

What is the Principle Approach?

How is it Different from other Homeschooling Methods?

The Principle Approach is a restoration of the type of education that the Founders and many other classical scholars received in years gone by. It is characterized by hard work, little prepared curricular choices, notebooking, and lots of books. If there's one thing that sets Principle Approachers apart from other homeschoolers it is their bibliophile tendencies! The PA-er in your group is usually the one with the most extensive library. They usually have a bunch of obscure titles too; old tomes are the norm, as are multiple resources to teach a single topic. They are also the folks with the strange vocabulary, filled with words most people never heard of and few employ. Yes, PA-ers are a strange lot, but there is some good fruit to be had by this method.

The Principle Approach is actually more of a mindset than a homeschooling method, though it does employ methods that are both Biblical and classical in nature. This is the most thoroughly Biblical method of homeschooling because it starts with Scripture, ends with Scripture, and is thoroughly saturated with Scripture. Every piece of information is either sifted through the Word or examined through Its lens. PA-ers search out God's purpose for every academic discipline. They trace the origin, development, and fulfillment of every topic. They account for God's Providence in the affairs of men and nations though all time. They study the greatest works by the greatest minds through history. They study basic principles and apply them in numerous ways throughout all areas of life. If all this sounds great to you, and you're not afraid of being labeled a little "out there" by your peers, well then, this is the method for you!

You will find some overlap with other methods as well as some subsets within the Principle Approach. For example, PA is Classical in that the stages of learning are taken into consideration and timeless methods are employed, but, unlike many classical systems, the classics studied do not include that which does not fit with the principles put forth in Philippians 4:8, "Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things."(NIV) In other words, censorship is alive and well in a PA home, and with good reason! There are also some similarities to the Living Books method of Charlotte Mason because people who practice this method firmly believe that by putting the best books into their children's hands they can help shape their hearts. There is also a good deal of overlap with unit studies in the PA, though they go by another name here – the interdisciplinary approach – basically a unit study on steroids. Imagine a unit study the way Emerill Lagasse would do it – Kicked up a notch and Bamm!!!! That's the interdisciplinary approach. Everything studied is related; it's a true cross-curricular endeavor. It can be difficult to keep this going in the latter grade levels though, so you have to work hard to keep track of the hours studied on all the particular topics, but aside from the paperwork drawback, it's a very workable and enjoyable approach. Two of the subsets of the PA are Delight Directed Education, employed by the folks at the Heart of Wisdom as well as by Barb Shelton and Marilyn Howshall, and the Thomas Jefferson Education. Both of these are very similar in the methodology employed, but they differ from the PA by being more child centered, some say, by allowing more freedom to follow the unique "bent" of each individual child. Others would say that accounting for a child's uniqueness is the very heart of the PA.

I mentioned that the Principle Approach follows a set of basic principles that are applied in all aspects of life. Several people have found these timeless principles though different people word them in different ways. The folks at the Foundation for American Christian Education (FACE) have titled them in this manner:

Seven Principles of America's Christian History and Government

- ***God's Principle of Individuality:***
Everything in God's universe reveals His infinity and diversity. Each person is a unique creation of God, designed to express the nature of Christ individually in society. Parents and teachers should cultivate the full potential of Christ in every child.
- ***The Christian Principle of Self-Government:***
In order to have true liberty, man must be governed internally by the Spirit of God rather than by external forces. Government is first individual, then extends to the home, church, and the community. This principle of self-government is God ruling internally from the heart of the individual.
- ***America's Heritage of Christian Character:***
The image of God engraved upon the individual within brings dominion and change to his external environment. The model of Christian character is the Pilgrim character. Becoming accountable for one's learning and productivity is the fruit of Christian character.
- ***"Conscience Is the Most Sacred of All Property" (James Madison):***
God requires faithful stewardship of all His gifts, especially the internal property of conscience. This is a tool for self-government as each child learns the revelation of consent. Each individual governs his life through the voluntary consent to do right or wrong.
- ***The Christian Form of Our Government:***
The divine flow of spiritual power and force in a Christian Constitutional Republic begins with self-governing individuals, whose God-given rights are protected by laws established by their elected representatives. Proper government requires a balance of internal power and its external form as seen in the separation of powers and its dual form with checks and balances. The Christian form of our government finds its source in the Holy Bible, "the American political textbook."
- ***How the Seed of Local Self-Government Is Planted:***
Christian self-government begins with salvation and education in God's Law and Love, and flows in governing oneself, one's home, church, and community.
"Liberty is an individual responsibility..." (Samuel Adams)
- ***The Christian Principle of American Political Union:***
Internal agreement or unity, which is invisible, produces a voluntary external union, which is visible in the spheres of government, economics, and home and community life. Before two or more individuals can act effectively together, they must first be united in spirit, in their purposes, and in their convictions.

The two ladies who founded FACE almost half a century ago, Verna Hall and Rosalie Slater, were the pioneers in this method of restoring the Christian moorings to a lost nation. Before their deaths, they trained several of the current leaders in the methodology. These leaders are now training this generation of parents in these ways, helping us to find the ancient pathways and offering guidance so we may walk in them.

How to Four-R an Academic Discipline

1. Define the vocabulary of the subject using Webster's 1828 Dictionary
 - a. Start with the name of the academic discipline (reading, science, mathematics, whatever it is).
 - b. Underline key words and define those too.
 - c. Keep going until you can explain the basic principles and ideas.
 - d. Compile and list properties or leading ideas.
 - e. Probably only 3 to 5 main concepts for each discipline, with several sub-points.
2. Research the vocabulary and leading ideas of the subject in the Bible using an exhaustive concordance (This must be keyed to your Study Bible!)
 - a. Consider synonyms.
 - b. Find out what God says on a topic.
3. Deduce the Biblical purpose for this subject from the Bible.
 - a. Use the vocabulary definitions to help you trace this out.
 - b. Try to discover the source and origin of it in the Bible.
4. Identify the history of the discipline.
 - a. Use an encyclopedia from prior to 1900, as these generally will reflect a Biblical worldview. A 1911 edition is available online.
 - b. Make a timeline of this research.
 - c. Start a second timeline with the major events of God's Providence (The Chain of Christianity). Use a Bible Chronology book to help you find this information.
 - d. Did the subject advance more quickly after the Reformation and the Bible was in the hands of the individual?
 - e. Did it originate in Asia, develop further in Europe, and explode in the USA? Has it been furthered in the Far East more recently?
 - f. Identify the Christian view of the subject and contrast this with the pagan perspective.
 - g. Use primary sources!!!
5. Identify the course goals and objectives.
 - a. Decide which main ideas you will teach this term. Each year you will decide anew which areas to teach and with what leading ideas.
 - b. Divide these plans into semesters and then quarters so that you can effectively plan your lessons and you will know what you are going to do each week.
6. Review and refine your course overviews and goals each year.
 - a. Teachers must do the 4-R process first in order to take dominion of the subject.
 - b. This takes time and effort.
 - c. Take it one step at a time.
 - d. Remember your vision!

Students will use a modification of this 4R process in their study of the TOPICS they study in each subject. They will utilize the 4R's (or D's or E's, depending on whose curriculum you are following) to take reason through the information they are assimilating. Some ideas for the activities you and your students will be engaging in as they learn in this manner follow on the next page.

The Four D's (Advanced Training)	The Four E's (Heart Of Wisdom)	The Four R's (Principle Approach)
1. Discover <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Select topic * Word is defined and recorded * Build Idea Map * Locate resources * Read and take notes * Define terms * Understand concepts 	1. Excite <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Create an interest * Motivate student by making the lesson meaningful to their lives * Mind mapping * Brainstorming * Watch a video * Discuss the topic * Make a list * Draw tentative conclusions 	1. Research <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Define word from Webster's 1828 Dictionary. * Key words within definition are underlined and defined. * Each word is researched in a concordance of the Bible and the references relevant to the definition are written out.
2. Discern <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Find Scriptural principles * Compare to God's truth * Ask questions * Organize and outline * Decide what is important * Relate to the Wisdom Booklet 	2. Examine <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Find out the facts * Research on internet * Read a book on the subject * Read a classic * Research encyclopedia * Refer to a commentary * View maps * Interview an expert * Interact with software 	2. Reason <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * A definition of the word is written by the student in his own words. * Biblical principles are then deduced and recorded from the study.
3. Develop <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Apply in your own life * Internalize, personalize * Put in your own words * Plan how to edify others 	3. Expand <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Do something with what you learned * Reinforce the lesson by completing an assignment or creating a project based on what has been learned * Mind map * Complete a writing assignment * Create illustrations * Make a model * Perform an experiment * Create a diorama * Write songs or poetry * Trace journey on a map * Make a booklet, poster, or pamphlet 	3. Relate <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The student writes out the application of the definition and the deduced principles as they relate to the study purpose and to his own life.
4. Document <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Communicate-make it understandable to others * Present concepts clearly * Use your own words and ideas * Give steps of action * Report, minit-book, poster, art, etc. 	4. Excel <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Pull everything together and share it with another * When a student can teach someone else what he has learned, he knows the subject * Create a portfolio * Narrate the subject * Explain a project * Give a report * Share writing assignments * Explain the portfolio * Create artwork * Share oral stories * Recite poetry * Share songs 	4. Record <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The student's written work, filed in his notebook, is a permanent record of learning and is easily appropriated for future study.

General Objections to the Principle Approach Answered

Objection	Refutation
May present a narrow view of life and of history	Presents an expansive view of life and history – Christ! <i>His story</i> . It shows the hand of God, providentially working through individuals and nations.
Focuses mainly on American history	Focuses on the Chain of Christianity. It especially shows how many subjects had their beginning in Asia, grew in Europe, and had their fulfillment in America. World history is studied in connection with this chain, and studied across the content areas.
Requires a great deal of teacher preparation	Yes, the Principle Approach does require a great deal of teacher preparation. The teacher is the “living textbook.” Principle Approach methodology is chiefly concerned with developing a biblical worldview which will be seen in Biblical reasoning in all areas of life, first in the teacher, who then can guide the student to develop this as well.
Prepared curriculum available in few subjects	Yes, there is very little prepared curriculum material available for the teacher; however, this is part of the methodology. The teacher is expected to master the subject, develop lesson plans suited to the student’s abilities, and then teach so that learning occurs.
Extremely literal approach to Scripture	Yes indeed, the Scriptures are taken literally -- “God says so, so I should do it.”
Doesn’t allow for interest directed learning on the part of the student.	The Principle Approach is not “child directed,” the student is not in control, but the student exercises liberty in learning. The child’s interests and the subject’s points are taken in consideration.
Doesn’t follow set subject guidelines.	The Principle Approach is also not “subject directed.” Learning is never only for learning’s sake, but to discover God’s purpose(s) for a subject.
There is too much writing involved.	Students create records of their learning in the form of notebooks, so yes, there is a lot of writing; however, it should be noted that the amount and type of writing is centered on stretching (but not breaking) the child’s capability. Oral recitation is also used.
It takes too much time to do all that planning.	Planning does take time, there’s no getting around that. The discipline of writing out lesson plans helps to solidify the subject matter in the teacher’s mind, thereby making the actual teaching of it that much more profitable for both student and teacher.
It’s not functional in a multi-age home school environment.	The Principle Approach methodology liberates the teacher and the learners. It is adaptable and personal. Multiple ages can be taught much of the same material, just on different levels, requiring different levels of work from each child, based on stretching each one’s abilities.

The following are necessary materials for practicing the Principle Approach:

A Bible to read, suitable for your children's reading abilities. *The Narrated Bible* (NIV) from Harvest House, is very nice because it is in chronological order and reads like a story. The print is large and uncluttered, and any background information is printed in a different color, so it is easy to see if text is of the Word or commentary.

A Bible to study from. Here, I recommend either the KJV or the NASB, for accuracy and language.

An Exhaustive Concordance (which will include the Greek and Hebrew numbers and dictionaries). This must be keyed to the study Bible you are using.

The American Dictionary of the English Language, Noah Webster, 1828. Facsimile edition, published by The Foundation for American Christian Education (FACE). Either the print or CD-ROM version is fine.

A Grammar handbook for the teaching of our language. Abeka's *Handbook of Grammar and Composition, 3rd Edition*, by James A. Chapman, is excellent, as is Rod and Staff's *English Handbook*.

These next three books, which are keyed to each other, are very useful for truly learning the Principle Approach:

A Guide to American Christian Education for the Home and School by James B. Rose, American Christian History Institute, (ACHI) Palo Cedra, CA. This book outlines and explains what the Principle Approach is and how to practice each subject in your home school. It references the two titles below, for source readings, so you do need those as well.

Teaching and Learning America's Christian History - The Principle Approach, by Rosalie J. Slater, Foundation for American Christian Education, San Francisco, CA. This book takes you through the whole chain of Christianity while thoroughly inculcating in you a biblical worldview.

The Christian History of the Constitution of the United States of America - Christian Self Government, by Verna M. Hall, Foundation for American Christian Education, San Francisco, CA. This is the reading book of primary sources which document the providence of God during the founding of our nation.

The following resources are well worth having, as an aid to teacher training as well as for curriculum development:

The Encyclopedia of Bible Truths for School Subjects, compiled by Ruth Haycock, is a treasure trove of the Biblical purposes for each of the academic disciplines.

The Self-Directed Seminar, a FACE publication, will help you define education, build your curriculum, and teach you to reason from Scripture, thereby increasing your Biblical worldview.

The Noah Plan Notebook, Grades K-8 (red) or Grades 9-12 (blue), or the newer *Grade Level Guidelines*, from FACE, contain the scope and sequence as well as the objectives and points to be covered each quarter.

The Noah Plan Curriculum Guides (thus far, *History and Geography*, *Literature*, *English Language*, *Mathematics*, *Reading*, and *Art* guides have been published by FACE.) Each of these guides offers much useful information for the teaching of these subjects.

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