

CHAPTER EIGHT THE SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT OF YOUR CHILD

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Scripture Memory Verse—Dt 6:6-7

“And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; and 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.”

Chapter Eight Workbook The Spiritual Development Of Your Child—Bible Study

INTRODUCTION

And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; and 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.

Dt 6:6, 7

Traditionally, when it comes to the instruction of their children, parents have come to rely upon two institutions. These have been the school system (be it public or privates) and the Sunday school program, along with its supporting organs in the local church. It would be difficult in the confines of the introduction to a chapter of this workbook to adequately discuss these two givens, especially since the debate concerning school systems ranges far wider than the scope of this Bible study. The sole reliance upon Sunday school programs is readily accepted by most Christians, almost without question. Therefore, without going into details, I will simply state my convictions in this area for your prayerful consideration, hoping that they will not turn you from the material in the workbook but, instead, create a lively and prayerful discussion between you and your spouse.

Historically the home, under the guidance of the parents has been the spiritual training ground for the children. It is a sign of the disintegration of the home and spiritual authority of the father that institutional programs, rather than supporting what takes place in the home, have come to supplant it, taking on for themselves a separate and self-sustaining life, without reference to what the parents are doing in the home. I say it is a sign of disintegration, not because of the content and value of these corollary programs but rather because for all intents and purposes, fathers have abrogated their position to these programs. Fathers not only do not demand that what takes place in church compliment the spiritual training in the home, for the most part, they are unaware of the curriculum being used. They are content to be relegated to the reader of bed-time Bible stories, a purely nonessential spiritual appendage of the Sunday School ministry.... something nice, but not necessary.

The Bible places no restriction on the parents concerning the secular education of their children. Faced with an ever more sophisticated and technical world, it is perfectly acceptable and understandable for Christians to look outside the home for the education of their children. The *spiritual development* of children is another matter. Irrespective of the social, cultural, and intellectual changes in the world around us, God continues to hold parents directly responsible for the spiritual growth and education of their children.

I find it interesting that while evangelical Christians are pulling their children out of public schools to take on the responsibility of their secular education (something which is not commanded by God), they are simultaneously surrendering most of the spiritual education of their children to others, even though this is something for which they are specifically commanded by God to take responsibility.

This is not to question the existence of Sunday school in the church, or the many other very excellent programs which churches offer their children. Rather, it is to call into question the parental role in the spiritual development of children the rest of the week. While parents may be morally free to turn over the secular education of their children to others, they are not free to do the same with the spiritual education and development of

those children entrusted to them by God. In this chapter we will explore the parents' responsibility before God in the spiritual development of their children.

What follows is:

1. a brief study in the Word of God to aid you in understanding the subject matter of this chapter
2. a manuscript for you to read and discuss with your spouse
3. a set of practical projects for discussion and application to aid you in implementing those areas of the seminar which meet your needs as a parent

The Home And Word Pictures In The Bible

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

A healthy and loving home is essential for children to relate to concepts found in the Word of God, not only during their childhood years, but throughout their adult life. As you read the passages below, reflect on how divorce and dysfunctional, non-resident or uninvolved parents could be used by Satan to distort the meaning of the passage.

Passage
understanding
1 Thes 2:7, 8

How sin in the family would distort the

Heb 12:7 – 9

Ps 131:2

Ps 68:5

Ps 103:13

2 Thes 2:16

I Jn 3:2

Mt 25:10

Rv 19:9

Rv 19:9

Mk 3:35

Jn 16:21

The Home— The Center Of Spiritual Training

Historically, the home (under the wise guidance of the parents) has been the spiritual training ground of the children. Early in the foundation of the nation of Israel, God laid down in His Law the specifics of the spiritual training of each generation. Read the following passages and then write out the plan of God for the spiritual instruction of the children in each generation.

Passage generations	Plan of God for the spiritual instruction of successive
Dt 4:8 – 10	
Dt 6:4 – 9	
Dt 6:20, 21	
Dt 11:18 – 21	
Ps 78:4 – 6	

To “paraphrase a verse” means to rewrite the verse in your own words without using any of the key words found in the passage, being certain to put it in everyday language. Under the passage below, paraphrase or rewrite each verse in your own words.

Eph 6:1 *Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.*

Eph 6:2 *Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise),*

Eph 6:3 *that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth.*

Eph 6:4 *And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger; but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.*

According to Prv 1:8 and 6:20, who shares in this responsibility?

Prv 1:8 Hear, my son, your father's instruction, And do not forsake your mother's teaching;

Prv 6:20 My son, observe the commandment of your father, And do not forsake the teaching of your mother;

Ultimately, the father assumes the headship of the family. Read each verse and match each verse with the corresponding principle.

The Husband As The Head

Passage

- | | |
|--|-------------|
| ___Spiritual responsibility for the children | A. Eph 5:22 |
| ___Control of the children | B. Eph 5:25 |
| ___Head of the wife | C. 1 Tm 3:5 |
| ___Spiritual responsibility for the wife | D. Eph 6:4 |
| ___Manager of the household | E. 1 Tm 3:4 |

According to Genesis 2:18, what is the wife's role in all of this?

Gn 2:18 Then the Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him."

How do the following verses depict her role?

Col 3:20 Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord.

Prv 1:8 Hear, my son, your father's instruction, And do not forsake your mother's teaching;

2 Tm 1:5; 3:14,15 For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois, and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well. You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them; and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Prv 31:1 The words of King Lemuel, the oracle which his mother taught him.

The question of delegation usually comes up when addressing fathers concerning their responsibilities in these areas. Many fathers feel that as long as the job gets done they are free to delegate the work to others. The command in Eph 6:4 comes at the close of a long list of responsibilities, beginning in Eph 5:22. By each verse is listed the responsibility, check those which you feel it would be wrong to delegate.

Eph 5:22 Wife being subject to her husband _____

Eph 5:25 Husband's spiritual care of his wife _____

Eph 5:28, 29 Husband's care of his wife's physical needs _____

Eph 5:33 Husband's care of his wife's emotional needs _____

Eph 5:33 Wife's respect of her husband _____

Eph 6:1 Children's obedience to their parents _____

Eph 6:2 & 3 Children's honor of their parents _____

Eph 6:4 The father's discipline and instruction of the children _____

In assuming his responsibility, the husband assures that his wife, the children's mother, his helpmate, will have an enjoyable role. According the following verses, how is the husband to shape the children's behavior so as to assure that this is true?

Prv 15:20; 17:25; 19:26; 20:20; 23:24; 29:15; 30:17; 31:28

Husband Assures The Children Do...

Husband Assures The Children Do Not...

Chapter Eight

The Spiritual Development Of Your Children—Lecture

Only give heed to yourself and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things which your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your sons and your grandsons."

Dt 4:9, Dt 6:6-7

I. SCRIPTURAL PRINCIPLES

Every home is unique; every culture is unique; every family has its own history, traditions and economic base. As I share illustrations, I generally go for the big picture when it comes to spiritual development. The individual situations may or may not be immediately applicable, but look for the heart, the principle behind them and seek to develop your own applications in the light of your family experience.

A. HISTORICAL ROOTS

Historically the home, under the guidance of the parents, has been the spiritual training ground for the children. Spiritual training and instruction for children outside the home, though not forbidden, is certainly not the primary focus of the Word of God. In fact, there is no doctrinal teaching which provides for the spiritual training of the children outside of the home.

As you can see from these passages, when God gave the Law to the nation of Israel, he gave the responsibility of instructing the children to the parents. True, the Priests were to instruct in the Law, but these instructions were to the father, who in turn passed them down to his family. Equally true, there are situations where this was circumvented, such as Samuel being entrusted to Eli as a child to be brought up in the Temple, but this was a specific historical event. Eli became not the Sunday school teacher of Samuel, but rather the adoptive father. The doctrinal teaching is clear— parents are responsible for the spiritual teaching and instruction of their children.

Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; and 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. When your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What do the testimonies and the statutes and the judgments mean which the Lord our God commanded you?' then you shall say to your son, ' We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt; and the Lord brought us from Egypt with a mighty hand.

Dt 6:4 – 7, 20-21

"You shall therefore impress these words of mine on your heart and on your soul; and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. And you shall teach them to your sons, talking of them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road and when you lie down and when you rise up.

Dt 11:18-19

Although Sunday school, church services, camps, vacation Bible schools, children's programs and Bible studies outside the home may serve this process, the parents may never abrogate their responsibility by turning it over to a third party. The responsibility is theirs and they will be held responsible by God. Many parents subvert the meaning of headship to that of a supervisor who sees that things get done. The commands in Scripture concerning the parents' responsibility to teach and train the children are not given in the context of responsibilities to be assigned, but to be accomplished.

In the context of Ephesians 5 and 6, what other duties are you as a family willing to assign to others? How about, “Love your wife as your own body?” Do you think God is indifferent as to by whom this is accomplished as long as it gets done? What about, “Let the wife see to it that she respect her husband?” Wives, do you want to find another woman to show respect to your husband? Do you think that as long as he gets respect from a woman, that you see that it happens, that you are free from this injunction? What about “children obey your parents?” If you ask your child to fulfill a responsibility and he gets a sister or friend to do it, are you satisfied as long as it gets done? No, the commands in these and other passages are for the benefit of the one being commanded, and not just the recipient.

“Take personal responsibility for your life. Don’t let the schools keep you from getting an education, don’t let the church keep you from getting saved and don’t let the Navigators keep you from making disciples.”

—John Crawford, *The Navigators, Missionary Statesman.*

It is as important for the husband that he sacrificially experience loving his wife, as it is for the wife to experience this love. It is as important for the wife to experience respecting her husband as it is for him to be respected. It is as important for the child to experience obeying the parents as it is for the parents to be obeyed. Even so, it is as important for the parents, and more specifically the father, to experience the discipline and training of the children, as it is for the children to receive it. There are some responsibilities that the individual must fulfill; they cannot be assigned, and the discipline and training of children is one of them.

In the Scripture, the father and mother both share in the responsibility of the spiritual training of the children. Proverbs 1:8 states, “*Hear, my son, your father’s instruction, and do not forsake your mother’s teaching;*” and again in Proverbs 6:20, as elsewhere in the Scriptures the Word of God states, “*My son, observe the commandment of your father, and do not forsake the teaching of your mother;*”

The mother has an important role in the discipline and instruction of the children, being mentioned both in the Old (Prv 31:1 & 2) and the New (II Timothy 1:5; 3:15) Testaments as playing a key role in the spiritual instruction of King Lemuel and Timothy respectively. But it is the father, as head of the home, who is ultimately held responsible as he is the spiritual head of the wife (Eph 5:22–24). As such, he is responsible for the mother’s sanctification and spiritual growth (Eph 5:25–27), as well as that of the children (Eph 6:1–4).

Many parents will homeschool their children to ensure their success in secular education, which is not specifically commanded, while stepping back from the specific command of God by turning over their children’s spiritual education to relative strangers. Husbands, fathers, wives and mothers, do not rely on strangers for the primary spiritual training of your children! Think for a moment. Who is your child’s Sunday school teacher? Have you met this person? Have you had this person in your home? Do you know the curriculum?

God calls you to the spiritual leadership of the home. The husband, with the help of his wife (Gn 2:18) is responsible before God for the spiritual leadership and development of the home (Eph 6:4). The days when we could, as parents, send our children to school and, without our personal involvement, expect them to get a good education is over. So it is with the church. You must become personally involved with your children’s spiritual growth. Above all else, you must be a model for them.

Remember, if your children “turn out all right,” but you did not obey God in Eph 6:4, then you still did not obey God. If your children do not “turn out all right,” yet you did obey God in Eph 6:4, then you still obeyed God. There is virtually nothing you can do to guarantee that your children “turn out all right.” What you can control is your response to Ephesians 6:4. The goal of this workbook has never been to guarantee your children “turn out all right.” Remember, from the very beginning it was stressed that the goal of this workbook is to guarantee that *you* as parents, “turn out all right.”

B. MODELING, FATHERS, THE NAME OF GOD BESTOWED ON MAN

I have heard it said many times that when God wanted to express the love and devotion He has for us, that He looked about for a term that would communicate this clearly. Having searched the world over He decided to take for Himself the term Father, as used by earthy families and apply it to Himself. This line of reasoning is best described by the old Japanese proverb, “Hogawashie.” God did not take the name Father for Himself. He very graciously bestowed both the gift of “Father” and the corresponding name, “Father,” on man.

God *has been*, and *is*, Father—throughout eternity. He is Father by His self-existent attribute. The triune God, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, *is* and always has been in existence. He is Father by creation. James 1:17 states, *“Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow.”* From His first statement of creation, God has been the Father of all creation. He is Father of all mankind through His creation of Adam and Eve, and He is Father through the spiritual creation of Christians as His children. James 1:18 goes on to say, *“In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures.”* God is referred to as Father a total of 256 times in the Bible. Six times in the Old Testament and 250 times in the New Testament.

The Fatherhood of God is one of the greatest doctrinal truths of the new covenant. It is central to the doctrine of regeneration and it is inseparable from the doctrines of the new birth and adoption. It is this word, this attribute, this description which has been with God for eternity. It was by this that He revealed himself to the prophets, by which His Son called Him, the name by which the apostles and church have prayed to Him down through the centuries. It is this name that He allows us to take for ourselves and use. God did not take the name of Father for Himself, rather God in His graciousness allows us to use his name, “father” in reference to ourselves. Mystery upon mystery, He allows us to be father to our children. It is not to be done lightly. No man takes the name of God lightly to himself without suffering the consequences of this action.

One of the reasons that the term “Father” should be held so dearly by the church and protected at all cost is that *it is one of the word pictures by which man understands God* in the Scriptures. There are in fact 10 pictures of God and His relation to man here on earth:

- | | | |
|--------------------------|-------------|---------------|
| 1. Creation, (Rom 1: 20) | 4. Marriage | 7. Father |
| 2. The Lord’s Supper | 5. Bride | 8. Childbirth |
| 3. Baptism | 6. Groom | 9. Children |
| | | 10. Family |

The last seven are related to the family and as such, inseparable from the word “Father.” Satan consistently and viciously attacks these. By attacking the family, he can get seven of the ten in one fell swoop. If he can destroy the institution of fatherhood, if he can poison the world to the institution of marriage and the role of the father, then 7/10ths of visual illustrations given to man in the Word of God are distorted. Thus, man's ability to understand God and His relationship with man as revealed by the Word is dealt a serious blow.

As a result, we as fathers must guard vigilantly the name we bear and model its worth and value to those around us. In a single act of infidelity... in a single act of divorce... in a single irresponsible act on the part of the father, the children's ability to relate to and embrace God the Father as a God of love is shattered. The word pictures God uses to help us understand the Family of God as revealed in Scripture, to understand the security of the Church as the Bride of Christ, to anticipate the joy and security of the Wedding Feast of the Lamb, are then dealt a blow by the evil one. We must guard this term with all diligence, for the sake of God, for the Word, and for our children as they read the Word of God.

My father was never at home. When he was, he was never there for me. It seemed like I could never please him. Then one day he picked up and left. It was really tough for Mom and me. He has since contacted me on and off, but he is a really selfish and unreliable person. I always feel let down and I will never forget the hurt and shame he caused my mom. Please pray for me. It is so hard for me to relate to God as father, to believe the things the Bible says about Him. When I read the word “father” in the Bible it just makes me mad.

—Woman graduate student in Eleanor's Bible study

As we model the name “father” to our children, we must remember the rule: don't expect your child to continue into adolescence anything you do not model before him as an adult. Do you have him memorize his Sunday school verses? Do you have him review yours? Do you send him off to Church and Sunday School? Do you go as well? Do you have him do his lesson? Does he see you working on yours? Do you read the Bible to him each night? Does he see you reading yours daily? Some fathers teach their children by their actions that these things are in fact evidences of spiritual immaturity. That part of growing up is leaving them behind. Sure, I have to memorize my verse; sure I have to go to Sunday School; sure I have to do my lesson; but someday I'll be grown up and won't have to do this kid stuff, just like Dad!

C. CHRISTIAN LIBERTY

Whenever I talk about the spiritual development of children and the modeling of the parents—and especially the father, I feel it is necessary to touch on Christian liberties. It is important for parents to realize that the immaturity of children and adolescents coupled with the tendency to view all issues as black and white will often result in extremes of behavior. Because of this, parents must compensate in their behavior which is constantly being observed and evaluated by the child. In so doing, you may have to alter actions which, though legitimate, are inappropriate due to the impressionability of the child coupled with the tendency to take things to the extreme. Children and young adults tend to live in a black and white world. They have not learned the nuances of life's experiences.

“Others may, I cannot”

— John Crawford on Christian liberty.

I was traveling to Uganda by car with the Mukolwe family. We stopped for refreshments and Dr. Mukolwe pointed out a neatly-planted bed in front of the roadside

restaurant where we ate. Breaking off a sprig, he smelled it. “Try it” he encouraged. I broke some off and was amazed, “Thyme!” I had never seen it growing as a plant before. His five-year-old son then reached down, pulled up an entire plant and handed it to me. “Hear Mr. Mahon, smell this one.” It is a great illustration. To a child, the difference between breaking off a stem and pulling up a plant is lost. Even so, in Christian liberties, for our children, the differences we see between liberty and license, is lost to them. If it is ok, then it is ok.

Another good illustration of this principle is why we put medicine out of the reach of children and lock tops on medicine bottles. To a child, if one aspirin is good for you, then why not half a bottle? If one pill helps, then why not ten? Things are very black and white. We must be very careful with our children and deny ourselves some activities and conveniences that we would not have to if we were on our own.

It is a sad fact that many parents will make adjustments for the non-Christian world around them without considering the impact this is having on their own children. There are several examples which come to mind...

1. ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES:

It has been my observation that in the case where adults seek to drink in moderation to relate to the non-Christian world around them and to teach their children responsible drinking, the kids go out and get smashed. Dad takes a glass of wine at dinner and sonny boy goes out and knocks back a bottle of Cold Duck. Dad takes a glass of beer at a party and his little darling shows up the next night at the keg party.

Gordy is a long time friend and missionary in a country where drinking alcohol is a cultural event. He used to argue with me long and hard about how wine and beer were not taken as stimulants but rather as a beverage. That in the culture where he ministered, people drank responsibly and learned to do so in the home. When I visited Gordy on the field, I saw drunks just like in the U.S., and no appreciable difference in alcohol abuse. In fact, statistics state that his country is beset by alcohol abuse. Not only that, but my son reported to me that his children boast of their drinking prowess and that they regularly get bombed at parties.

I know, personally, of about eight families who practice responsible drinking before their children for cultural or evangelistic reasons. In every case, their children have abused alcohol, some to the extent of becoming alcoholics. I do not know of any case where the family practiced “responsible drinking,” where the children did not abuse alcohol at some time during their adolescent years. I am not saying they do not exist. I am just saying that, in my experience, the exact opposite of the desired result in the family occurs. Based on my personal observation and experience, I remain unconvinced of this approach.

2. RESPONSE TO AUTHORITY:

Think for a moment about your response to authority— home, secular (laws, school, employer), and spiritual (church, media, other branches of Christianity). How do you model a response to authority to your children? Knowing that children tend to take what we do and then run it out to its natural conclusion, what can you expect your children’s response to authority to be? If your children are having trouble with authority, what aspects of this have you modeled for them over the years?

3. T.V, VIDEOS AND MOVIES:

This is another area. Do you have one standard for you and one for your children? Are you teaching your children by your actions that spiritual maturity means that you go from watching “G” rated movies as a child, and then mature in your devotion to Christ to the point of watching “R” rated movies containing graphic sex and violence? Are you teaching that to observe women’s breasts and gratuitous violence is one of the marks of maturity?

Tina was heartbroken and had been crying on the phone to Becca. She had found some “R” rated movies that her father had been watching and could not believe the covers. She had known for quite awhile that when her father watched “his movies” that she had to leave the room, but she never guessed why. These were not pornographic by any means, but to a child who idolized her dad, who looked up to him as a Sunday school teacher and deacon, to find the type of things that entertained him to be at this base level completely shattered her confidence. When I was dating, my college minister used to say, “Don’t do anything on a date you wouldn’t do if your mom was in the car with you.” To parents I say, “Don’t watch anything on TV or the movies or the videos that you couldn’t watch with your first grader.”

4. APPEARANCE:

One of my convictions is that the world does not need any more fat, unkempt ministers. At 45, I have been fighting the “Battle of the Bulge” and it takes more and more work each year. Children whose parents take seriously the fact that their bodies are indeed the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16) leave their children an important legacy: a neat house, a temple that is in good shape, an appearance that reflects the dignity and order of God. These are all important examples that create respect among men and among our children. More than once I have seen children reject their parents' authority in spiritual areas because they were basically over weight slobs and had lost their standing before their children.

5. SMOKING/DIPPING:

Again the issue is the Temple of the Holy Spirit. There is no doubt that carcinogens in tobacco cause cancer and are addictive. One of the poorest examples a Christian can present to his children is an addiction to a substance. Again, I admit that it is possible to smoke the odd cigar, take out the pipe now and again and have a chew and reminisce about the old days, back when you were a pagan and on your way to hell, and not become addicted. However, with children, you are playing with fire. Few children make the distinction between the subtleties of smoking and addiction, between drinking and getting drunk. Children think in black and white. If you model these things before them, you are taking a chance you don’t want to take. I have found it better to model abstinence before them while they are in the home and let them grapple with these issues as adults, when they can take the adult responsibility.

Phil is a good friend of mine. As a non-Christian, he smoked cigarettes. Phil went to a mission field where smoking was the norm for the nationals. He began having the odd cigar with those in Bible study, “to relate” to them. He didn’t inhale, so he didn’t worry. His wife did not like the cigar smoke, so he took up the pipe. I saw Phil recently, and he was back up to a pack a day. His complexion had that off color that smokers develop, and I hurt for Phil as I thought of the lost years of vitality and the painful death he will die. He was completely rationalizing his addiction and with that mindset has come a subtle change in his view of liberty and license. Phil doesn’t know it, but his son is also smoking. Phil can’t pick it up because his nasal passages are once again being damaged and he cannot pick up the nuances. His wife, suffering from second hand smoke syndrome is oblivious as well. When I first met his son it was obvious to me. I asked him later and he confided that once his dad started smoking that odd cigar, he began rethinking all of his values.

D. CHRISTIAN LEGALISM

There are times when a parent, through a combination of conscientiousness, zeal and fear will overreact in protecting their children

"For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge."

Rom 10:2

from the world's influence. Suddenly, everything becomes wrong. Public schools are bad. Private schools are bad. Christian schools are inadequate. Even the way most people do homeschooling is wrong. Rock music is bad. Secular music is bad. Even some Christian music is bad. Movies are bad. TV is bad. Cartoons and G-rated movies are tainted. Even some Christian movies are bad. Most churches are bad. Most books are bad. Even most foods are bad. Pagan holidays, such as Halloween, are bad and Christian holidays, such as Christmas, are corrupted and polluted by the world.

Parents should remember that if in their rules they push a child to the point where he decides that they think everything is bad, then he will decide nothing is bad. In other words, *once the child decides that your extremes are a character flaw on your part* then he begins to rethink all values on the basis of his system not yours. This is a very dangerous and precarious position on the part of the child, but a position I have seen more than one parent push their child into through their hypocritical opinions on the world as well as the church.

As the child matures, he will recognizing that reasonable Christian men differ on certain issues. If, in order for him to function, he must agree with you on everything or nothing, he will eventually choose nothing.

E. THE CHURCH:

Of all the areas where parents need to hold their tongue, the most important is in the area of the church. How parents expect their children to be serious about God, when every Sunday at the dinner table the sermon, the building, the deacons and the lessons are raked over the coals by the parents, I will never know. For parents, the church is the safety net. You do not want to have to depend upon it, but it is nevertheless there for you. You will not want to destroy it in the eyes of your children. The family that church-hops every time there is a dispute can rest assured your children will have little or no allegiance to the local church. Just where do you think their spiritual home will be when they leave yours? Although it goes against the grain to most fathers, you as the spiritual head will want your children to began shifting their allegiance from you to the church so that when they leave home the transition has already been made— with your encouragement and blessing at that.

There are a few things which I look for in a church, having seen it from three sides. I have joined churches as a layman, as a minister in a Christian organization, and as a minister of the church. Having moved quite a bit and gotten into the practice of looking at churches here is what we look for...

1. An emphasis on the importance of the family and sensitivity to the number of activities
2. Active children's programs beyond Sunday school
3. An emphasis of instruction and spiritual growth over play
4. A curriculum which is as challenging academically as their school curriculum. (While school is constantly pushing your child, most church curriculum lag several

years behind the child's actual academic skills causing them to think of Sunday school as a place for dummies.)

5. An emphasis on missions and mission trips over camps and retreats
6. An emphasis on missions and mission trips over service projects
7. An authority who shapes the peer groups and who functions on the basis of an overall philosophy of ministry. (Ask the director what the five year goal is and for a copy of their ministry philosophy. If you draw a blank, move elsewhere).
8. A willingness on the part of the church to invest in the children through the church budget
9. Active evangelism and discipleship training apart from the Sunday school program
10. An opportunity to grow in leadership and leadership skills such as speaking, organizing and directing programs
11. Some sort of prayer chain where the youth pray for one another.
12. Social outlets for the older children.

Now is a good time to discuss your child's behavior in church. We always left our children in the nursery, if one was provided, until age three. Then, rather than having the children join the others for children's church, we had them sit with us. I enjoyed the children being with us and I wanted them to grow up worshipping with their family, seeing their mom and dad worship, pray, take notes during the sermon and serve in the church. Often, they would fall asleep in our arms during the sermon. We all have fond memories of the family being together, worshipping together and growing together.

This presupposes a certain level of behavior on the part of the child. More than once I have slipped out of the service to discipline a squirming or disobedient child. Once this issue has been settled, the family worship time is a highlight of the week. A few things a parent can expect and should train and discipline his children in, in terms of behavior, when the church meets corporately...

Children should sit, stand and sing

with the adults. Even if they cannot read, they can still join in. Much can be learned at this time and the children will catch on very quickly. More importantly, they learn to show respect and to take part. Parents do their youngsters a disservice to allow them to absent-mindedly sit, color or sleep or day dream while the church worships and prays before the sermon.

Preschoolers can draw quietly during the sermon, look at a picture book or sleep. They may not however bang their head, bang their heels, squirm, whine, ask questions, ask for treats, wiggle off their seat, sprawl out on the floor, chairs or pews, crawl around and in general make themselves a nuisance.

They should participate fully in all areas they are intellectually capable of. Start off by having them draw a picture of the sermon, later advance this to writing words down they

"Aging Baptist" was a church I served with briefly as Discipleship and Outreach Pastor. They were concerned that the overall age of the church was increasing. After serving there for six months I brought to the board my findings, as requested. The children's and youth facilities were in decay, while the two oldest adult classes were very nicely decorated. The youth and children's budgets were slashed, while the senior budget was increased. I pointed out that as the voting age of the church went up, they had voted the funds up with them. Aging Baptist could not bring itself to make the change and remains a great place for senior citizens. The younger families follow the budget to other churches who emphasize their needs.

recognize. Finally, advance to notes. Discuss their observations, drawings etc. at the dinner table and reward attentiveness profusely.

I always give the option of reading the Bible if the sermon was boring or over their head or they would simply like to do so.

God would have the spiritual training done in the home. This is a shared responsibility between both the father and the mother, though the father has ultimate responsibility as head of the home. **Modeling is absolutely necessary both for the sake of our witness to the world and our impact on the spiritual lives of our children.** Children and young adults think in black and white terms. As a result, there are many things which others may do which we as cautious parents choose not to, simply because the stakes are too high. It is important for the parents to look for the day when their child will shift his primary spiritual allegiance from the home to the church. This is something we work towards and rejoice in. We, as parents, can prepare for this by holding the church in high esteem in family discussions; by choosing a church on the basis of the children's needs rather than our own; by requiring the children at an early age to participate in the order of worship; by rearranging family priorities to reflect a commitment to children and youth activities; and by requiring the type of behavior of children when the church meets which reflects the love and service the family wishes to direct toward God.

II. The Early Years: Initial Training and Decisions

Though the training presented in this section is given generally by ages, the reader will notice that in some areas the instruction goes beyond the age mentioned in the heading. This is because in some cases it is better for the parent to see the big picture, where it is all leading to. In the same way, certain topics, such as holidays, are developed along with the training skills. This is most evident in the first section, allowing the later ones to stand on the groundwork laid here.

A. ROUTINES

Routines are very important at an early age, and there are several things you can do in this area in order to set the precedent of spiritual growth in your family at an early stage and in a fun way. This is not just for

your child, but also for you. As you begin at an early age with your child, you are more likely to continue on. It becomes simply a part of your lifestyle

There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven...
—Ecc1 3:1

1. Evening Routines including:

a. Singing together before going to bed.

I have a terrible voice, well maybe not **terrible**, but certainly not operatic. Nevertheless I would sing to the children each evening. In addition to singing hymns, I had a special song I made up which expressed my love for the children and I would sing to the children as I held them and they nodded off to sleep. Even as a baby I would hold them every night and sing to them. They eventually grew out of this, but I was surprised at how long they were willing to keep it up.

My brother Rob would sing hymns with his children. He, by the way, has a very nice voice. I was amazed at an early age, how many hymns and Christian songs his children knew. It was a special time they shared together as they sang together in the evening.

A couple in our ministry gather the whole family together for hymn singing in the evening. They have four children ages seven and younger. This is the transition time for the family. Before bedtime, the father calls all the children to him in the living room. They sing a few hymns together and then they all go about the business of getting ready for bed. Besides being a very spiritual time for the family, it is also a time when the children calm down and transition into the bedtime routine.

Kurt and Julia Diederich, missionaries to Africa, sing the old hymns of the faith at dinner time. Julia told me that the reason for this is that she wants her children to learn the deep doctrines of the faith which are so clearly presented in the lyrics of these great old hymns.

b. The Bible Story

This was a special time as well for the family. We read through several Bible story books which systematically went through the whole Bible. From there, we began reading directly from the Bible. After a while, as the children grew older, I would read secular books as well in the evening. Some had decidedly Christian morals and others, though moral, were not written specifically as Christian novels *per se*. Nevertheless, the values and perspective are there. The transition came about as the children began reading the Bible themselves in the evening. Since they were already doing this, and since we enjoyed the time together, we switched over. We read many of the classics together and to tell you the truth, I enjoyed the time together as much as they did.

c. Prayer

Prayer was always an integral part of our time together. I would read them their Bible story, sing with them and pray with them. Even as infants, before they were old enough to be read to, I would sing and pray with the children, holding them in my arms and caressing their little heads. El would do the same, though I was the one who read to them, she was with them during the day and could read with them then. This was my opportunity and I praise God that she willingly gave it over to me.

Eleanor encouraged me not to just use rote prayers but to teach the children conversational prayer. From their earliest prayers we prayed conversationally with God, just talking to Him. If a child is able to talk to their father, then the child can pray conversationally with their heavenly Father. This was important for the children, to learn to pray conversationally. My last prayer with them at bedtime though was almost always the same. "Thank you Jesus for little Megan. Thank you for what a sweet, sweet girl she is. Thank you for how pretty she is. Please help Megan to always remember how proud we are of her and how much Mommy and Daddy love her and how much Jesus loves her." (The name and gender of course would change from child to child.) At the end of each day I wanted both the children and God to know how thankful I was for the precious gift of their presence. I also wanted to reinforce over and over again, literally thousands of times before they became too old to pray with, that they were sweet, they were pretty/handsome, that we were proud of them and that God would instill a deep sense in their hearts of how much we loved them and how loved they were by the Lord Jesus.

d. Scripture Memory

We initially started Scripture memory out as a meal time exercise, but then switched it to bed time. At first this was a major project with me and I was rather short and impatient with the children. God convicted me one night when Becca was crying because I was short with her. I came to understand that the way to encourage her with the Word of God was not to turn it into a major project but rather to make it relational. Little girls want more than anything in the world to please their daddies. She needed praise and encouragement in this and I soon changed my ways. After that, it became a gentle and fun time. The goal became not memorizing the verses within a set time, but rather having the Word of God sanctify the lives of my little darlings by gently residing in their hearts.

2. Prayer:

Prayer has always been an important part of the Mahon family. Three key times are used for prayer. First, the meal time. I generally pray here, but I also encourage other members of the family to pray. Whenever someone asks to pray I always honor this. Sometimes all the children would want to pray, and that was just fine with me.

And it came about, when the days of feasting had completed their cycle, that Job would send and consecrate them, rising up early in the morning and offering burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, "Perhaps my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." Thus Job did continually.
Job 1:5

Second was bedtime. This was a period of conversational prayer for the children and a chance to talk over the events of the day and coming events. Lastly were times of trouble or crises. Eleanor encouraged me to always include the children in our prayers when the family faced a crisis. Because of her influence, all the children turn instinctively to family prayer whenever one of us has a problem.

As I have been typing this manuscript, I have also been preparing for a mission trip to Kenya to present this seminar. In fact, this is why I have been working on the manuscript. I had promised on my next visit I would come with one. Yesterday afternoon I took a break from my typing to call British Air to confirm my seating on their Houston/London/Nairobi flight. The agent told me that I had had a reservation, but it had been canceled. I was in shock. I paid cash for the tickets; I had them in hand. How could they not have them? I was to leave in just three days. I could not possibly come up with the additional money in that time and besides, all seats were sold. I called my travel agent and as he went to work on it I went into the living room to tell Eleanor. She was already in prayer with her friend, having overheard the phone conversation.

I went back to the phone and after some thirty minutes the problem was straightened out and I was back on schedule. Within minutes after hanging up I got a call from my daughter Becca. Having just completed her freshman year at college, she was spending the summer in Santa Cruz, California with Campus Crusade for Christ on an evangelism summer project. The first thing she said was, "Oh Daddy, I hope everything is all right. I was suddenly so burdened to pray for you that I dropped everything and my friends and I have been praying. The burden is lifted now and I wanted to call to make sure you are OK." The burden exactly coincided with my travel agent's struggles to get our tickets reinstated.

Eleanor sat upright in her bed, all she could think of was, "I need to pray for John!" It was three A.M. Across town, Celia Williams, staff wife of William Williams woke her husband up. He looked at the clock. It was three A.M. "We have to pray for John!" They

began to pray. Eight time zones away, I lay unconscious in the dirt of a Ugandan road, my heart stopping and starting spasmodically in a reaction to some medication. I praise God for godly mothers who pray.

3. Music:

Charles Wesley, the great English evangelist and founder of the Methodist movement, stated of his brother John, who lead the singing at his revivals and wrote many of the hymns which we today hold so dear,

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Col 3:16

“Long after they have forgotten or lost my doctrines, they will still be singing my brother John’s.” And this is true. Few people have ever read a sermon of Charles Wesley, but few Christians have not sung a hymn written by his brother John. We encouraged the ministry of music in our children. Buying them tapes of Christian music to listen to and singing as a family together are two ways we have done this. Few trips are taken in the car with the Mahon family that we do not sing hymns together. We allow each child to pick the song and this assures that songs are done at all levels. During the Christmas season, we always sing Christmas carols on the way to church and when running errands. Another tradition during Christmas is to light the advent candle each evening, read from the Christmas story and sing Christmas carols. This emphasis of singing during the Christmas season gives us such a blessing and such a strong sense of family worship, that it seems to carry over through the rest of the year.

4. Observation:

For children growing up, observing their parents walking with God is a strong influence on later life. When they think back on their own memories as they try to picture in their adult life what a Christian parent should look like, they should think of...

The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things; and the God of peace shall be with you.

Phil 4:9

- Daddy reading the Bible
- Daddy sharing his latest verse
- Daddy preparing for his Sunday school class
- Daddy serving in the church (taking the offering, ushering, speaking in the business meetings etc.)
- Daddy speaking in public (testimonies, devotionals, etc.)
- Daddy singing in the congregation or the choir
- Daddy and Mom praying
- Daddy and Mommy hosting home Bible studies

- Mommy serving and ministering in the church
- Mommy helping Dad with his ministry
- Mommy preparing her Bible study
- Mommy doing her Scripture memory
- Mommy reading her Bible
- Mommy having her daily quiet time alone with God
- Mommy sharing her testimony
- Mommy and Dad hosting evangelistic meals

All these and more. The children should grow up with a strong sense of God's presence and purpose in their home life.

B. HOLIDAYS

Holidays are a good way to draw in spiritual emphasis in the home and to add momentum to what exists. Of late, though, there has been a growing opposition by

But let the righteous be glad; let them exult before God; Yes, let them rejoice with gladness.
Ps 68:3

some evangelicals to holiday celebrations. These range from a healthy rejection of the world's corruption of the holiday to a monastic attitude towards fun and blessings. Christians need not become disciples of the cult of Jehovah Witnesses in order to respond correctly in this area. God allows Christian to decide for themselves what they are going to do about the subject of holidays. The Word of God states in Rom 14:4 – 7:

Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and stand he will, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One man regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Let each man be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God. For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself;

Each individual then can decide what to do with holidays. One may celebrate them in a big way, while another may pass on them altogether. Neither should judge the other. We chose to celebrate holidays in a big way for two reasons. First, it is so easy to use them as a launching point for Christian traditions within the family. They are fun and so easy to make Christ-centered. They can easily serve as a beginning point for a new tradition, such as family hymn singing, or they can serve as a time of renewal for traditions already in use. Secondly, as Christian parents we have to say "no" to so many things, that we try to say "yes" to whatever fun things we can. Holidays are a safe thing to say "yes" to. By making them festive and a big deal, it is just one less thing that Satan can one day whisper in your child's ear. "Hey, your parents are such sticks. They never have fun. They are cheating you. Why, they are even Scrooges about Christmas and that's supposed to be a Christian holiday. Come on, let's rethink this whole value deal..."

I suppose something should be said here about Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny. We view these things as cultural aberrations, and though we do not teach our children that these are real, we do incorporate them in our family traditions. From their earliest understanding, we teach them that they are not real, but the world's reaction to the celebration of a religious holiday. We also do not ignore them. They are a central part of our culture and we include them in our family traditions while making a clear distinction between what is true and false. As a result, the children have grown up being able to

think discerningly in their celebration of these holidays about what is biblical fact and what is cultural fiction.

For those who wish to celebrate, there are seven fall and winter holidays that we emphasize. I will begin with the fall, as it follows the school year. These are all central to our culture and we use them rather than fearing them.

a. Halloween

For Christians in America the decision of whether or not to celebrate Halloween has already been made for them. Our culture has turned it in to a major economic holiday for the merchants and they are not going to let this cash cow go away. The question then becomes what to do with it. Some change the name to “Fall Festival” and do basically everything the pagans do with Halloween, with only a name change. I feel like this is skirting the issue and a little hypocritical. After all, there is nothing Christian about a fall festival. In fact, there is something a little pagan about celebrating a season for the season itself without reference to God. Thanksgiving is the celebration of God’s provision through the fall harvest to help us make it through winter months. A fall festival is no more Christian than a pagan Halloween. Another alternative is to ignore it or fight it. In each of these three alternatives, you put your child in the difficult position of functioning far outside the cultural norm during a major holiday and run the risk of being viewed as eccentric in your child’s eyes or, even worse, legalistic and cold.

A fourth alternative is to teach your children the spiritual roots of Halloween, a time when the dead are remembered. It was initially the same as our Memorial Day. Next, you can teach them the cultural and spiritual errors and then you can have a spiritual Halloween party for your children. This contains all the traditional Halloween festivities plus a trivia and question and answer time concerning the truths and errors in the celebration of Halloween. Most people believe in ghosts but think witches are make believe, and are surprised to find that in the Scriptures the exact opposite is true. We turn Halloween into an evangelistic and fun event, putting Satan on the run, rather than allowing him to scare us into hiding, huddling in churches, in prayer groups, or pretend Halloween “fall festival” celebrations. Just as you can bring Christ back into Christmas, you can bring Holy back into Halloween.

I find Christians who reject Halloween because of the spiritual implications, and then celebrate war on the Fourth of July, and sex on Valentines Day... a little hypocritical. We live in a fallen culture and can indeed be in the world and not of the world. Rather than fleeing from culture we can redeem culture. Rather than culture being the leaven in our dough, we can invade culture and be the leaven in the dough of fallen culture.

We have always participated in the cultural tradition of trick or treating. We have given our children guidance in this. Certain costumes are off-limits and we teach them that this is because they are pagan (Witches, ghosts, ghouls, monsters etc.). We dress them in fun or historical costumes, then we allow the children to go out and get their goodies just like all their friends. Later, they come back in and count up their loot. We ration this out and eventually buy this candy from them, if they want, (which they usually do) and let them use the money to buy something useful that won’t rot their teeth out. Usually we donate the candy to the church youth or a college class.

Halloween parties are very popular. Instead of just saying “no” to our children, or letting them go to a party we are not sure of, we get in front of the issue and get the invitations out to our children’s party early. In this way, we can have a wholesome

Halloween party and include a Bible trivia game in the party, which covers the spiritual issue of Halloween. These parties are very popular, even with non-Christian parents, who are always concerned about activities of their children during Halloween and it is a relief to them to know they are at our party.

“Trick or Treating” ends at the 5th grade for the children in the Mahon family. This helps stress to them that it is a childish holiday and differentiates in their minds between the childishness of it and the spiritual issues involved. After 5th grade, they can have a Halloween party and can be the ones to give out candy to the children who come around. Many of their contemporaries are still out Trick or Treating. We have a good laugh at their silliness and it opens the door for candid informal talks about the spiritual condition of their friends.

Christians who do not give out candy on Halloween, or worse, leave religious material, run the risk of marginalizing themselves culturally in their neighborhood. They become the Scrooge on the block. While everybody else has a brightly lit house with children crying “trick or treat” and people sharing candy with them and laughing and having a good time, the local Christian Scrooge’s house is the dark one on the block. “No candy from me for those pagan children,” is the message this conveys.

Instead, we seek to love each child who comes to our home. The neighbors know that Pastor John’s home is a place open to them; the children know the best loot on the block comes from Pastor John’s home; my kids’ friends look forward to the parties at Pastor John’s home, and the neighborhood is treated to a taste of the gospel and the true meaning of Halloween each and every Halloween because of Pastor John’s home. What does your home say to your neighbors on Halloween? Is it a time of inclusion and ministry to the non-Christians around you, or is it a time of exclusion and judgment? Do you communicate the victory of Christ over the spiritual counterfeits of the world, or do you communicate retreat, fear, and suspicion during this holiday? Must the world come to your alternative celebration or do you take the gospel to the world? Think about it.

Things To Do:

- Have a “Christian Halloween Party, invite your children’s friends at church and school. Include the Halloween Test. (See Appendix)
- Carve a pumpkin as a witnessing tool with your children.
 1. Explain how the pumpkin looks pretty, but is dead inside.
 2. Carve the top off and show the yucky stuff, then as you scoop it out tell how Jesus does this for us.
 3. Next share your testimony as you carve a happy face on the pumpkin sharing (2 Cor 5:17)
 4. Lastly, tell how it is not enough to take sin out but Christ’s righteousness must come in.
 5. As you share 1 Cor 3:16, light the candle.
- As a family night activity decorate the house for Halloween using happy, uplifting decorations and sing fall harvest hymns of thanks.

b. Thanksgiving

During the Thanksgiving holidays, Eleanor would have the children create “I Am Thankful” Books when they were young. They would take magazines, cut out pictures of things they were thankful for and then paste them on paper and bind them in to a book. These “Thankful Books” would guide the sharing at meal time and bedtime prayers. As the children got older, we would stress the Thanksgiving holidays as a time to give food to the poor and to minister to those around us. We would always have non-Christian

Internationals at our table during the traditional Thanksgiving dinner. I always remember the admonition of God to the nation of Israel in Dt 10:19, “So show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.” All of us were aliens to the love of God and are now aliens on this earth and, as such, we should have special empathy for those aliens who reside in our own country.

During the Thanksgiving holidays we decorate our home with pictures and symbols of the season, which helps turn our minds back to God and the blessings He has bestowed.

Things To Do:

- Put a “book” together with construction paper and then using family magazines have the children create an “I am thankful book” of things for which they are thankful.
- Have a dinner where international students or immigrants are invited over and give the gospel.
- Use family night to further decorate the house, singing thanksgiving hymns.

It was Thanksgiving week and American hostages were still being held in Iran. At the University where I was ministering, anti-Iranian demonstrations were being held and I was concerned that many on the team had attended the latest demonstration. We decided, as an act of sharing Christ's love to Iranians, we would have a special Thanksgiving dinner and invite the Iranian students who were studying at the local university to our dinner. Eleanor got together with the Campus Crusade for Christ's director's wife and they divided the responsibilities. She would bring the extras, they would both bring desserts and Eleanor would do the turkey and dressing.

We had ten Iranian students coming. That week all of our kids came down with either strep, ear infections or both. We were struggling college ministers. In terms of our finances, this broke the bank. With Thanksgiving two days away, there was no money for a turkey. The whole family was praying and then El got a call from JC Penny's. Over a month ago she had, on a whim, filled out a card to win a turkey from the JC Penny's store. She had completely forgotten about it. They were calling to tell her that she needed to come and pick up her 20 lb. turkey. The whole family rejoiced in this answer to prayer and we often talk of this event as we share over Thanksgiving dinner. It is an experience that combines faith, miracles and a refocus on the act of sharing Christ and his blessings with those around us.

C. Christmas

The Christmas holidays can be a real time of spiritual momentum for the family. We do not exist outside our culture though and will include cultural aspects of Christmas so that the children are not considered weird by their friends. These cultural aspects are always stressed as cultural, and seen as childish. We always teach our children that Santa Claus is a childish belief that is not true. They grow up thinking they are very mature because they do not believe in Santa Claus like their friends. By the end of elementary years the mention of Santa Claus has almost vanished, by a natural attrition. It is replaced by spiritual emphasis on Christ and people. This is not a forced exclusion, but rather, a learned one. The children have not grown up feeling cheated out of a common cultural experience with their peers, but as having experienced it and moving on to a richer and more spiritual experience and tradition. We teach them that Santa Claus is a clown, just like Ronald MacDonald, that the world made up because they did not like the story of Jesus.

We teach that St. Nicholas, was a kindly old Turkish gentleman who gave out gifts to poor children during the Christmas season. Also, that the Catholic Church got the jump on us and made him into a saint, but that we are really all saints to God. We teach them that Jesus was not born on Christmas day, but this is the memorial day celebration of his birth. We compare it to when their birthday is on Wednesday but they have their sleepover party with friends on Friday, so we are celebrating His birthday on December 25th. Just like we decorate the house for the children's birthday, we decorate the house for Jesus' birthday. (Remember, St. Nicholas is not the anti-Christ, he just happened to be singled out unfairly by the Church and by western culture).

One family tradition we share is to go evangelistic Christmas caroling. We gift wrap New Testaments, along with a candy cane, and in the evening go door to door in our neighborhood singing carols and giving the New Testaments as a gift. This is quite a hit with the neighbors and many send their children along with us. Afterward, we come back to the home for more carols, reading of the Christmas story, sharing and prayer. It is a rich and rewarding time together.

Another family tradition is to have our large dinner Christmas Eve. The first Christmas El and I had together, we ate on Christmas day. El spent most of the day in the kitchen preparing the meal. From then on, we celebrated the large dinner on Christmas Eve. On Christmas day we eat very lightly. This allows Eleanor to have the day off with everyone else rather than spending the day in the kitchen. In this way, she can emphasize her relationship with the children and family rather than a large project.

On our Christmas Eve dinner we will invite non-Christians to share with us. During the meal, we will read the Christmas story from the Bible and talk about what it must have been like the morning Jesus was born. After dinner, we have a family time of sharing and playing games and being together.

We have always encouraged the children to do something for the less fortunate during the Christmas season and many times this will occur with my help on Christmas Eve day while Eleanor is preoccupied with the meal. Several things we have done:

- bake cookies beforehand and then on Christmas Eve, deliver them to the local police and fire station for the men who cannot be home with their families
- leave Christmas cookies in the mailbox for the postman
- rent a Santa clause costume and visit children in the hospital on Christmas Eve
- have the children go through their toys and select out ones to give away and then deliver (with the children) to a needy family previously selected from a mission organization.
- we will call missionaries we have been praying for and the children will talk to them, wish them a Merry Christmas and then the family will pray for them. Many missionaries are lonely and feeling separated from family and friends during this time. It is a great encouragement to them to get an overseas call on Christmas Eve. (Be sure and plan ahead for the time change)

During the month of December, leading up to Christmas, we will read a Christmas theme book and from the Word of God each evening at dinner. Then we will light the advent candle and spend some time singing Christmas carols and sharing before leaving the dinner table.

We have nice manger scene my mother brought us on her trip to the Holy Land. We always set this up in a central place as a witness during the Christmas season. In addition to this, though, El bought several cheap plastic manger scenes, which we set out as well. These are ones to which the children have access. They cannot play with them in a sacrilegious way, but they can touch them and act out in their play the birth of baby Jesus. Eleanor wanted the children to get closer to the story and not grow up thinking it was a hands-off event.

On Christmas mornings we open our gifts, but we have taken several steps to make sure this is not a selfish orgy of getting. First, we have some juice and all get settled. Next, as gifts are passed out each person opens one while the others watch. The gift is appreciated as is the giver, and thanks are given. During this time we will break for breakfast and then come back to the gifts. Later in the day thank you notes are written. We want the children to enjoy gifts but we also want the giver to be recognized and the family time to be central, not getting, getting, getting. All the children are expected to make or buy a gift for each member of the family.

Eleanor will make a Jesus birthday cake with candles. We will sing happy birthday to Jesus, blow out the candles and then spend some time sharing why we are thankful that He was born.

We begin celebrating Thanksgiving the first week of November, sharing at the meals special thanks from the thanksgiving book and special time of prayer. The day after Thanksgiving we set up the Christmas tree, decorate for Christmas and begin our evening meal Christmas celebration and worship. This continues on through January first. By this time there has been six straight weeks of strong spiritual emphasis in the home during the evening meal. With this end-of-year boost, it is easy to start the year off with a strong emphasis on family devotions at the evening meal. Each evening we will pass around a prayer letter from a missionary, pray for him, read from the Bible and sing a hymn. Having been praying for the missionaries all year makes the Christmas Eve call especially important to the children. Conversely, the call makes praying for these missionaries all the more meaningful for the children

Things To Do:

- As a family, call a missionary you are praying for
- Put together and mail a mission box to them
- Take your family Christmas Caroling, choosing evangelistic carols. Leave each home with a candy cane and the story of the candy cane attached. (see appendix)
- Have friends over and use selected ornaments to present the gospel
- As a family, make Christmas cookies and give them to police, firemen, teachers etc.
- Each day, open a door on an advent calendar, read the verse and sing a Christmas hymn
- As a family, decorate the house and tree and then spend time in worship with Christmas carols
- Make a Jesus birthday cake and invite your children's friends over for His birthday party

D. New Year's

This also is a family day but it is also a day of reflection and thanksgiving for all that God has done. The smaller children all try to stay up until midnight and then we celebrate the new year as a family, with horns and noise makers and confetti. We top this off with a late-night breakfast. The next day at the main meal, we reflect on the blessing of the past year. As we share, more and more memories flood to us of God's goodness and blessings.

The fall season has been such fun and such a spiritual time of renewal that it is a natural thing now to continue the spiritual aspects of these holidays on throughout the year. The daily prayer time at the meal, sharing about missionary needs at the meal, Bible reading before bed, intimate family discussions at the meal time on spiritual issues are all more natural now in the uncontrived family setting, having been learned in the context of the holiday setting.

Things To Do:

- Develop a traditional New Year's Day meal.
- After lunch, make lists of all that God has done and post on refrigerator door or bedroom doors.
- Each person picks someone they would like to see saved or join their church that year.

E. Valentine's Day

This is a traditional holiday for showing love to those who are dear to you. It is also a great time to teach your children to show love and kindness to others. One side benefit as well is to teach children what and who angels really are— not babies with wings as they are depicted in western literature. In fact, the popular image of them is really the concoction of the imagination from early Greek and Roman mythology.

Valentine's Day is a time when you can make your daughters feel *very* special. On this day, I arrive at school during their first hour with a rose for them to carry throughout the day. I have done this since first grade and I cannot tell you the impact it has had on our relationship. Eleanor supplies Sam with a box of chocolate. He is not into naked babies with wings and roses... but he loves chocolate.

At dinner, we have Valentine cards which we all share with each other as a family, and then I have a very nice gift for Eleanor and she for me. This is a time when we truly show our love for one another. The benefit in modeling this cannot be overemphasized.

Things To Do:

- Dads: Take your daughters roses so they will have them at school.
- Moms: Put chocolate or a special treat for your sons with a card in his lunch bag.
- A family dinner where cards and expressions of love are exchanged.
- Send cards to relatives as a family.
- Send cards to missionaries as a family.

F. Easter

For us, Easter is a time of remembering the sacrifice of Christ. It is also as a family time. The day is spent at the Easter service at church and then the family dinner. Here the

Easter story is read and there is a time of worship before the meal. For the children, Easter egg hunting is done in the morning. As with Halloween, once they reach 5th grade they no longer hunt for Easter eggs. This helps them conceptualize that this cultural aspect of Easter is just for children, that the real meat is the message of the cross. The older children get an Easter basket, but with a Christian book and tape in it and some little thoughtful gifts or treats. As with Christmas, Easter is a family day and the children are expected to spend the time with their family, and not run off with their friends or neighborhood children.

I have found that a good way to include Christ in the Easter dinner is to celebrate the Lord's Supper as a family at Easter. This is a great way to cover the meaning of Easter. It communicates the equality and universal priesthood of the believer to the children and they will experience the intimacy of the first Lord's Supper in a true supper atmosphere, much as the early Christians did.

We decorate our home for Easter. The cross is everywhere, as are lambs and Bible scenes drawn by the children. The covers of Church brochures bought at the local religious store during the Easter season and they make excellent decorations for doors and walls during this time. When people are in our home during Easter season, the message, beauty, and joy of Easter is **everywhere**.

On the Easter egg hunt for the children, they will get some candy, but other eggs will have coupons in them to the local Christian bookstore or pennies for them to spend. The older kids get Christian books and tapes. We don't cheat our children from the fun of Easter that their pagan friends will recount to them the next day at school. We rather turn this fun to Christ and in so doing, improve it.

Things To Do:

- Have a time of hymns and sharing at the Sunday meal
- Read the Easter Story from the Bible
- Several weeks before Easter, use family night to decorate the home. This will keep the meaning of Easter before you in the weeks to come. The covers from bulletins (which can be obtained at your local Christian bookstore) make great little posters for the children to stick on walls and doors.

G. The Fourth Of July

The Fourth of July is America's most patriotic holiday, celebrating our independence as a country. We use this holiday as a family day, spending it together and with relatives in the usual outdoor activities and pursuits, ending with the traditional fireworks display.

Things To Do:

- Several weeks prior to the 4th, use family night to decorate the home, then discuss over the next few weeks the spiritual roots of our nation's independence.
- One evening prior to the 4th, invite an international family or student over for a Fourth of July party where you explain the spiritual roots of our nation and share the gospel.
- Most patriotic songs in our country are distinctly Christian. Sing these at the dinner table.

- Find out from the church secretary who are the servicemen from the church currently overseas and send them a care package with warm letters of thanks.

We live in the fallen world. It is not a Christian world. Many Christian holidays have been tainted by pagan traditions from the past and the present materialistic culture. We have chosen as a family, rather than to allow this to cast a shadow over our holidays, to simply worship Christ and use them to our advantage. As family, within our culture we seek to love one another, worship Christ and share His love with others, rather than retreating from the realities within which we find ourselves. As Eleanor says of the world's misuse of our Christian holidays, "Don't let it rob you of your joy."

C. THE CHURCH

The benefit of the Body of Christ cannot be underestimated in its support role of the disciplining and training of your children. It should not be the primary spiritual input for your children, but

neither should you go without this powerful supportive spiritual tool in your family's life. There are certain things I look for in a church when I am thinking of the family.

...Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.

1Cor 16:19

1. A Family-Based Decision

No church has it all, so if I have to give some. I give on the adult end if there is a compromise to be made. In other words, if church "A" has a dynamic worship service and adult program, but tends to neglect the children and church "B" has an adequate adult service, but really dynamic children's and teen ministry, then I will go with "B." I can look after myself and join an adult church when the children are grown and gone, but for now, I will sacrifice my needs for theirs.

2. Worship

I like a church that has a children's choir ministry with an emphasis on worship and not art. The existence of a children's choir tells you that in the church's limited labor force, children's ministry are priority. Then the emphasis on teaching the children to worship and know Christ, tells you that this is truly a ministry and not a school for the performing arts.

3. Challenging

In Sunday school, I want the assurance that they are taking the spiritual instruction of the children seriously. In public schools, the children sense early that education is serious business and they appreciate the challenges given to them intellectually. Then when they go to Sunday school, too often they are given busy work to do or the materials are below grade level. Even at the preschool age, I want a sense of urgency and ministry in the hearts of the teachers to whom I entrust the spiritual care of my children.

Junior high and high school Sunday school classes are especially notorious for allowing teachers who are more interested in reliving their youth than in molding young disciples of Christ to become teachers. I don't want immature adults who are going to make Sunday School an opportunity for them not having to be in an adult class directing the spiritual orientation of my children during this crucial time period.

4. Year-Round Ministry

During the summer, most evangelical churches have vacation Bible schools to which all are welcome. My kids would meet everyone in town. This expands their network of Christian friends in the public schools, gives a decidedly spiritual bent to their summer and gives them an appreciation of the value and emphasis of the other churches in town.

5. *Children's Church*

Many churches offer a children's service. I think these are good. Many parents do not have the parenting skills to teach their children to behave in church, so provision must be made for these children. Still other parents offer little spiritual instruction—or none, in the home. The church should make provision for these children as well. For those parents involved in their children's lives, who are teaching and training them in behavioral skills and who provide for their spiritual instruction in the home, children's church is not needed. For this reason, we kept our children with us after they passed the nursery years (about age 3).

I did this because I wanted my children to grow up with strong memories of the family worshipping together. I wanted them to grow up seeing me submissive and learning from my spiritual leaders. I wanted them growing up associating the love and warmth of their family with the love and warmth of their spiritual family. I wanted them to see their parents as leaders in the church and to see the respect and place of influence a leader has in the church. I wanted them to take part in the order of worship of the church and to grow in their understanding of the church. The adult service is more intellectually and spiritually challenging. It requires greater social skills and it challenges the child, pushing the envelope in all of these areas, which is of great benefit to the child.

When the children were very young they were still expected to pay attention. Pray when the church prayed, stand, when the church stands, hold a hymnal and sing the best they could, even before they can read. The same went for the Bible reading. Only during the sermon could they fall asleep.

Soon, however, we introduced coloring during the sermon. The child is to listen for words or concepts he understands during the sermon and then make a picture of them. This introduces him to the concept of taking notes and discussing them after the service. The picture is shown to the pastor and then discussed at dinner and posted on the fridge. When the child knows this will be taken seriously, then he takes this task seriously as well.

The next level is the folder for church. Each Sunday before leaving for church, the child needs his Bible and his folder. In school he has his school notebook and for church, (which we take just as seriously) he needs his church notebook. I have photo copied for the child a form to follow for the sermon. There is a space to list hymns sung, a space to list special music or testimonies. A space to record the Scripture passage read. A space to record important announcements, a space for the sermon title and then a space for some things he learned during the sermon and, lastly, a space for decisions made by him or others.

This is discussed at dinner and the previous pages are all kept up. Periodically he shows this to the pastor so he know he must do a good job. I give rewards at milestones such as 14, 24, 36, 48 and 52 weeks for the child for faithfully keeping up his notebook.

Finally, the child graduates to taking notes in outline form just like Mommy and Dad. Now he is taking his spiritual training just as seriously as he does his secular, just like Mommy and Dad. Now he can discuss spiritual issues of the sermon at the table as

and adult, just like Mommy and Dad. Too many children see their parents working hard at home over secular facts and figures and then staring blankly, mouths open with that gaping, fish-out-of-water look during the sermon, finally coming back to life just in time to sing the closing hymn. If some pagan professor in college, teaching scientific facts that will be obsolete in ten years, deserves to have notes taken on his thoughts, or some supervisor, who will be replaced soon, deserves to have notes taken on his thoughts, then our pastor, a man of God, who is proclaiming a message from the inerrant, eternal, living Word of God, deserves ten times more to have notes taken on his thoughts.

6. Baptism and the Lord's Supper

There are two events in church which help the child refocus on the fact that there is a spiritual division in mankind and no matter how loving the family is, this spiritual division is a very real spiritual division. These are the Lord's supper and Baptism. We took several steps to help crystallize this fact in the minds of our children.

First— they were not allowed to take the Lord's Supper until they were baptized. Each time the cup and bread passed them by, they were forced to refocus on their spiritual state and on the serious adult nature of the Christian life.

Second— we did not allow them to be baptized until they were at least ten years old. Many times they would ask or even beg. I know how strong the desire is to please, to conform and to play grownup is in the mind of a child. At age ten, peer understanding sets in. The desire to be an accepted member of one's peer group, to not stand out and to be accepted by your peers as an individual, apart from parents sets in. Past this stage, the child must make a concerted decision and effort to be baptized. He will not do it to please Mommy and Daddy. Only when the child is old enough not to want to be baptized, only then can you be assured he actually made a decision to be baptized. With each child, we saw the change take place. We saw the desire wane and wondered if we made the right decision. With each child, we saw the desire return as a result of their own convictions, and were further convinced we had made the right decision.

In addition, when they made the decision to be baptized, they had to make it on their own. True, they would discuss it with us, but without our input at the moment, they had to decide to walk the aisle or approach the pastor without prodding... without reminding, "Are you going forward today?" without questioning when was the day going to come, or quizzing them on the way home from church, "Why didn't you go forward today?" It was a private decision, to be made publicly with the child bearing the difficulty of dying to self alone save for the strength of the Holy Spirit. On their own, the child had to step out and walk the aisle. On their own, the child had to make the decision to approach the pastor. Whatever the tradition happened to be in the Church we belonged to, the child had to do it on their own.

I was doing the preaching rotation at Rice Temple Baptist Church. During the invitation, Megan, our eleven-year-old, came forward. "Megan, what is wrong, what do you want?" I asked. I could not imagine what could be so important as to make our shy, retiring little Megan come forward. "Daddy, I want to be baptized. I have accepted Jesus and want to follow Him in Baptism," she frankly replied. "Oh, yes, of course..." and then I referred her to one of the counselors. It's not that I am a clueless father, but neither Eleanor nor I knew that on that particular day she was going to do it. It was the same for all my children. It was a decision they made personally before the Lord.

III. Building Upon The Foundation

A. SCRIPTURE MEMORY:

I believe that I have probably beat the modeling theme into the ground, and yet... perhaps not. Should I go over it once again? The Holy Spirit says in 2 Pt 1:3, “*And I consider it right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder.*” It is surely a part of your personal convictions by now. Just keep in mind, if you have your child memorize verses and you are not doing it, your child will slowly, over a period of time, through your example and by your modeling, come to the conviction that Scripture memory is for kids— a childish thing and that one of the things he will someday leave behind when he is big like Mommy and Daddy. Mommy doesn’t have to go to bed at a certain time. Daddy doesn’t have to ask permission to go somewhere. Mommy doesn’t have to ask what’s for dinner. Daddy doesn’t have to ask to drive the car, and Mommy and Daddy don’t have to memorize the Word of God. I can’t wait until I am grown up just like Mommy and Daddy.

Decide on the basic world view you want your child to have and then select a battery of verses to shape that view. Have the child begin memorizing and reviewing these verses even before he can read. The child may not understand the verse completely, but then who does? The child will *grow* in the understanding for the rest of his life. At least he will have it down in his mind and it will be available to the Holy Spirit when needed. We rejected completely the idea of children memorizing concepts, rather than the Word of God. We also did not pick and choose phrases from a verse for the child to memorize. Don’t dumb down the Word of God for your child, rather expect the best for him. He will be challenged in every area of his life; don’t let him grow up thinking from childhood that the one area he does not have to stretch himself in is the Word of God.

For our children the basic Scripture memory battery was begun before they could read...

- *The Ten Commandments*
- *The Plan of Salvation*
- *Eph 5:23–6:5 On the Family*
- *The Wheel Illustration*
- *The Bridge Illustration*
- *Four Verses On Hard Work*
- *Four verses on Honesty*
- *Ps 23*
- *Ps 100*

If you had to choose 50 verses to shape your child’s world view, what would they be? If you have not chosen 50 verses to shape your child’s world view by having the child memorize them and review them, then what is your child memorizing to shape his world view, and who is making the decisions on this? (You can be assured that your child, at this age, is memorizing thousands of new facts and people are seeking to influence him about what he memorizes.)

B. FRIENDS:

At this age, we choose character over doctrine. The doctrinal beliefs of our children will be shaped at home. The social issues are being shaped (to a degree) outside the home. At this early age, the character of the child with whom our child is playing, and the character of his parents and what they allow and do not allow to take place in their home, is more important to us the doctrinal differences they may hold.

When our son Sam was this age we did not allow him to play with our pastor's son very much and did not encourage him to sleep over at his house, etc. The reason— the pastor's child was a spoiled brat. Conversely, a Catholic family in our neighborhood had very strong family values and conservative values of behavior. This was the child we encouraged Sam to play with, eventn though in terms of doctrines, we were worlds apart.

When Liz was this age, we would choose our Moslem neighbor over some Protestant friends for her. The reason was the social and moral standards of this Moslem family were closer to our own and far more conservative than most of her Protestant friends. In the Moslem home, there were no tobacco products, no alcohol, no TV and the radio was limited to songs in a language she did not understand. By contrast, in many of the Protestant homes in our neighborhood, there was smoking, drinking, TV's were not monitored and music was left to the discretion of the child.

The same was true for Sam and a Jewish boy he was friends with. Their values were very conservative and family-based. This was preferable to many of the values modeled in the Christian homes his friends lived in.

C. CHURCH:

Again, insist on active children's and youth programs. Remember the false values you teach by skipping church. Remember the damage you do by publicly criticizing the spiritual leadership of the church or the children in the church. Patterns are very hard to break out of. At this early stage, before the children can really understand, if you and your wife get in the habit of criticizing your church and pastor, it will be passed on to them before you even know it. It will become such a pattern in your life that you will not even be aware of it. The Holy Spirit says, in Jas 3:6 *"And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell."* First, you will be defiled by your tongue, then your spouse, then your children, then all that is around you.

Gus and his wife wanted to teach their child not to drink. They bought some beer and left it outside in the can on a hot sultry summer afternoon. Then they called their son, "Do you want to see what beer tastes like?" they asked. He could not believe his good fortune and nodded eagerly. They opened the sickeningly warm can of beer and bade him drink it. It was terrible, but they made sure he had two or three good swigs. It made him sick and the child ended up throwing it up. Gus related confidently to me how his son had sworn that he would never drink again. This of course was fantasy. Gus had deceived his child as a young adolescent. His child was no dummy. He would see beer being consumed ice-cold on TV and movies. He will meet Christian men who like and drink beer. Later, his friends will laugh at him for being such a patsy and so naïve about drinking. Then one day, at a party, he will taste a Daiquiri or well-made mixed drink, or an ice- cold premium beer. It will be delicious, and he will wonder what other ways his father deceived him into adopting his moral values.

D. HOME:

Continue to encourage reading and discourage TV. Model this yourself and be willing to shell out the money necessary to turn your home into a Christian library and music center for the children. Buy them their own tape player and stock them exclusively with Christian tapes. (If you are concerned they will listen to pagan music on the radio, buy them a tape or CD player, not a radio/player combination). Buy them their own bookshelf and again, stock this exclusively with Christian books. Update this shelf constantly as their reading skills increase.

A good place to go for fun, Christian-education materials is a Christian bookstore that stocks vacation Bible school and Sunday school materials. There are many fun projects and games which come with these packets, as well as posters with which to decorate your child's room.

Be available for questions, and answer them honestly and sincerely from the Word of God. Do not trivialize or minimize the importance of the question or the doctrine with your answer. "Will grandma go to Hell?" "Is it a sin that Aunt Agatha smokes?" "Why doesn't Uncle Bob go to church when he visits us?" "Why does Mrs. Smith's husband not live with her any more?" "What is an alcoholic and why did Mrs. Johnson have to go to the hospital for it?" In each question, give them the straight truth from the Bible. The way you protect a child is not to avoid or downplay an issue, but to give the child the perspective of the issue, which is given in the Word of God.

We were up front with our kids. People drink because it tastes good. They drink a lot because it feels good. Just because it tastes and feels good does not make it all right. We taught them clearly that drunkenness is forbidden in the Scriptures, but we were equally honest in teaching them that Jesus drank wine and one glass of wine or beer does not make you drunk. We had made our decision on drinking and when they became adults, they would have to make theirs. Until then, the Bible called them to obey the law and the law forbade them to drink. They had to wait to drive and they will have to wait to drink. We did not want them drinking "responsibly" in our home. It was against the law for minors to drink, and we wanted them to grow up respecting and obeying the law. We warned them about the dangers of alcoholism and asked them to carefully weigh whether the risk was worth the enjoyment. We shared freely about the alcoholics on both sides of our family and the proven genetic tendencies associated with this disease.

We were truthful, too, about smoking. True, most people did not like it at first. But, it is also true that most people don't like coffee either; it is an acquired taste. It looks sophisticated and makes you feel good about yourself. Great men in the secular and religious realm smoke and have smoked in the past. Smoking does cause cancer, but in some the effects are very late in life and in some there are seemingly no ill effects.

Ken and his wife did not want their son to smoke. "Do you want to see what it is like to smoke?" they asked. He could hardly believe his good fortune. Ken produced a long extra-strong cigar. "You have to smoke the whole thing," he instructed. Periodically he would exhort, "You're not inhaling. Inhale deeply when you smoke." His son coughed, and choked his way through the cigar, slowly turning green as he swallowed more and more of the smoke until he finally got sick to his stomach right there on the spot. Ken was very pleased with himself as he related the story to me, boasting confidently that now his son would never smoke.

The only problem is that Ken's son, as he grows, will notice the fun people seem to be having on the ads as they smoke. He will notice women, even young girls who smoke and don't get sick. His smoking friends will laugh at him for being such a sucker and falling for the oldest trick in the book. They will introduce him to a mild menthol cigarette and it will not be so bad. He will learn of the sweet, masculine scents of pipe tobacco and how not to inhale or swallow the smoke. He will notice how sophisticated and masculine certain figures appear when smoking cigars, such as Winston Churchill, John F. Kennedy, Clint Eastwood, Harrison Ford and John Wayne. He may be attracted to the pipe and figures such as Gen. MacArthur, or some of the great intellectuals of our time. He will learn that some of the great preachers of the 18th and 19th century smoked cigars, and will wonder what other ways his father manipulated him into adopting his values.

Smoking is wrong because it is self-destructive. 1 Cor 3:16 is a clear statement by the Holy Spirit, *“Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?”* To knowingly make the Temple of God weak, sick and disabled through the slow poisoning of the system with carcinogens is sin. Not only this, it has been proven beyond any shadow of a doubt that tobacco products are universally addictive, which again is a direct violation of the command of God in 2 Peter 2:19 promising them *“freedom while they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by what a man is overcome, by this he is enslaved.”* They must wait until they are of age to decide, and we hope they will make the right decision. All the people we know who smoke smell bad, eventually suffer from poor health, and would like to quit... but can't.

I have always felt that honesty is better than manipulation. I want my children to make wise spiritual decisions in this area. Decisions that will last a lifetime and decisions that will deepen our relationship, not bring it in to question.

IV. The Child Matures: Matching Pace And Expectations With The School System

A. CHURCH

Encourage the child to serve, not just *be* served. Volunteer in nursery, church library, etc. Participate in church workdays and fund-raisers. Have them earn their own money to put in the offering. Make sure the academic level of spiritual growth is pacing with the secular. If not, take it upon yourself to insure that the child is challenged in the reading and studying material. This is a good time to give the child a One-Year Bible and reward the child for daily Bible reading.

By this time, each of our children were working jobs around the house so they could earn money to give at church. Becca also adopted a child through World Vision. She earned money each month to send to the support of this child who was an orphan. The child, from India, wrote her back each month and Becca was able to send her small gifts. This was a great experience for Becca.

I take several mission trips each year. One thing the children have always been encouraged to do is to go through their toys and belongings and consider what they have that they might give up for the children of missionaries or children on the mission field.

By this time we expected all of the children to be learning generosity, not just by giving at church but to each other on birthdays and Christmas, and to Mommy and Dad on their anniversary. They could make the gifts or they could earn the money, but they were to take these days seriously as a way of showing love.

B. BE PROACTIVE

Allow the child to stay awake in bed as long as he wants— as long as he is reading the Bible. Remember, no TV after dinner or 6 P.M., whichever comes first. Do not have the TV in the central part of the house. Keep it covered or behind a cabinet when not in use, so it is not the primary focus of the family living area. No TV or phone in the bedroom. Keep the child well stocked with Christian biographies, autobiographies, Christian novels, CD's and tapes, especially of Christians, entertainers and authors of the same sex and same interests as the child.

C. SPEND TIME WITH HIM

In terms of the personal, spiritual, well-being of the child, continue bedtime readings but be sure and cover basic doctrines of salvation. Move away from simplistic children's Bible stories to meatier stuff. Salvation, Baptism and the Lord's Supper should all be understood and covered in one-on-one, focused discussions. Be aware of what the school is teaching on evolution, morals, sex and values. Make any adjustments necessary by talking directly with the teacher and giving your child alternative books, etc.

Before the fourth grade a serious "sex talk" should be had with the child by the parent of the same sex. It should be honest; it should be open; it should be frank and well thought out. A book with illustrations should be included. Tell the truth. It is not bad; it is fun; it is for marriage. Use the biblical motivations for abstinence and teach purity and modesty. Answer any and all questions without reacting and without being judgmental. Lay the groundwork and precedent that your child can, without fear, bring to you any question or problem that he may ever have in this area.

V. Transition Years Into High School

A. ACADEMICALLY CHALLENGED:

Be sure the academic level of the child is being honored. Bible study and Bible reading should be kept at challenging level and equal to the science, social studies and linguistic level of their school studies.

Campus organizations such as the Navigators, Campus Crusade and InterVarsity have excellent Bible study materials and workbooks. Starting at this age I would get up and have quiet times with the children, using these books as a guide. We would pray and ask God to speak to us, cover one or two questions and then share what we received from the Lord. I would answer questions as their level. I would make sure to honor their insights and often find something they had to share that I could add to mine. "Oh that's really good, I wished I had thought of that!" I would say, "Just a minute while I write that down. That was really good Liz, God really gave you something good there." Later, they would begin to encourage me in the same way.

For Becca, it was important to do this on her own. She wanted to exert her independence by having her own quiet time. Sam and I had one for a while, but then he wanted to do it on his own as well. Megan liked doing ours together and continued on into high school. She did not want something complicated. She wanted a simple, relational, devotional time before school in the morning. It was very important for it to not be rushed and for her to be able to share how she felt. She wanted to cover just one or two questions and then have plenty of times to share feelings. Liz wanted an eventnt. She loved the British culture and saved up and bought a tea set and several brands of loose leaf tea. She would set the table for tea just right, then have the Bibles and workbooks laid out before calling me to the table. She wanted to cover as much as possible so we could march through the books. Accuracy was important to her, as were facts. The time had a very academic approach, which was how she liked it. Each child was unique and it was important for me to be the guest at their quiet time and not vice versa.

B. CHURCH:

They should be involved in a dynamic youth program with a mission mentality, rather than a camp mentality. You should not be threatened but, rather, rejoice as they begin to

be influenced by spiritual leadership outside the home via their pastor and youth leader. You must choose a church where this can happen without fear. The youth leader at church and the Sunday school teachers will begin to assume more and more importance. Your child will begin to confide outside the home. Your child will become spiritually active outside the home. Your child will be developing gifts and spiritual interests with a different emphasis than your own. Your child may begin to develop doctrinal and ministry convictions different from your own. Be very careful not to over react.

Think clearly. Are there men and women in your church, who are used of God, with whom you fellowship and minister while differing in convictions? Why can't your own children? I know of fathers who minister constantly with other adults who differ from their own convictions, but cannot allow this same freedom to their adult children. If anything, the exact opposite should be true. It is important to be secure. Don't criticize the church leadership and their advice to your child, even when you don't agree. *You need to want this to happen* and encourage its growth.

C. HOME AND FRIENDS:

It is now that the importance of doctrine (as well as character) comes in to play with the friends they are making. Don't openly oppose a child you are not happy with, forcing your child to defend them. Instead, don't actively facilitate their getting together, e.g. make it hard. With some kids, it just never seems to work out for the car, the time, or the money to be available; with others, it seems to always work out. Don't volunteer for your child to become friends with your friend's problem kids in order to save them, and don't allow your friends to take your child to play with their problem children because he is such a good influence on them.

Remember, God says, when it comes to friendships, bad overcomes good. Your child, no matter how wonderful, will not be able to beat the odds on this. The Word of God clearly states in 1 Cor 15:33 *Do not be deceived: Bad company corrupts good morals.* Don't deceive yourself and do not let others deceive you. Don't take too seriously the highs and lows. During this time, a child may announce one day he is going to be a missionary and the next day will question whether God really hears prayers. Take the shock statements in stride and don't react. Make sure that you are adjusting to your child's maturity, in the level of sophistication with which you treat and talk with him.

D. PERSONAL EVALUATION:

Reevaluate your own values and what you may be subtly or subconsciously communicating to your child. Would you rather have he have Christian friends, even though they do not run with the popular crowd, or if it comes to it would you really rather him dump his nerdy Christian friends to be one of the "in" kids? Are you really placing spiritual achievement above academic achievement? Are you placing Church above sports? Is what you teach your child about values contradicted by what you tell him to do in terms of priorities of school, sports, social and church activities?

VI. Looking To The Future:

You should be actively moving your child to a spiritual identity and dependence outside the home. This should not be a radical shift but part of the process already begun in every area of life, as the child prepares for independence upon graduation from high school.

The depth of your relationship with your child and the modeling before God and the church which you exhibit to the child will be crucial during this period. A few areas of consideration are...

- Is the child separating and developing a growing relationship with a spiritual leader outside the home?
- Is the child developing a growing ministry commitment outside the home?
- Is the child developing a growing sense of spiritual family outside the home?
- Are you encouraging service in the church at the expense of your own plans and convenience?

During this time, family night is optional, leaving the child free to pursue his own spiritual life via church and youth activities.

- In encouraging this transition there are a few little extras you can do...
- Give money or some reward for certain spiritual pursuits or decisions.
- Be willing to stretch the rules for spiritual pursuits, curfew, study time, boy/girl activities, youth trips etc.
- Continue to encourage reading and Christian music by being willing to make the financial sacrifice to make this possible.
- Make sure your child recognizes that you know how hard it is to be a Christian at this age, and you are proud and aware of the sacrifices the child is making.

When Becca was in the 7th grade, she went to the movies with a group of church friends. After being dropped off, they all decided to see a movie that Becca knew we would not allow her to see. The kids, on the other hand, knew that Becca would be the spoilsport, so had been planning their attack well before the event. Becca found herself sitting in the theater with the lights dimming;. A verse on purity came to mind and she remembered her youth minister's exhortation, "once seen, but never forgotten." She stood up, left the show, and went and sat by herself and watched the agreed-upon show. When she got in the car, she related what had happened. Several of her friends sheepishly discussed it with me, wondering if I would tell their parents. That next day, I took Becca to the jewelry store and bought her a nice silver bracelet. I told her this was her trust bracelet and I was buying it for her because now I knew I could always trust her to do the right thing. I told her that as she wore it, to remember the love and trust of her father. It remains her prized possession.

VII. Conclusion

- A. The goal is preparation for spiritual adulthood outside the home.
- B. The keys for reaching this goal...
 1. The father as the spiritual leader of the home.
 2. The mother, as helpmate, spiritually supporting and supplementing the fathers leadership.
 3. The parents modeling what they are teaching.
 4. The parents making their own priority decisions by the Word of God

5. The parents praising and encouraging church activity as opposed to criticizing and complaining about the time and cost of this level of commitment on the part of their child.
6. Parents *encouraging* the children, as they develop their own spiritual independence and identity, apart from the family.

Becca knew she could only join one social club in school. She had the chance of joining one, which was very prestigious, though spiritually dangerous. Though drawn to this, she recognized the danger and instead chose to join the Christian club on campus. I have to admit that I initially struggled with this decision. I knew it was right and was proud of her, but I also recognized in my own heart the desire to be known as the father of one of the popular kids.

Sam had the opportunity to be chosen for the varsity position on the baseball team. It would require that he play with the team during the summer. Sam had been working for this opportunity all through school. Since first grade "t-ball," he had talked about varsity baseball and the coveted letter jacket. Yet, with the opportunity finally at hand, he came to me sharing that he felt like he should do volunteer work at a Christian camp this summer. He had seen the spiritual results in his older sister's life as a result of volunteering at this camp. They are known for their intensive Bible study and discipleship programs. To be honest, in my heart, I balked a bit at this. Having a son on the varsity team is quite prestigious for a father. I deferred to him though, and praise God for His prodding me to do so.

Sam's chemistry final was coming up and he needed to make an A on it. He had made some bad grades and a B was iffy and a C probable. Only an A would save the day. He had been studying all week, but after dinner he asked to be allowed to go to church. It was Wednesday night and he had been taking a boy with him to church regularly whom he had lead to Christ on the baseball team. To tell you the truth I balked at this. I felt like he should study and do everything he could to guarantee the A. Sam's concern was for the friend... the new Christian, who might not go to church unless Sam took him, and his concern was for his walk with God. The midweek service was a much-needed boost, given the pressures of public school. We deferred to Sam and I know in my heart that his priorities were right.

In each case I recognized my wavering and repented. It is one thing for us as parents to preach values. It is another to support our children in the hard day-to-day decisions that they face. As parents, we must not only diligently watch over our ambitions as they pertain to our own lives, but our ambitions as they pertain to our children as well.

- C. Remember, the ultimate decision concerning the child's spiritual life will be made by the child, not by you. **There is nothing you can do to guarantee that the child will make the right decisions in life.** You can, however, influence the decision and assure future hope if a wrong decision is made, by putting your relationship with the child above any single issue. Parents should always remember that once their children enter adulthood it becomes possible to win the argument and lose the child. Better to maintain the relationship so you can be there for the child when the Lord brings him back.

VII. Summary

I. Scriptural Principles

- A. Historically the home, under the guidance of the parents, has been the spiritual training ground for the children
- B. Modeling, Fathers, The Name of God Bestowed On Man
- C. Christian Liberty
- D. Christian Legalism
- E. The Church

II. The Spiritual Development Of Your Children: The Early Years (0 – 5)

- A. Routines are very important
- B. Observation: Children growing up observing their parents walking with God, are strongly influenced later in life.
- C. Holidays are a good way to draw in spiritual emphasis in the home and to add momentum to what exists.
- D. The Church

III. Kindergarten–Second Grade (Here we build on the foundation laid during the preschool years.)

- A. Scripture Memory
- B. Friends
- C. Church
- D. Home

IV. Third–Fifth Grade (Again we continue to build upon what has gone before)

- A. Church
- B. Allow the child to stay awake as long as he wants in bed as long as he is reading the Bible. Remember, no TV after dinner or 6 p.m., whichever comes first. Do not have the TV in the central part of the house.
- C. In terms of the personal spiritual well-being of the child, continue bedtime readings but be sure and cover basic doctrines of salvation.

V. Sixth Grade through Junior High: (continues to build upon what has gone before)

- A. Academically Challenged
- B. Church: They should be involved in a dynamic youth program with a mission, rather than camp, mentality.
- C. Home and Friends: It is now that the importance of doctrine as well as character comes in to play with the friends they are making.

VI. Looking To The Future:

You should be actively moving your child to a spiritual identity, and dependence outside the home. This should not be a radical shift but part of the process already begun in every area of life as the child prepares for independence upon graduation from high school.

VII. Conclusion

- A. The goal is preparation for spiritual adulthood outside the home.
- B. The keys for reaching this goal...
 - 1. The father as the spiritual leader of the home.
 - 2. The mother, as helpmate, spiritually supporting and supplementing the father's leadership.
 - 3. The parents modeling what they are teaching.
 - 4. The parents making their own priority decisions by the Word of God.
 - 5. The parents praising and encouraging church activity as opposed to criticizing and complaining about the time and cost of this level of commitment on the part of their child.
 - 6. Parents encouraging the children, as they develop their own spiritual independence and identity, apart from the family.
- C. Remember that **the ultimate decision concerning the child's spiritual life will be made by the child**, not by you, and there is nothing you can do to guarantee that the child will make the right decisions in life.

Chapter Eight

The following projects are a continuation of the process begun in Chapter Six as you set and implement changes in your child's behavior. What follows are a number of projects which you and your wife can complete, some are to be done separately and then the results compared, others are to be done together. The goal is to come to an agreement upon the discipline needs of your child and then work on them together as a team. Remember, the general rule in decision-making in this area is to yield to the more conservative of the couple in arriving at a decision.

Scripture Memory Verse— Heb 12:11

All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

Last Week's Verse— Dt 6:6, 7 "And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; and 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."

QUIET TIMES ALONE WITH GOD

JEREMIAH 15:16

THEME: SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT OF YOUR CHILD

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: DT 6:6–7

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: DT 11:18–9

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week, and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: Dt 4:8–10

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

QUIET TIMES ALONE WITH GOD

JEREMIAH 15:16

THEME: SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT OF YOUR CHILD

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: Dt 6:20, 21

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week, and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: Ps 145:4

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week, and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: Ps 78:4–6

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week, and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

Christian Liberties

In the lecture it was stressed that Christian liberties, though thought through and carefully controlled by parents, are often used as an opportunity for license by children. As a result, in many cases, parents must be willing to give up their rights for the sake of their weaker children. Think through the list below. What liberties or gray areas are you engaged in which might be a stumbling block to your child?

A. Alcoholic beverages

B. Response to authority

1. In the home

2. In the community

3. At work

4. The government

5. Church or spiritual authority

C. Public entertainment and diversions

D. Movies; TV; videos; computer etc.

E. Tobacco products

Spiritual Atmosphere Of The Family

Many Christian families assume a spiritual atmosphere without even really working at it. A family active in their church is not necessarily a family that is growing spiritually together at home. Spiritual activity within the church is very important, but is not a substitute for the spiritual atmosphere of the home. As you complete this project together, first fill out what you are doing right, then fill out the needs as you see them and then last, write out what you will do about these needs. The spaces are purposely kept small. Keep the list to those few most important aspects of the family.

<u>Area Considered</u>	<u>What we are doing right</u>	<u>What our families needs are now</u>	<u>Action steps we can take</u>
Meals			
Father's Spiritual Leadership Of Home			
Home As A Ministry			
Home As A Refuge			
Christian Books Tapes, CD Etc. Available			
Our Modeling Of Their Spiritual Disciplines			

Crystallizing The Needs Of Your Family

Together, in the space below, isolate what you both agree to be three basic spiritual needs for your family. Write these in the blank spaces provided. Next, discuss together and agree upon the actions steps Dad should take and write these out. Then, discuss together and agree upon the actions steps Mom should take as helpmate and write these out.

I. _____

Dad's Actions Steps:

Mom as helpmate

II. _____

Dad's Actions Steps:

Mom as helpmate

III. _____

Dad's Actions Steps:

Mom as helpmate

Prayer

(After finishing this project, you and your wife should desire to pray over it each day before going to bed)

In the space below write down five areas that you think you should pray for your family and the children daily.

I.

II.

III.

IV.

V.

Now in the remaining space, write the name of each of your children and after each name write out a Bible verse which you would like to be true in his or her life.

Using the remaining space list the things you can be thankful to God for concerning your family and your children. Just a word or phrase to jog your memory is fine.

Scripture Memory Battery

Review the section on our decisions concerning Scripture Memory. Then, in the space below, list the topics which you will have your children memorize verses from. Agree upon why this is important and write this out in a short sentence. Now, list the verses you will include. Be realistic in terms of the volume. If you are not memorizing Scripture, then now is a good time to begin.

APPENDIX



Halloween

Separating Fact From Fiction

Are there mummies, ghosts and zombies.? Heb 9:27

Is the devil is the equal and opposite of God? Jas 4:8

Is the night ruled by evil, and the day by good? Is the night is a bad time? Gn 1:5 & 31

Can evil spirits snatch children? Ps 91:11

A decorative border of small, carved jack-o'-lanterns surrounds the entire page. The top border is a single row of pumpkins. The left and right borders are vertical columns of pumpkins. The bottom border is a single row of pumpkins.

Halloween Scavenger Hunt

(ONE ITEM PER HOUSE)

Fingernail Clipping

Lock Of Hair

Eye

Newspaper Clipping Of A Murder

Picture Of A Monster

Pumpkin Seed

Burnt Match

Candle Wax

Popcorn Kernel

The Pumpkin As An Evangelistic Tool

BEGIN WITH THE INTRODUCTION:

“Although there are many apocryphal stories about pumpkins, they are, in fact, a tradition whose true meaning has long been lost in the mists of our culture. In our home, we choose to see the pumpkin as a picture of the life that only Christ can bring into a person’s life.”

HOLD THE PUMPKIN UP:

“As you can see this pumpkin looks alive. But is it? Is this pumpkin alive? Why, what has happened to this pumpkin? (Answer: cut from vine) That is correct, the pumpkin has been cut from the vine. Read Jn 15:5, 6, *‘I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch, and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.’* We have the same problem the pumpkin has, without Christ, we are cut from the vine and fit only to be burned.

Let’s look and see what is in the pumpkin? (*Cut open the Pumpkin and show the insides*)

Yuck, the pumpkin is all dead inside, that is what Jesus said we are like inside. Mt 23:27 *‘Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness.’*

God wants to take this sin out of us. If we ask Jesus to save us from our sins, He will take the Yucky stuff out of us. (*Scoop insides out*)

What does God do with this sin? Is 53:6 *‘All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him.’*

God takes all the sin and puts it on Christ on the cross, where He died for our sin.

Now we can be happy, because Jesus has forgiven our sins. We are not a dead pumpkin, but new and alive. 2 Cor 5:17 *‘Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.’*

Now God wants to do something very special for us. He wants to come and live in us.

1 Cor 3:16 *Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?*

When we accept Christ into our lives, God takes our sin out, gives us a new life and then comes and lives inside of us. The next time you see a pumpkin, think how much God loves you.

Has your sin been taken out by God?

Has Jesus paid for your sins?

Has God given you a new face?

Has He come to live inside of you?

You can make that decision right now.”

“Now the Birth Of Jesus Christ Was as Follows...”

Mt 1:18

or

The Gospel of Jesus According To Hallmark

How much of what you believe about the Scripture is based on truth and how much is based on Hallmark greeting cards? You might be surprised to find out the answers. Take a trivia test on the birth of the Savior. Match wits with your friends, family and coworkers. (Better have a Bible with you to prove you're right.) Some beliefs about Christ's birth are so strong... yet so wrong that you will become an instant expert when you point them out. Good luck, have fun and remember, before Christmas pageants, before the mini-series, before Hollywood, yea even before Hallmark Cards.... there was the Bible.

According to the Bible... T = True; F = False

- ___ 1. Jesus was born on December 25th.
- ___ 2. We celebrate the birth of Christ each year in accordance with the early Church in the Book of Acts and the teachings of the Apostles.
- ___ 3. The Christmas Revelation roughly spans the nine-month period from Christ's conception to His Birth in the manger.
- ___ 4. In the temple, Zacharias was confronted by the arch-angel Michael, who foretold the birth of a son to his wife Elizabeth and commanded that he be named "John."
- ___ 5. If a person knew the prophecies concerning Jesus, he could find the city of His birth unaided by the star.
- ___ 6. The angels who appeared to the shepherds were lead by Gabriel.
- ___ 7. The angels told the shepherd where to find the baby Jesus.
- ___ 8. There were no prophecies concerning the exact location of Jesus' birth, which is why the wise men needed the star to guide them to Jesus.
- ___ 9. The birth of the Messiah was hidden from all except those to whom God chose to reveal it through His angels.

- ___ 10. The Christmas Revelation relates the birth of two babies.
- ___ 11. In the Christmas Revelation, the angel first appears to Mary.
- ___ 12. The angel appeared to Mary at the time of the Immaculate Conception by the Holy Spirit.
- ___ 13. The angel appeared to Mary and Joseph at roughly the same time.
- ___ 14. While the Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, but it was the archangel Michael who appeared to Joseph.
- ___ 15. Mary did not hear directly from God concerning the birth of Jesus.
- ___ 16. Mary was selected by God by her righteousness and piety to Him. She was above all women worthy of this honor and was chosen because of her deep faith and devotion to God.
- ___ 17. Nothing is said about Joseph's righteousness before the birth of Christ.
- ___ 18. Mary believed the Angel of the Lord when he revealed to her that she would bear the Messiah.
- ___ 19. From the Revelation by the angel to Mary throughout Jesus' life, Mary believed in Jesus' deity and that He was the Messiah.
- ___ 20. There was a lot of gossip concerning the legitimacy of Jesus both before and immediately after His birth.
- ___ 21. No one believed Mary's Revelation that the child was conceived by the Holy Spirit.
- ___ 22. Joseph's initial decision to break off the engagement and marriage was carried out in a righteous manner.
- ___ 23. The birth of John the Baptist holds a central position in the Christmas Revelation.
- ___ 24. Mary rode on a donkey to Bethlehem.
- ___ 25. Joseph wandered through Bethlehem knocking on doors trying to find a place to stay but he was turned out everywhere he looked.
- ___ 26. Joseph and Mary ended up in a manger because there was no room for them in the Inn.
- ___ 27. At Jesus' birth, a star shown over the manger.

- _____ **28.** In accordance with the Scripture, “the little Lord Jesus, no crying He makes....,” the baby Jesus did not cry, as many babies do, and as a result began to manifest His deity on the very first night of His birth.
- _____ **29.** At the time of Jesus’ birth, Mary and Joseph were married.
- _____ **30.** The angels who appeared to the shepherds had white robes, wings and halos.
- _____ **31.** The shepherd found the manger unaided by the star.
- _____ **32.** The angels took the shepherds to the manger.
- _____ **33.** At the manger, the angels hovered overhead, praising God, as the shepherds worshipped the baby Jesus.
- _____ **34.** The wise men consulted the Scriptures which led them to Bethlehem and the baby Jesus.
- _____ **35.** The wise men, upon seeing the star in the east, followed it directly to Bethlehem.
- _____ **36.** The chief priests and scribes consulted the Scriptures which isolated Bethlehem as Jesus’ birthplace.
- _____ **37.** After receiving their instructions from the priests and scribes, the wise men came to visit the baby Jesus in the manger.
- _____ **38.** The three wise men came bearing gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.
- _____ **39.** The shepherds and the wise men all converged upon the baby Jesus in the manger.
- _____ **40.** The wise men were from the East.
- _____ **41.** In finding Jesus, the wise men saw the star in the East and followed the star from the East, the star leading their way to Jesus.
- _____ **42.** The star led the wise men directly to Jesus.
- _____ **43.** Although the wise men found their way to the baby Jesus in quite a miraculous way, there was nothing particularly miraculous about their return home.
- _____ **44.** The pagan wise men were the only people in the Christmas revelation to hear directly from God.
- _____ **45.** After the birth of Jesus, Joseph and Mary remained in Bethlehem and set up housekeeping.

- _____ **46.** Shortly after Jesus' birth they were married and at the ceremony the prophetess Ramona prophesied concerning the death of the baby Jesus.
- _____ **47.** There is no record of Joseph and Mary being married either before or after the birth of Jesus.
- _____ **48.** Jesus was a beautiful baby who grew into a handsome man with long flowing hair.
- _____ **49.** The Christmas Revelation ends with the arrival of the Wise Men.
- _____ **50.** Joseph, being warned by God in a dream of Herod's intention of killing Jesus, fled to Egypt and then God again appeared to Joseph at the death of Herod to call him back to Israel, thus fulfilling the prophecies of the birth and coming of Jesus the Messiah and ending the Christmas Revelation.

Study Key:

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| 1) Mt 1:18–2:1; Lk 1:1–5;
2:1–6; Dt 29:29 | 17) Mt 1:18 & 19
18) Lk 1:34–38 & 45 | 34) Mt 2:1–6 |
| 2) Gal 4:8–11; Col 2:16–19;
Rom 14:4–8 | 19) Lk 2:19; Lk 2:41–
50; Mk 3:20, 21, 31–
35 | 35) Mt 2:1 & 2, 9–11
36) Mt 2:4–6 |
| 3) From: Lk 1:1–5; To: Mt
2:13–23 | 20) Mt 1:18–23; Lk
1:39–45; Jn 6:42 | 37) Mt 2:11 |
| 4) Lk 1:8–11 | 21) Mt 1:18–25; Lk
1:39–45; Lk 2:22–38 | 38) Mt 2:1 & 11 |
| 5) Mic 5:2; Mt 2:6 | 22) Mt 1:19 (Lv 20:10; Dt
22:22; Jn 8:1–6) | 39) Lk 2:8–16; Mt 2: 11 |
| 6) Lk 2:9–15 | 23) Lk 1:13–17 & 57–80 | 40) Mt 2:1 |
| 7) Lk 2:11 & 12, 15 & 16 | 24) Lk 2:4 & 5 | 41) Mt 2:1, 2, 9–12
42) Mt 2:1 & 2, 7–11 |
| 8) Mic 5:2; Mt 2:2–6 & 9–11 | 25) Lk 2:7 | 43) Mt 2:7–12 |
| 9) Lk 2:21–38 | 26) Lk 2:7 | 44) Lk 1:11, 26–28; Mt
1:18–20; Lk 2:8, 9; Mt
2:2, 3; Mt 2:12 |
| 10) Lk 1:5–17, 26–38 | 27) Lk 2:1–20; Mt 2:1,9–12 | 45) Mt 2:11 |
| 11) Lk 1:8–14 | 28) Lk 19:41; Jn 11:35; Mk
7:8 | 46) Rv 22:18 & 19 |
| 12) Lk 1: 34 & 35 | 29) Lk 2:5; Mt 1:18 | 47) Mt 1:16, 19, 20, 24; Jn
6:42 |
| 13) Lk 1:34 & 35; Mt 1:18–
24 | 30) Lk 2:8–15; Heb 13:2 | 48) Is 53:1–3; Dt 22:5; 1
Cor 11:14 |
| 14) Mt 1:18–23; Lk 1:26–28 | 31) Lk 2:10–16 | 49) Lk 2:21–40; Mt 2:13–23 |
| 15) Lk 1:26–33, 41–48; Mt
1:18–25; Lk 2:10–20; Mt
2:7–11; Lk 2:21–38 | 32) Lk 2:15 & 16 | 50) Mt 2:13–4 & 19–23 |
| 16) Lk 1:26–28 & 38 | 33) Lk 2:8 & 9, 13, 15 & 16 | |

Answer Key:

1. F— The Bible does not fix a certain day, month and year for Jesus' birth. There are historical events which the divine revelation refers to that can fix the approximate time in history (for example: the death of Herod and the census of Cyrenius) but, as Unger's Bible Dictionary points out:

“the modern chronologist is confronted with no inconsiderable difficulty at the very outset to fix the exact date of the nativity of Jesus Christ. This is due to the fact that he is compelled to base his computation on dateless documents written in a remote antiquity. For neither sacred nor profane authors in those time were at all accustomed to record historical facts under distinct dates. All demands were satisfied when known occurrences were referred to definite periods, as within a certain generation, or under a specific dynasty, or within the reign of a given ruler already familiar to the contemporaries addressed; for our modern method of historical notation according to the calendar was something altogether unknown to the ancients.” (Ungers Bible Dictionary, page 197; Moody Press.)

We can, therefore, accurately fix the era and even the year, but not the day. Christmas then is celebrated as remembrance of the birth of Christ and not as the exact date. It is the celebration of an historical event, not of a day. In Lk 1:1–5 and Mt 2:1, we learn it was set in the reign of Herod. In 2:1–6, we learn it was during the census of Caesar Augustus, under the governorship of Quirinius. Beyond this, Dt 29:29 tells us that the “secret things belong to the Lord, the things revealed to man...” and God has kept this date secret and we should leave it at that.

2. F— There is no record, one way or another, in the Scriptures of the celebration of Christmas. Both Gal 4:8–11 and Col 2:16–19 free us, as Christians, living under the New Covenant from the forced observances of dates. Yet Rom 14:4–8, allows for the free observance of dates as a form of worship and faith. The observance of Christmas as an act of worship, thanksgiving and meditation is a matter of conscience, and one may do either freely.
3. F— Lk 1:1–2:38; Mt 1:18– 2:23 Actually, the Christmas Revelation, as revealed in the Scriptures, spans a time period of several years— from the time of the announcement of the birth of John the Baptist to the return of Jesus from exile in Egypt.
4. F— The angel who appeared to Zacharias is simply referred to as “an angel of the Lord.”
5. T— Micah 5:2; Mt 2:6 Although the Magi followed the star and presupposed the birth of a king, they did not seem to have used the Scriptures to ascertain this. The star itself either led them to Israel or for some reason they took it as a sign to go to Israel. Here, either specifically by plan or by deference, they ended up in Herod's court in the capital city, Jerusalem. After extensive search of the Scriptures, scribes

were able to pinpoint the exact location of Christ's birth and this information was passed on the wise men. Any Jew with a command of Scripture could have known the city.

6. F— Again, the only angel referred to is “an angel of the Lord” who was accompanied by a “multitude of heavenly host”
7. T— Micah 5:2; Mt 2:2–6 Even though you were versed in the Scriptures, expecting the Messiah, and even if you had decided to live in Bethlehem in order to be there for the Messiah's birth ,and even if you had decided that the star was a sign of this birth... you would not, from Scriptures, be able to locate Jesus in the manger on the exact day of His birth. To find Jesus you would need assistance either from the angels or later the star as it guided the wise men from Jerusalem.
8. T— This is true. Although the city of the birthplace of Jesus was clearly foretold, the exact location of Jesus was not. A building-to-building search would have had to be carried out, if not for the miraculous appearance of the star that pointed out Jesus' exact location.
9. F— Lk 2:21 –38; Mt 2:1–6 Evidently, there were many people looking for the Messiah at or around the time of Christ's birth.
10. T— Lk 1:5–17, 26 –38 The birth of John the Baptist and the birth of Jesus Christ.
11. F— Lk 1:8–14 The angel Gabriel first appears to Zacharias in the temple.
12. F— Lk 1:34 & 35 The angel appeared to Mary and she later conceived of the Holy Spirit. (“the Holy Spirit **will come** upon you”) There is no record of how this (the conception) happened or if Mary was even aware of its occurrence at the time. It was evidently a short time after the angel appeared because the pregnancy had time to become noticeable before the wedding.
13. F— Mt 1:18–24 The angel appeared to Mary, then she conceived of the Holy Spirit, then it became known to Joseph and the families, and he determined to put her away and *then* the angel appeared to Joseph.
14. T— Lk 1:26–28 Mary only heard from an angel, she had no immediate confirmation on this from either her parents or Joseph but was alone with this revelation. Later the angel appeared to Joseph but in a dream and then still later, John the Baptist leaped while in the womb, confirming her status to her cousin Elizabeth. God never directly appeared or confirmed her status to her or to others.
15. T— In Lk 1:26–33, Mary hears from Gabriel, in 41–48 her cousin Elizabeth confirms her baby as the promised Messiah. In Mt 1:18–25, it is also confirmed by Joseph through the revelation of an angel in a dream. In Lk 2:10–20, the shepherds bring word of the divine nature of Jesus, while in Mt 2:7–11, his deity is attested to by the wise men. Finally, in Lk 2:21–38, both Simeon and prophetess Anna attest to

His being the Messiah, but at no time did God directly speak to Mary as He had done in the past on momentous occasions such as Noah and the building of the Ark in Genesis 6:13 or Moses and the burning bush in Exodus 3:4.

16. F— In Lk 1:26–8, 38 Mary is referred to as a “virgin,” “favored one,” it is proclaimed to her that “the Lord is with you,” and she submits with “behold the bond slave of the Lord.” Her life has many high points in the Scriptures and there is nothing to indicate her life before the birth of Christ was anything but one that should befit a good Jewish girl. There is, however, *no indication* from Scripture that she was anything other than a Jewish girl who responded in faith and obedience to God. There is nothing in the word of God to indicate any special virtue or piety on her part that went in to her selection to bear the Messiah.
17. F— Much to the amazement of many, just the opposite is true. Joseph is presented in Mt 1:18–19 as “being a righteous man.” The Bible is silent about Mary’s being selected by her piety, while Joseph is portrayed as having a righteous character which precedes this event and shapes his reactions to the pregnancy of Mary.
18. T— Lk 1:45 states, “blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord.”
19. F— Mary did “treasure” the revelation of Gabriel (Lk 2:19), she did believe the revelation of the angel Gabriel (Lk 1:45), she did respond in faith and obedience (Lk 1:38) but this faith and obedience was not a constant in her life. In Lk 2:41–50 the incident at the Temple on the occasion of Jesus’ 12th birthday and the referral to God as His Father, went right past Mary. Again in Mk 3:20 & 21, 31–35 we find Mary, with the family, coming to take Jesus away, whom they perceive to be demented. It is at this time that Jesus disavows His earthly family and proclaims His spiritual family, His true family to be made up of those who follow Him in faith. This is truly a low point in Mary’s spiritual life.
20. F— Mt 1:18–23 The only record of anyone questioning Jesus’ legitimacy before his birth is of Joseph’s reaction. In fact, during His ministry, His deity was often questioned as a result of His being the son of Joseph and Mary (Jn 6:42). Evidently, Joseph did an outstanding and admirable job of protecting Mary’s reputation both before and after the revelation of the divine nature of their conception.
21. F— Mt 1:18–25; Lk 1:39–45; Lk 2:22 –38 There is no evidence that Mary even argued for the divine nature of her conception. God, however, though silent at first did bring others to her side. First Joseph, then Elizabeth and lastly Simeon and Anna at the Temple.
22. T— Mt 1:19 This is in stark contrast to what could have taken place. The public humiliation of the adulterous woman in Jn 8:1 –6 could have been called for including the subsequent stoning, which was entirely consistent with the Law of Moses. (Lv 20:10; Dt 22:22)

23. T— Lk 1:57–80 The Christmas Revelation actually begins, not with the angels appearance to Mary, but rather with Zacharias in the Temple (Lk 1:5–17). The birth of John the Baptist and subsequent Messianic prophecies hold a central position in the Christmas Revelation.
24. F— Lk 2:4 & 5 In the historical revelation of Jesus' birth, no mode of transportation is given in terms of Joseph's and Mary's trip to Bethlehem to register for taxes. Only that they traveled to the city and that she gave birth there.
25. F— In Lk 2:7 the Bible only records Joseph being turned away from one Inn and from there, going directly to the Manger.
26. T— Again in Lk 2:7 it is recorded that when Joseph could not find room in the Inn, that he resorted to the manger.
27. F— Lk 2:1–20; Mt 2:1,9–12 At Jesus' birth there was no star. The shepherds followed what instructions they were given by the angels in order to ultimately find their way to the manger. The star did not appear until later, most likely more than a year later, guiding the wise men.
28. F— The Bible is completely silent about Jesus' specific behavior from birth to adulthood save the incident at the Temple when He was 12 (Lk 2:41–52). All that we know is that He lived in subjection to His parents and grew in favor with God and man. (Lk 2:51 & 52) We also know that in His adult life He cried on more than one occasion (Lk 19:41 & Jn 11:35) and there is no reason to believe He did not cry as a baby. In His adult ministry Jesus condemned, in Mk 7:8, those who were overly fond of myths and apocryphal sayings with His rebuke "Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men." We should be careful not to be found in this class of people ourselves. Where the Bible is silent, we too should be silent and reject all myths and traditions as handed down by man and not God.
29. F— Lk 2:5; Mt 1:8 Joseph and Mary were engaged, or betrothed to one another. Although stronger and more binding than the engagements of our culture, nevertheless it was not marriage. As such, in terms of marriage, both in the eyes of the law and of the Jews, Mary was a single mother.
30. F— Lk 2:8–15; Heb 13:2 There is no scriptural basis for the current fashion of depicting angels with white robes, wings and halos. In fact, the angel who spoke to the shepherds stood before them, on the ground and made its proclamation in their language. There is no specific mention of the heavenly host being in the air or flying when they were praising God and giving their revelation, nor is their any indication that they flew away afterward. Nowhere is there depicted in the

Bible angles with white robes, wings and halos and nowhere in the Bible are angels depicted as beautiful young women or as babies.

31. T—Lk 2:10–16 All we know that they specifically had to go on is that the child was in the City of David, e.g. Bethlehem. Of course, the angels may have been more specific and the information is not recorded, but all we really know is that one way or another they, “found their way to Mary and Joseph and the baby as He lay in the manger.
32. F— The angels in Lk 2:12 gave the shepherds a general idea of how to find Jesus, “you will find a baby, wrapped in cloths, lying in a manger.” But not only were they silent as to the exact location of the manger, but after the heavenly host appeared praising God, they left the scene. In Lk 2:15, 16, we find the shepherds left to their own ingenuity in finding Jesus. Either because of the number of the shepherds or because of the relative few mangers in Bethlehem, Jesus was located rather speedily. It could well be that any shepherd worth his salt new where the mangers in a nearby city were located.
33. F— When the angel of the Lord in Lk 2:9 appeared to the shepherds he was standing before them. Then, in verse 13, a multitude of heavenly hosts appear with the angel, praising God. In neither verse is there any indication that the angels are in the sky. When the angles do depart in verse 15, they go into the sky, leaving the shepherds to follow their instructions in finding the baby Jesus. Thus at the manger itself no angels are mentioned or alluded to by the Bible; they having long since departed into heaven.
34. F— Mt 2:1–6 There is no indication that the magi were relying on any special ancient writings and certainly not the Scripture. Herod had to have the Scriptures consulted for them. The Magi were simply following the star, why they and not any of the Jews we do not know.
35. F— Mt 2:1 & 2, 9–11 The star led the Magi either directly or indirectly to Jerusalem and at that point ceased to provide specific aide in locating Jesus. Later, after Herod consulted the scribes and priests on their behalf, the star led them south, directly to Bethlehem and residence of Jesus, thus the star took them on an indirect route, first, westward to Jerusalem and then southward to Bethlehem.
36. T— Mt 2:4–6 It was the Scriptures, not the star, that first isolated the city of Bethlehem as the home of Jesus.
37. F— Mt 2:11 By the time the wise men arrived Jesus was a child, living in a home, with his parents, Joseph and Mary. The Greek word for child, here, being PADION, is different from TENKNION, which refers to a little child. Rather, it can be used to signify either a young or a more advanced child, as it is used here in Mt 2:11.

38. F— Mt 2:1 The number of Magi or Wise Men is not known. We only know that there were more than one.
39. F— Lk 2:8–16; Mt 2: 11 The shepherds came upon Jesus as a new born, in the manger, wrapped in swaddling cloths. The wise men came later to Jesus’ house and found him as a young boy.
40. T— Mt 2:1 states, “wise men from the east arrived in Jerusalem.”
41. F— Mt 2:1 & 2, 9–12 The wise men or magi, dwelling in the East (Mt 2:1) saw the star in the East (Mt 2:2), traveling westward and arriving from the East (Mt 2:1) they came to Jerusalem. It would appear from these verses that, that the wise men, while traveling from the East to the West, viewed the star in the East and thus it was not guiding them to Jerusalem. Nevertheless, for whatever reason, be it following the star, revelation or tradition, they came to Jerusalem, seeing the star as a sign that a king would be born to the Jews. Once in Jerusalem, the star seemed to afford no more help in locating Jesus. Thus they contacted Herod, then serving as king. (Mt 2:2) After Herod, by help of the scribes, pinpointed Bethlehem as the city of the Messiah (Mt 2:4 & 5), this same star either moved or reappeared in the South leading the wise men Southward to Bethlehem. This time the star, “went on before them” and led them directly to the house where Jesus was living. (Mt 2:9 & 10) Its characteristics were now distinctly different than before and it either hovered over, or cast rays directly upon the house in which Jesus was living with His parents. (Mt 2:9)
42. F— Mt 2:9–11 They found the house Jesus was in by following the star which went on before them, but it was by an indirect route and they needed other aides, such as Herod, the scribes and the Word of God to find Jesus.
43. F— Nothing could be further from the truth. In a mind boggling event recorded in Mt 2:7–12, God makes a personal appearance in directing the wise men in a dream to ignore Herod’s orders and head home by another route.
44. T— In Lk 1:11, Zacharias hears the news from an angel. In verses 26–28, Mary receives word via the angel Gabriel. In Mt 1:18–20, Joseph gets his information in a dream from an angel. In Lk 2:8, 9, the shepherds are instructed by an angel; in Mt 2:2, 3 Herod gets clued in, not by the scribes and priests but by leaders of a pagan cult. It is only the leaders of this pagan cult who hear directly from God in a dream (Mt 2:12).
45. T— Mt 2:11 By the time the wise men found Jesus, Mary and Joseph were no longer at the manger. They had evidently found a house to live in and had set up housekeeping. Jesus was living in a house, with His parents in Bethlehem.

46. F— Rv 22:18,19 There is no historical narrative of the wedding of Joseph and Mary. All non-biblical traditions and speculations of Joseph's and Mary's wedding, Joseph's reaction to Jesus' Deity, Joseph's and Mary's marriage, events surrounding Jesus' birth, childhood and teen years are purely fictitious and should be avoided.
47. F— Mt 1:16, 19, 20, 24; Evidently, at some point after Mary's pregnancy, she and Joseph were formally married. Joseph and Mary were referred to as husband and wife, while Jesus' was freely referred to as the son of Joseph and Mary, not the illegitimate son, but simply the son, as you would in the context of a married couple (Jn 1:45; 6:42).
48. F— Is 53:1–3:1; Dt 22:5; 1 Cor 11:14. The Bible clearly says that Jesus was not of striking appearance and would not stand out in a crowd. The prohibition in Deuteronomy of dressing like a woman and of Paul concerning long hair in 1 Corinthians would deny Jesus the long flowing hair so often attributed to Him in paintings. Classic sculptures of the time, which have remained intact to this day, depict men of that period with short, closely-cropped hair. As a carpenter's son, Jesus was certainly not the wan, skinny figure depicted in Renaissance paintings. Rather, this depiction of Christ reflects the aristocracy of the Renaissance period, rather than historical and scriptural accuracy. Who knows how our continued insistence, despite the Biblical injunctions to the contrary (Exodus 20:4, 5), will confuse and muddle the truth of Christ in future generations?
49. F— Lk 2:21–40 continued in Mt 2:13–23 The Christmas revelation actually ends with Jesus return to Nazareth from the exile in Egypt.
50. F— In Mt 2:13 & 14, an angel of the Lord warned Joseph in a dream to flee to Egypt and then in verses 19–23 an angel appeared again in a dream to Joseph and instructed him to return to Israel to reside in the city of Nazareth.

Lessons To Be Learned From The Christmas Test

I. Become a man or woman of the Word. The first thing we must ask ourselves is, “Where have I been getting my information about Jesus’ birth?” I remember going to the dentist and he noticed abrasions on my teeth. He asked me how much toothpaste I was using. I replied, illustrating it with hand motions, that I put a layer over the bristles and then curled it back over with a second layer. He smiled and asked me why, to which I replied, “Because that’s how they do it on TV.” He smiled, called his nurse in, the scene was repeated and they both became very animated. “Why would you look to TV ads to care for your teeth?” they both wanted to know. He then went on to tell me that all you need is just a little dot of toothpaste on the bristles. I had seen the ads so many times that I had just assumed they were right. It never occurred to me to ask the dentist. It is the same way with our doctrine. Why would we look to TV or Christmas cards for the doctrine of Christ’s birth? Yet we see the repetition of unbiblical events surrounding His birth so often that we just *assume* they are right. Go to your dentist, not the media for truth in dental care. Go to the Bible, not the media, for truth in your spiritual care.

II. Learn to study the Bible for yourself. The second thing we must ask ourselves is, “What other things do I believe incorrectly about the life of Jesus and the Bible”. The Word of God says in about the Bereans in Acts 17:11 *Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so.* We too must become students of the Word of God, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things are so. We must take personal responsibility for our command of the Scriptures.

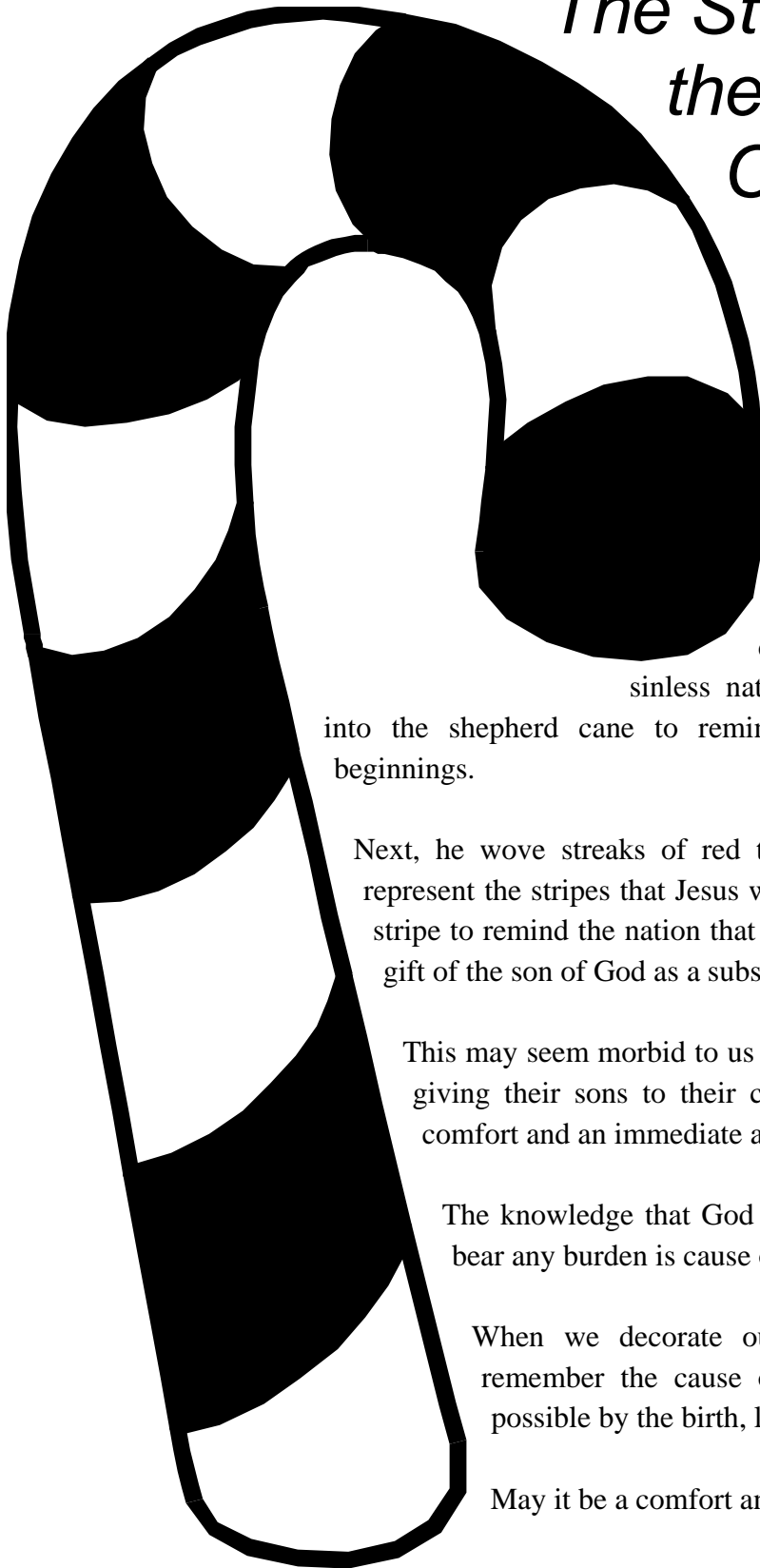
III. Stop expecting the world to protect sound doctrine and stop maligning the world for something you have been unwilling to do. A third lesson is to stop attacking the world for corrupting the meaning of Christmas when we have not taken the time to study the Word of God in an indepth manner ourselves. Remember, it is not Sears’ responsibility, not Hallmark Cards’ responsibility, not Deerbrook Mall’s responsibility, not even Hollywood’s responsibility to preserve the purity of the doctrines of our faith. It is our responsibility. We cannot expect the unregenerate world system to even understand the gospel, more or less to persevere it in its pristine truth. 2 Cor 4:4 states, “*in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the*

unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” And again 1 Cor 2:14 teaches us, “But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.” Do not be angry. Do not even be surprised when the fallen world system misses the meaning of Christmas completely. We can expect nothing less. The spotlight turns not upon the world but upon us as Christians. If we cannot score a 100% on this test, then isn’t it just a little bit hypocritical for us to chide the poor, blind, lost, dying and enslaved world for not knowing the truth?

IV. Do not fall into Satan’s trap of a joyless Christmas and critical spirit.

Lastly, ask ourselves, “What is my response to the loss of the true meaning of Christmas?” Honestly review your month so far. Has your response been to compassionately seek to lead others to Christ so they can understand the meaning of Christmas, or has it been to simply gossip and complain among yourselves? I remember vividly the joy of my first Christmas as a new Christian. Let us always remember: non-Christians are not the enemy. Satan is the enemy. Eph 6:12 states, *“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.”* Non-Christians are the enslaved civilian population we have come to liberate. Don’t fall into Satan’s trap of becoming a crotchety, griping Scrooge at Christmas time. Satan does not care how much you hate the commercialism of Christmas; in fact, he likes you to hate. Satan does not care how angry you become at merchants and shoppers at Christmas time; in fact, he wants you to be angry. He doesn’t care how distasteful your office mates and neighbors become to you as they celebrate materialism and partying; in fact, he wants all non-Christians to be so distasteful to you that you will have nothing to do with them. Christmas is a wonderful time to tell others about Jesus, to open your home in love to your non-Christian friends, to give New Testaments and Jesus Videos to your business contacts, your merchants, co-workers, friends and neighbors, to bring “good news of great joy which shall be for all people!” (Lk 2:10)

The Story of the Candy Cane



During the Civil War a candy maker in Indiana wanted to make a candy that would encourage people at Christmas during this very trying period of our nation. He decided to incorporate into the candy the story of Jesus' birth.

He began with a stick of pure white candy— white to symbolize the sinless nature of Christ's birth. He formed it into the shepherd cane to remind people that Christ had humble beginnings.

Next, he wove streaks of red through the cane. The small stripes represent the stripes that Jesus would receive on our behalf, the large stripe to remind the nation that our sins were already paid for by the gift of the son of God as a substitute in death for us.

This may seem morbid to us today, but at a time when many were giving their sons to their country, this symbol became a great comfort and an immediate addition to every tree.

The knowledge that God knows our feelings and is willing to bear any burden is cause of great joy for all.

When we decorate our tree with this cane we always remember the cause of celebration at this time is made possible by the birth, life, death and resurrection of Christ.

May it be a comfort and joy to you as well.

'Twas the night...

'Twas the night before Jesus came and all through the house
Not a creature was praying, not one in the house.
Their Bibles were lain on the shelf without care
In hopes that Jesus would not come there.

The children were dressing to crawl into bed,
Not once ever kneeling or bowing a head.
And Mom in her rocker with the baby on her lap,
Was watching the Late Show while I took a nap.

When out of the East there arose such a clatter,
I sprang to my feet to see what was the matter.
Away to the window I flew like a flash,
Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash!

When what to my wondering eyes should appear,
But angels proclaiming that Jesus was here!
With a light like the sun sending forth a bright ray,
I knew in a moment that this was the day!

The light of His face made me cover my head,
It was Jesus—returning, just like He said!
And though I possessed worldly wisdom and wealth,
I cried when I saw Him in spite of myself.

In the Book of life which He held in His hand,
Was written the name of every saved man.
He spoke not a word as He searched for my name,
When He said, "It's not here," my head hung in shame.

The people whose names had been written with love,
He gathered to take to His Father above.
With those who were ready He rose without a sound,
While all the rest were left standing around.

I fell to my knees, but it was too late;
I had waited too long and thus sealed my fate.
I stood and I cried as they rose out of sight;
Oh, if only we had been ready for our Lord tonight.

In the words of this poem the meaning is clear,
The coming of Jesus is drawing near.
There's only one life and when comes the last call,
We'll find that the Bible was true after all!