**Spiritual Development**

In past studies, we have observed that the description of Jesus’ development from child to adult in Luke 2:52 provides the perfect model for the intellectual, physical, spiritual and social growth that is critical if our children are to become the well-rounded adults that God intends them to be. We now turn our attention to helping our children grow “in favor with God”.

**Who is God and why does it matter?** At the heart of human spirituality is the acknowledgement that God created everything (Gen 1:1), that He has chosen to communicate His will to mankind throughout history (Heb. 1:1) and that violating His will separates us from Him (Is 59:2). Our children need to know God and to understand that He has loved us enough to pay the price for our sins with the blood of His son. As they mature, they will need to be able to study His word and properly discern His will for themselves.

**How do I know what pleases God?** Once our children have a firm grasp on the fact that God inherently holds ultimate authority because He is the almighty creator, they must be taught that He has granted all authority to His Son, Jesus (Mt. 28:18) and that Jesus, in turn, sent the Holy Spirit to guide the inspired writers of the New Testament into “all truth” (John 16:13). Our children will be able to find all the answers they need in the scriptures and be “equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). With a profound respect for God’s authority, they can earnestly and confidently “contend for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints” (Jude 1:3).

**Who do you trust?** Most young children can trust their parents to do *what they believe* to be in the child’s best interest, and that’s a good thing. But as our children get older, we must help them understand that their ultimate trust must be in God. He knows what they need (Mt. 6:8), He loves them enough to do what is best (Rom. 8:28), He is powerful enough to make it happen (Luke 1:37) and He never breaks His promises (2 Cor. 1:18-20). Once they understand that every good gift comes from Him, they can make their petitions, express their gratitude and enjoy the peace of God that surpasses all comprehension (Phil. 4:6-7).

**Both reverence and love.** If we do our job right as parents, young children will sense that even discipline is an extension of our love and concern for them. As they grow spiritually, we must help them understand that their relationship to their heavenly Father is much the same. While fearing God and keeping His commandments is the whole of man (Eccl. 12:13), our kids should understand that the greatest motivation for serving and pleasing God is reciprocating the love He has demonstrated for them and showing their gratitude for all He has done for them (1 John 4:18-19).

Our children will never become spiritually minded adults unless they view God as the creator of all, the savior of their souls, the authoritative author of scripture and the One they trust and fear and love above all else. It is up to us to lead them to love the Lord their God with all their hearts (Mark 12:30).

**John McKee**

**West Murray church of Christ**