

## CHAPTER 2

### **BIBLICAL VIEW OF CHILDREN'S SPIRITUAL NEED**

Volunteer teachers interested in the spiritual development of children in their class will want to know the mind of God regarding children and their spiritual welfare. They need to be cognizant of the spiritual opposition they encounter. The scriptural instruction and strategy to train children will enable them to focus clearly on their task. When teachers understand the moral decline of the world they will value the opportunity to encourage spiritual development according to the Word of God. The teacher may be the primary facilitator of spiritual development if the parents are unable or incapable of providing such training. The evangelical volunteer teacher stands in a unique position to encourage spiritual development from a biblical perspective whereas the world and social sciences often obstruct true spiritual growth. Mainline denominations recognize deficiencies in spiritual development and have produced research from their perspective to combat the problem. Evangelicals are seeking to produce current research on the spiritual development of children. The child's destiny and future rest heavily upon the teacher's ability to provide training that will produce spiritual maturation. In a real sense the future of the family, the church, and society is at stake so the responsibility upon the lay teacher is tremendous.

### *God's Will for Children*

It is crucial for a teacher to fully grasp God's will for children if they hope to succeed in an effective ministry of producing godly children fully mature in the Lord.

Understanding God's will for humanity, his instruction for teaching children and His specific concern for children from the Word of God will lay a solid foundation upon which a teacher can develop a strategy and philosophy for ministry with children that will produce effective results spiritually. Since "the Bible, and only the Bible, is the absolute authority for faith and life" (McQuilkin 1992, 69) examination of biblical references regarding God's will for children should lay a solid trustworthy foundation for teachers to build their ministry philosophy.

God's perspective in general for humanity which can appropriately be applied to the spiritual development of children is found in Colossians 1:24-29.

Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness - the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people.

To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me. (Col. 1:24-29 TNIV)

As Paul was chosen to be God's servant to present to the Colossians the Word of God in its fullness, so teachers today are called to present the same to their students which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Like Paul, teachers today proclaim God to their students

so they can present everyone fully mature in Christ. This is the purpose of God for teachers which will be discussed in greater detail in the future.

The final words of a person are considered to be of importance. The final words of Jesus while upon the earth provide the marching orders for the church or what is often referred to as the Great Commission. Teachers may consider these specifically for the ministry God has called them into as the will of God.

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. (Matt. 28:19-20 NIV)

These words of commission by the Savior to the early disciples continue to apply to the church today and in particular for teachers as they minister to their students. They are to make disciples of them by sharing the gospel and then teach them to live obediently to the Word of God. These verses convey the will of God for the world to enter a relationship with Him and then develop that relationship by living obediently to His Word.

Two other passages of Scripture that convey the general will of God for the world in which teachers can apply to their situation would be, “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9 NIV). This clearly states God’s will for humanity is that they be saved. John 3:16-17 also declares the love of God for the world and His desire for humanity to have eternal life through Jesus Christ.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son

into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through him. (John 3:16-17 NIV)

“God loves the world and it is not His will that any should perish. He has done and is doing all He can for the salvation of souls. The perishing of millions year after year is against His will” (Overholtzer 1971, 11). God’s heartbeat is reflected in this passage of Scripture demonstrating His tremendous love for all the world. This would include the boys and girls for whom Christ died, which is amplified more in the general call in Scripture for reaching and teaching children for Christ.

In Scripture there is a general exhortation for teaching children about God which demonstrates the will of God concerning children. Proverbs 22:6 admonishes God’s people to “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it” (NIV). In a similar fashion the New Testament commands, “Fathers, do not exasperate your children, instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4 NIV). The implication of these verses seems to indicate God’s love and concern for the well being and spiritual training of children. These passages of Scripture are but a few that demonstrate the importance God places on training children. Larger portions of Scripture, like Psalm 78:1-8, spell out God’s desire for children to be taught about all God had done in the past so the children would come to know God personally and place their hope in Him. Ultimately the knowledge of God would be passed on from one generation to the next. Moses gave very specific instructions for the adults in Israel to walk with God and pass along the laws of God to the children in Deuteronomy 5:30 - 6:9. The specific concern of God was that the children learn about Him so they would place their faith and trust in Him. The repeated admonition to teach the children seems to

indicate God's special concern for them. This general implication is strengthened by direct commands from Christ in regarding children and His concern for them.

Mark 10:13-31 stands out as a pronounced declaration of God's will for children. The passage opens with the disciples rebuking people that were bringing little children for Jesus to touch and bless. The response of Jesus recorded in Mark 10:14 NLT and KJV was that He was very displeased or much displeased while NIV and NASB translate His response as one of indignation. The word "aganakteo" used in this verse is defined as "from *agan*, much, and *achomai*, to grieve, primarily meant to feel a violent irritation, physically" by W. E. Vine (1966, 321). The New Analytical Greek Lexicon verifies and adds to this definition saying, "to be pained; to be angry, vexed, indignant; to manifest indignation" (Perschbacher 1990, 2). The question can rightfully be asked, why was Jesus angry with the disciples over this incident? Examination of the passage reveals no malice on the part of the disciples. Inspection of the remainder of the text reveals the answer to Christ's indignation. Immediately He boldly declares, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Mark 10:14 NIV). The will of God is instantly revealed regarding children. They are to be allowed to come to Him. It appears that verse 31 ties this whole passage of Scripture into one teaching segment for the disciples when Jesus said, "But many who are first will be last, and the last first" (Mark 10:31 NIV). In verse 13 the disciples dismissed the children as unimportant to the Master and His kingdom only to be rebuked by Him. As they traveled down the road a man of wealth and influence approached Jesus regarding eternal life. The indication is the disciples considered this individual to be a prime

candidate for God's kingdom. Hearing the response of Jesus, he departs leaving the disciples in a deep quandary. In Mark 10:26 NIV they ask, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus responds, "With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God" (Mark 10:27 NIV). There seems to be a short parentheses in the discussion, verses 28-30, as Peter states his misunderstanding and Jesus responds. Returning to the lesson at hand Jesus says in Mark 10:31 NIV, "But many who are first will be last," referring to one the disciples thought was a prime candidate for the kingdom of God, "and the last first" referring to the little children they turned away earlier in verse 13. God's will is for the little children to be allowed to come to Him.

Considering the will of God for the children would be incomplete without considering Matthew 18:14 which specifically shares God's will for children. "In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost" (Matt. 18:14 NIV). This lesson for the disciples was illustrated by Jesus having a little child stand among them as an object lesson. In conclusion Jesus makes this dynamic declaration that God their Father does not wish for a single little one to perish. The truth of God's expressed will for the salvation of children should motivate teachers to do all they can to reach and teach children for Christ as a means of fulfilling the will of God.

### *Spiritual Warfare for the Children*

The enemy of God rises up in opposition to the will of God as demonstrated in the Word of God. Satan opposes the will of God. The salvation of children brings glory to God so His enemy opposes every effort to introduce them to the Savior.

The world's most fruitful mission-field isn't anywhere . . . it's everywhere. It can be found in the remotest corners of the Australian outback or on the busiest corners of downtown Manhattan. The field is located everywhere because it isn't really a place – it's a people. It's . . . a special group of human beings who respond to the Gospel more openly and wholeheartedly than any other people on the face of the earth.

Who is that special group? It's the world's children.

They hear and respond to the Gospel, welcoming its message of forgiveness; accepting its terms; believing its claims and trusting its promises more readily than adults, collegians, teens or any other group. (Benke 1977, 1)

Logically that which is most effective is likely to receive special attention or opposition in this spiritual war. Each child responding in faith to Christ is lost in the kingdom of darkness but when they receive Christ as their Savior they are translated out of that kingdom into the kingdom of light. It would be very reasonable to conclude that Satan would specifically oppose ministry to children due to the effective nature of that ministry.

The real battle for the hearts and minds of children is spiritual. Satan the enemy of their soul is determined to hold on to the children if he can. Christian teachers seeking to encourage spiritual development of children will be engaged in a spiritual battle. It is critical for teachers to recognize the nature of the conflict they will encounter in order to be prepared adequately and use the correct weapons if they want to experience victory.

We are human, but we don't wage war as humans do. We use God's mighty weapons, not worldly weapons, to knock down the strongholds of human reasoning and to destroy false arguments. We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ. (2 Cor. 10:3-5 NLT)

Ephesians 6:10-18 delineates the armor or weapons used in spiritual warfare and how to be spiritually strong using God's mighty power to defeat the teacher's enemy. The passage speaks about putting on the armor and the type of conflict in which believers will

be engaged. The armor enables the believer to stand firm in the battle and not be overtaken by the enemy. The armor can be prayed on by the teacher for success in the spiritual battle to be waged in the classroom and ministry with children assigned to their spiritual care and oversight. The battle is of a spiritual nature. “For we are not fighting against people made of flesh and blood, but against the evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against those mighty powers of darkness who rule this world, and against wicked spirits in the heavenly realms” (Eph. 6:12 NLT).

Since teachers are engaged in spiritual warfare, battling for the children assigned to them by God, they need to be spiritually prepared so they can succeed. Peter indicates leaders should, “Care for the flock of God entrusted to you. . . . Don’t lord it over people assigned to your care, but lead them by your good example” (1 Pet. 5:2-3 NLT). Students are not accidentally under the care of a teacher but assigned by God indicating God knows this teacher can add value to the student’s life. The student is assigned to the spiritual care of the teacher. This places amazing responsibility upon the teacher. It also speaks highly of God’s trust in the teacher. In order to live up to this trust, the teacher must assume the responsibilities that go along with the appointment. That responsibility is to teach by example. The teacher, as a leader, sets the pace or leads the way in which the student should walk. Students should be able to look to their teachers to see how they should live. Such a godly life would be impossible apart from the teacher’s walk with God. Their enemy, Satan, will do all he can to undermine their walk with God. Therefore, Peter provides additional guidance especially pertinent for teachers who serve as God’s leaders.

Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith. (1 Pet. 5:8-9 NLT)

Several apt points are made in this passage for teachers. First they are to be alert or aware of the danger they are facing. They do have an enemy who is cunning and powerful. He is looking to bring them down spiritually. Teachers need to stand firm against Satan. The best way to successfully stand firm is by allowing the Word of God to dwell strongly in them. God wants to provide the strength they need to overcome the evil one. “The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world” (1 John 4:4 NIV).

Teachers also need to recognize there is a spiritual battle going on regarding the children they are trying to reach and teach for Christ. These children were born “dead in transgressions and sins” (Eph. 2:1 NIV). They are living in spiritual darkness and Satan will not release them freely without a fight. “Satan, the god of this evil world, has blinded the minds of those who don’t believe, so they are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News that is shining upon them” (2 Cor. 4:4 NLT). The battle will be fierce because “Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14 NIV). He plays dirty and he plays to win. Trickery and deception are part of his tactics to hold on to the children. Facing such an opponent, teachers need the spiritual armor and all the power of God to win this spiritual battle for the sake of the children God entrusts to them.

One of the first responsibilities for those engaged in a war is to study and understand the enemy we are fighting. . . . The devil is our enemy. He is our arch-enemy, and he is the commander-in-chief of all the forces, which oppose us and with whom we battle. (Doherty 2004, 256-257)

### *Scriptural Instruction to Train Children*

Earlier, under the section, God's Will for Children, some Scriptural passages were noted regarding the will of God for children to be taught spiritual truth and to know Him personally. However, the expansion of Scripture is necessary to lay the Biblical foundation for teachers to fully grasp their calling from God to train and nurture children spiritually.

Deuteronomy 11:18-22 is reminiscent of Deuteronomy 6:1-9 repeated by Moses to reinforce the importance of this message. The people were to love and obey God then to guide their children in this same response.

So commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these words of mine. Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. Teach them to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, so that as long as the sky remains above the earth, you and your children may flourish in the land the Lord swore to give your ancestors. Be careful to obey all these commands I am giving you. Show love to the Lord your God by walking in his ways and holding tightly to him. (Deut. 11:18-22 NLT)

Only by letting God's words invade every area of their lives and homes and by diligently teaching them to their children (cf. 6:7) could the nation hope to escape the seduction of false worship and find permanent prosperity in the land of promise given by the Lord on oath to their forefathers.

The same principle applies to Christians today. Commitment to know and obey the Scriptures keeps believers from contemporary forms of false worship. . . . Therefore Paul exhorted all Christians to "let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly" (Col. 3:16). (Walvoord and Zuck 1985, 283)

Old Testament saints were challenged to live obediently to the Word of God and teach it diligently to their children. Congruence between life and lesson has been a primary principle for teaching effectively from the beginning of time and will be

examined in more detail under, Teachers are a Living Model in the section Teaching for Spiritual Development and the section on the Scriptural Strategy to Train Children. The necessity of diligently teaching children the Word of God continues to be God's design to guide a new generation into a spiritual relationship with their Creator. God reveals this plan again to Moses in Deuteronomy 31:11-13.

You must read this Book of Instruction to all the people of Israel when they assemble before the Lord your God at the place he chooses. Call them all together—men, women, children, and the foreigners living in your towns—so they may hear this Book of Instruction and learn to fear the Lord your God and carefully obey all the terms of these instructions. Do this so that your children who have not known these instructions will hear them and will learn to fear the Lord your God. Do this as long as you live in the land you are crossing the Jordan to occupy. (Deut. 31:11-13 NLT)

God's plan has been to use people as His instrument to reveal himself to upcoming generations and preferably people who are walking with Him and experiencing His praiseworthy deeds in their life. This is further demonstrated by the psalmist saying,

what we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done.

He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands. They would not be like their forefathers-- a stubborn and rebellious generation, whose hearts were not loyal to God, whose spirits were not faithful to him. (Ps. 78:3-8 NIV)

The praiseworthy deeds of God can best be related from first-hand experience. As adults share their experience with the younger generation, the objective is, these children will want to share the same experience and place their faith in God. Then they will have hope for the future and loyalty to God.

The Hebrew pattern for transmitting values and beliefs consisted especially of handing on the treasured store from father to son. . . . This transgenerational communications system is clearly displayed in Psalm 78. . . . A similar pattern, clearly set within family life, shows up in Proverbs 4:1-4 (NASB):

Hear, O sons, the instruction of a father,  
 And give attention that you may gain understanding,  
 For I give you sound teaching;  
 Do not abandon my instruction.  
 When I was a son to my father,  
 Tender and the only son in the sight of my mother,  
 Then he taught me and said to me,  
 “Let your heart hold fast my words;  
 Keep my commandments and live.”

“Father” and “son” were labels somewhat larger than strict usage in North America today would allow. They had tribal overtones, and one saw his own actual offspring as the “sons” of his own father and grandfather also. As the tribal tasks were divided, formal instruction was arranged in the synagogue school, but the sense of urgency remained high for transmitting community values -beliefs of the larger family. (Clark, Brubaker, and Zuck 1986, 7-8)

God specifically said of Abraham, “I have singled him out so that he will direct his sons and their families to keep the way of the Lord and do what is right and just” (Gen. 18:19 NLT). This would indicate Abraham should instruct his sons in the ways of the Lord. The New Testament has similar instructions for elders that their children were to be believers (Titus 1:6). 1 Timothy 3:4 says the elder “must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect” (NIV). In a similar way, deacons are also to provide training for their children (1 Tim. 3:12). As church leaders the elders and deacons are to set the example of training their children well so others in the church have an example to follow for the godly training of their children. The crux of the issue is that children need to be nurtured and trained as Proverbs 22:6 and Ephesians 6:4 indicate.

Children in Scripture such as Timothy, Samuel, Rhoda, Moses, Daniel and Naaman's servant girl would provide good examples to encourage teachers that children can be trained and guided to walk with the Lord. The scriptural admonitions to train children are not beyond the realm of reality. It is a supernatural process requiring the intervention of God to produce the growth desired in the children. The teacher's part in the process is to walk with God, faithfully teach the children the Word of God and trust Him to produce the spiritual birth and growth that will enable the student to mature in the walk with God.

The final passage of Scripture to probe on this subject occurs at the end of Moses' life when he said to Israel,

Set your hearts on all the words which I testify among you today, which you shall command your children to be careful to observe - all the words of this law. For it is not a futile thing for you, because it is your life. (Deut. 32:46-47 NKJV)

The instructions from Moses are extremely appropriate for volunteer teachers wanting to encourage spiritual development in their students today. "It is not a futile thing for you" really means teaching children the Word of God is not a waste of time. Don't give up if results are not immediately obvious. Results often are not noticeable right away. Spiritual growth takes time before they become visible (Fowler 2004, 48).

Teachers who value the Word of God highly can present it to students in a fashion that will motivate them to assimilate it into their lives. Cognitive comprehension of the Word of God and understanding its meaning and relevance to life will help motivate the student to apply or obey the principles of the Bible so it transforms their behavior and character to become more Christ-like which ultimately will bring glory to God. Teachers have to consciously work at application for this to occur.

### *Scriptural Strategy to Train Children*

A thorough study of Scripture regarding teaching strategy could be made and written but the strategy to be considered here is not one of delivery methods and technique but more closely related to the personal relationship of the subject and the teacher. Integration of the subject into the teacher's life is critical if the teacher is to teach with authority and credibility. Students not only listen to the words of a teacher but watch their walk to see if the Bible is significant enough to be lived by the teacher. "A teacher is incapable of communicating qualities or characteristics of spirituality with life impact without personal growth in those same qualities" (Clark, Johnson and Sloat 1991, 153). Prior to living the lesson the teacher must learn the lesson as will be illustrated from the book of Deuteronomy. Teachers need to master lesson content through thorough preparation before they are able to live the material. The matter of integration of Scripture into everyday living is pivotal to the adoption of biblical principles by students.

The personal spiritual life of the teacher is instruction's first consideration. Instruction in God's Word calls for a teacher who is himself or herself personally responsive to God. . . . Thus the one who communicates the Word must be one who lives it. Communication of a living faith calls for living faith in the instructor. (Richards 1983, 23)

Major scriptural instruction regarding this strategy aspect of training children comes from Deuteronomy. This book is frequently cited for its instruction to diligently train children in the laws of God and the way they should live. Parents are clearly taught to diligently instruct their children in Deuteronomy which is the second law or repetition of the law or Ten Commandments from God. However, to only see the importance to "impress them [the laws of God] on your children" (Deut. 6:7 NIV) is to overlook what

seems to be an extremely valuable lesson on how to engage in that task. No less than twenty times in Deuteronomy 4-6 are the adults commanded to live the laws of God. Prior to reiterating the Ten Commandments in chapter five obedience to the law is commanded repeatedly before any mention is given to teaching them to their children. Prior to restating the ten commandments in chapter five, Moses urged the people to “learn them and be sure to follow them” (Deut. 5:1 NIV). Immediately following the presentation of the commands of God the people are told to keep, follow, do, walk, observe and obey these commands. This action would demonstrate their love for God as declared in the Shema, Deuteronomy 6:4-5, “the basic confession of faith in Judaism” (Walvoord and Zuck 1985, 274). Not until after these issues are covered does Moses, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, tell the people to diligently teach these truths to their children. The significance of order here would suggest the lessons were to be learned and lived first by the teacher and then passed along to the child.

Teachers that assimilate scriptural truth into their lives before trying to communicate it to children are able to teach from first-hand experience. They can teach with passion having walked the path first before trying to convey the truth to their students. First hand testimony can lend support to the scriptural principle and provide vivid illustration or examples of the truth. Walking the talk first makes the lesson more believable. “What is taught must match what is lived” (Clark, Johnson and Sloat 1991, 153). Congruence lends credence and credibility to the teacher’s lesson. Hypocrites want others to do what they are unwilling to do. Students will pick up on such behavior quickly and reject the message the teacher wants to convey.

After mastering the content of the lesson and putting it into life experience the teacher has to teach the lesson to students. It goes beyond the scope of this paper to examine the various teaching models but ample material is available to assist teachers in discovering effective teaching methods. Scripture lends support to teaching via verbal and non-verbal communication. Once the lesson is learned by the teacher and lived by the teacher it has great potential of being taught effectively with passion and conviction to the student.

The ultimate goal is not for the teacher to learn, live and teach a lesson. Ultimately the goal is to see the student learn the Scripture adequately to live the lesson and pass it on to someone else. The goal of the teacher is to assist students in their spiritual maturation. Scripture indicates the result of effective teaching is not in a teacher's ability to communicate but in the adoption of scriptural principles by the student. While it is the goal of the teacher to facilitate spiritual growth the result of spiritual growth will be observed as the student adopts the truths of Scripture and then begins to pass them on to others. The writer of Hebrews makes this point at the end of chapter five saying:

We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. (Heb. 5:11-14 NIV)

The result of their immaturity was they could not teach others instead they had to continue being fed basic truths of Scripture over and over.

The psalmist refers to the concept of learning truth adequately that it can then be transmitted by the student to another when he says,

He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. (Ps. 78:5-6 NIV)

Paul refers to the principle that a person who is mature or strong in the Lord should in turn teach others who will be responsible to pass on the truth they learn to others.

You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others. (2 Tim. 2:1-2 NIV)

This principle provides a means of propagating the gospel but it also gives evidence of the student's maturity. Once the truth is learned and internalized and integrated into the student's life the natural response is to share it with another so they will come into a relationship with God and have the joy of walking with Him.