

A Father's Spiritual Advice

By James McAlister

On his 20th birthday, I gave my son a copy of the letter I had written him when he was just one year old. The challenges I set out for him at age one are unchanged 19 years later. I've excerpted portions of that "spiritual yardstick" below, along with one final lesson that's now become obvious.

You are now a year old, and words can't describe the joy you have brought us. Your birth was an answer to years of prayer, and we know that you will grow to be God's man. Toward that end, let me summarize some of the most important lessons I've learned about living.



1. *Give top priority to knowing God. Spend much time in His word—read, study, memorize, and meditate—and in prayer to Him. Know Christ, and make Him known.*
2. *Use your time wisely. As it slips away, so does your life. Invest time in building relationships with others, and take time to write down what's important to you.*
3. *Give more attention to what you are rather than what you do. First be pure and holy, and proper actions will follow. Learn to endure hardships with joy, for they will come to an end, and you will have grown. Everything has its season.*
4. *Don't be deceived by the glamour of this world, whether it comes in the form of positions, possessions, or pleasures. Temptations and tribulations are a necessary part of life, but God has promised to provide a way of escape. He is faithful; you be faithful, too. Stand on the side of right, even if you must stand alone.*

5. *The important is seldom urgent, and the urgent is seldom important. Therefore, make your important decisions slowly; some can't be reversed. The joy in life is in the living, not in attaining some distant goal. Make plans, but leave room for God to change them.*
6. *Nothing is as simple as it looks, and problems are seldom as bad as they first appear. Don't be naïve, fearful or easily shaken.*
7. *Give credit for what you are to God and others, and cultivate love and gratefulness toward them.*

I hope these thoughts will challenge you in the years to come.

We want the best for our children and naturally set such lofty goals for them. Thus to these lessons I'd like to add another: The "spiritual yardsticks" we use on others seem to work better when we first apply them to ourselves. Perhaps that's the reason I'm ashamed to find I haven't "measured up" as well as I had hoped.

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