or “level” of spiritual maturity, if I can express it that way. I hope that the above examples demonstrate that, indeed, God has provided, via His word, the necessary metrics by which we can measure our spirituality and corresponding growth – or absence thereof. Although not in numerical terms, measurable nonetheless.

**Additional Scriptures:** Deut. 1:6-7a;Deut. 2:2-3; Psa. 11:5; Psa. 26:2; Prov. 5:21; Prov. 17:3;
Lam. 3:40; Jer. 11:20a; Jer. 12:3a; Jer. 17:16; Jer. 20:12a; Haggai 1:5,7; Luke 2: 47, 52; 1 Cor. 11:28; Gal. 6:1; Eph. 5:15; 2 Thess. 1:3; 1 Tim. 4:15;

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