

1-1-2017

In the Way They Should Go: Nurturing the Relational and Spiritual Nature of Children

Jamee Free

George Fox University, jfree14@georgefox.edu

This research is a product of the Doctor of Ministry (DMin) program at George Fox University. [Find out more](#) about the program.

Recommended Citation

Free, Jamee, "In the Way They Should Go: Nurturing the Relational and Spiritual Nature of Children" (2017). *Doctor of Ministry*. 233. <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/233>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctor of Ministry by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact arolf@georgefox.edu.

GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

IN THE WAY THEY SHOULD GO:
NURTURING THE RELATIONAL AND SPIRITUAL NATURE OF CHILDREN

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF PORTLAND SEMINARY
IN THE CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

JAMEE FREE

PORTLAND, OREGON

OCTOBER 2017

Portland Seminary
George Fox University
Portland, Oregon

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

Jamee Free

has been approved by
the Dissertation Committee on October 6, 2017
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Spiritual Formation.

Dissertation Committee:

Primary Advisor: Carole Spencer, PhD

Secondary Advisor: Lacy Borgo, DMin

Copyright © 2017 by Jamee Free
All rights reserved

*To God,
who invented something as wondrous as childhood;
this is my offering.*

*For Bridger and Jackson:
my fellow image bearers and my favorite theologians
I love you more.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to my family, my own secure base, for making this dissertation a reality. Thank you especially to Mark, Bridger, Jackson, as well as my parents, Joe and Linda, and my sister, Josie, for all the support, love, and patience during this process. My deepest appreciation to Dr. MaryKate Morse, the faculty and staff of Portland Seminary, Dr. Lacy Finn Borgo, and especially Dr. Carole Spencer for all the thoughtful guidance through this journey. Thank you to Laura Howard, Jane Bjordahl and Aimee Rust for your friendship and for dreaming with me about how to make life better for little ones. Lastly, another very special thank you to Mark, Bridger, and Jackson, who put up with months of me pointing out the attachment themes in every movie, book, or story, who patiently dialogued with me about this dissertation, and who sacrificed their own time and energy so this work could be completed. Thanks for doing life with me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Dedication.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Abstract.....	vii
Chapter One: Introduction.....	1
Chapter Two: Biblical Foundations.....	30
Chapter Three: History, Theology, and Modern Psychology.....	58
Chapter Four: Attachment Research and Brain Development.....	90
Chapter Five: Nurturing Children’s Innate Spirituality.....	120
Chapter Six: Conclusion.....	149
Bibliography.....	171

ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the innate relational and spiritual nature of children. This dissertation assumes that children are deeply relational and spiritual as part of the image of God within them. Chapter one takes a comprehensive look at how children are struggling within this country on every measure of health, as well as how relational nurture and soul care are significantly lacking. Chapter two explores Biblical materials, especially the incarnation, Jesus' interactions with children, passages from Deuteronomy, verses from Proverbs, and examples of children in Biblical narratives. The third chapter focuses on historical and theological materials, as well as theories from modern psychology. It begins with history from First Century Rome, when children were not even considered people and how the Judeo-Christian tradition stood in opposition to the cultures around them by giving dignity to little ones as God's creations. It reveals the many ways that children and their nature have been viewed, sometimes very negatively; and how a lack of reflection or presence of childhood theology has been harmful to children. Chapters four and five discuss the relational and spiritual nature of children, respectively. The fourth chapter gives an extensive look at attachment theory and brain development, as well as children's innate need for relationships. The fifth chapter explores children's spirituality, ways children have not been welcomed or respected, and practical suggestions for nurturing soul care. The conclusion focuses on summarizing the main points of the dissertation and adding information on authentic spiritual formation and the need for secure attachment to parents and to God. It also gives some practical suggestions for parents. Ultimately, this dissertation argues that children are deeply spiritual and relational beings that require nurturing to become the people that God created them to be.

INTRODUCTION

Richard and Melissa find themselves sitting in a faith-based Christian counselor's office about the eldest of their three children, ten-year-old Katie. In the initial diagnostic interview, they vacillate between being concerned for Katie and being very angry with her for her newfound noncompliance. She frequently talks back, has unexplained outbursts, and withdraws from everything in her routine. She refuses to do chores or follow instructions from her parents. Even regular activities cause her stress and anxiety. Katie is involved in two sports, three clubs, occasionally attends church, and has two social media profiles that her parents do not monitor. She sleeps poorly at night and spends most of her time at home in her room alone with her iPad. Her closest friend is Netflix. She does not eat dinner with her family due to their busy schedule and her parents admit that they do not really know her anymore. Katie seems worried, sad, or irritable most of the time and is now struggling in school despite her obvious bright intellect.

Katie's parents would like her to worry less, but they also are seeking behavioral therapy for her to regain her compliance to them. Anger is in their voices as they describe that they are devout Christians and that Katie is to obey them. They refer to their parenting style as "biblical," although they admit that they do not pray together as a family and attend church only once per month. They do not do family activities together and there is no focus on spiritual formation because "she isn't really old enough to understand it."

"Just fix her," they say to the therapist, "We want our little girl back. We don't have time for her to be so difficult." They lament her "bad behavior." "We have given her

everything,” the parents report bitterly, “She has every new and latest gadget, we both work to pay for all the activities she is in, and she is so disrespectful! Why is she doing this to us?”

After the interview, Katie meets with the counselor alone. She says nothing as she sits down on the couch, but has already begun silently crying. The level of emotional pain she is experiencing is palpable in the room. The counselor, herself a mother, fights the urge to just wrap her own arms around Katie to hold and soothe her. Katie begins to share that she cannot handle the stress of school and the demand for perfection. She reports that her parents are always angry with her and that they do not understand. “In fact,” Katie shares, “No one understands. No one really gets me.” Katie says that she prays, but she is not sure that God listens to her and she has no close friends or adults within her church. At the end of the hour, Katie has shared many desperate feelings and confided in her new therapist that she is contemplating suicide.

Katie easily meets the criteria for mental illness. Treatment protocols indicate weekly therapy and a referral to a medical provider for psychotropic medication. But Katie has no family history of mental illness and her symptoms seem more environmental than they do pathological. She is sleep deprived, overscheduled, and has little connection with her family or with her faith. Katie seems to be floating adrift from any firm foundation that could ground and secure her. The therapist flags her as a high risk for suicide and explains a safety plan to her parents, who are shocked that a child so young could have thoughts of wanting to die.

Katie is representative of so many children currently living in America. She is unhappy, anxious, and physically, emotionally, and spiritually unwell. Her behaviors are

met with anger. Her parents do not know what to do. They are not alone. There is an overabundance of online parenting forums, parenting books, seminars, and conferences, all purporting conflicting answers on how to get a child to behave. But, especially for Christian parents, behavioral management is too small of a goal. With the advent of neuroscience and over a hundred years of social science, more is being learned about the nature of childhood, its intense time of development and growth, and how to unlock potential. Childhood is a time of formation and requires protection. It is a time of discovering personhood: gifts and talents, strengths and weaknesses, joys and sorrows; and to whom one belongs. And while no one can be assured to know exactly what the Biblical writers meant in Genesis by humans being formed in the image of God, this dissertation assumes that children, were in fact made in the image of their Maker, and that bears with it a deeply spiritual and relational nature. A spiritual and relational nature that must be nurtured, in order that children can engage in the process of becoming the people God intended them to be; becoming more like Christ every day.

But children have had a troubling history. They have been marginalized and mistreated throughout the centuries. They have had to fight for their right to even be considered full human beings. Joining that fight, were the Jews and Christians, armed with the knowledge that God indeed created children and cares deeply for them. Even before Jesus placed a child among His disciples and gave them unparalleled worth, God's people had Deuteronomy and the Proverbs; explicit commands for spiritual discipline and nurture. Children, throughout Scripture, were called by God, used for God's holy purposes, and affirmed as members of the covenant community. And while the Church

stood in opposition to the cultures around them, by giving such dignity to little ones, it has struggled to do this consistently throughout every era of history, including this one.

It may surprise the reader to learn that children in this country are, in general, doing poorly in every measure of health available. It seems like uncommon knowledge. Instead, there is much talk of the “trophy generation” and “snowflakes.” Facebook memes, popular literature, and many older Americans lament this generation as being soft, entitled, and self-centered. Many argue that children are not given enough “tough love.” They are sheltered and overprotected. They are not spanked enough and now they are considered spoiled brats who need strict behavioral modification and a parenting formula to shape a kid up as quickly as possible. That argument is surprising considering UNICEF’s research on corporal punishment. “In the United States, one-third of kids are hit before the age of one, and 80 to 90 percent of toddlers are hit by their parents.”¹ Further, “In nineteen American states, corporal punishment is still legal and practiced in schools, with hundreds of thousands of paddlings annually.”² Even so, the “protected generation” is a common argument.

Ivy Beckwith, author of *Postmodern Children’s Ministry*, writes about this “protected generation.” Beckwith explains, “This generation of children has been described as the most protected, most wanted generation. These kids are watched over. They grew up in car seats and seat belts. They all wear bicycle helmets. Their play is organized and regimented. They toddled around childproofed homes.”³ Beckwith goes on

¹ Ross Greene, *Raising Human Beings* (New York City, NY: Scribner, 2016), 43.

² Ibid.

³ Ivy Beckwith, *Postmodern Children’s Ministry: Ministry to Children in the 21st Century* (El Cajon, CA: Youth Specialties, 2004), 29.

to offer a critical look at the way children are treated, especially spiritually. But the oft heard argument resounds: children, today, by these protections are indulged and self-centered. Children indeed have car seats and bicycle helmets, child labor laws and advocacy groups, and a great deal of material worth. Some estimates even suggest that children have an average of 150 toys and receive around 70 new ones each year.⁴ But material wealth is not how success is measured for Christians, and this generation is far from protected. Theologian Joyce Mercer writes, “Society appears to support and affirm children on the one hand with material excess, while on the other hand ignoring and even doing harm through neglect of their basic needs.”⁵ A more comprehensive look at the health and well-being of children within this country is in order.

Psychologist Peter Gray argues, “We would like to think of history as progress, but if progress is measured in the mental health and happiness of young people, then we have been going backward at least since the 1950s.”⁶ Many people who talk about the problems that young people are facing rarely give the proper credit to just how comprehensive and vast the current situation. And when psychologists like Gray suggest that there is a backward trend, there are many people that will immediately argue because of children’s increased material wealth and child protective measures that they are doing

⁴ Tracy Gillett, “Simplifying Childhood May Protect Against Mental Health Issues,” *Raised Good* March 4, 2016, accessed March 28, 2016, <http://raisedgood.com/extraordinary-things-happen-when-we-simplify-childhood/>.

⁵ Joyce Mercer, *Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2005), 119.

⁶ Peter Gray as quoted in Jenny Anderson, “Why Are Our Kids So Miserable?,” *Quartz Media*, March 21, 2016, accessed September 12, 2016, qz.com/642351/is-the-way-we-parent-causing-a-mental-health-crisis-in-our-kids/.

better than ever before, but when it comes to emotional well-being it is difficult to comprehend just how dire the situation.

In the general population, suicide is usually around the tenth or eleventh leading cause of death, but for children it is usually the second or third leading cause of death each year.⁷ While the statistics are not yet available for 2016, suicide has an enormous potential to be the leading cause of death for children aged ten to fourteen years old.⁸ The rate of suicide has doubled in the last seven years for that age group.⁹ Suicide claims the lives of more children and young adults than cancer, heart disease, AIDS, birth defects, strokes, pneumonia, influenza and chronic lung disease *combined*.¹⁰ And while the rate of suicide attempts would be impossible to calculate, it is estimated that there are roughly dozens of attempts for every one completed suicide making suicidal gesturing an enormous problem.¹¹ In fact, more than 5,000 children will attempt to take their own life today, and every day, in America.¹²

Similarly, the rate of mental illness among children has also skyrocketed. “Today, by at least some estimates, 5 to 8 times as many high school and college students meet criteria for diagnosis of major depression and/or anxiety disorders as was true half a

⁷ “Youth Suicide Statistics,” The Parent Resource Program, accessed July 15, 2016, <http://jasonfoundation.com/youth-suicide/facts-stats/>.

⁸ Elissa Nadworny, “Middle School Suicides Reach an All-time High,” NPR, November 4, 2016, accessed November 4, 2016, <http://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2016/11/04/500659746/middle-school-suicides-reach-an-all-time-high>.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ “Youth Suicide,” <http://jasonfoundation.com/youth-suicide/facts-stats/>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

century or more ago.”¹³ Perhaps the explosion of diagnosis and treatment with powerful medication can be seen in no greater clarity than with the phenomenon of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Pediatrician and psychologist Leonard Sax states that “the likelihood of being treated with medications for ADHD is nearly 14 times higher for teenagers in the United States compared with teens in the United Kingdom.”¹⁴ He also points out “an increase of nearly a factor of 10, from 12 per 1,000 in 1979 and 110 per 1,000 in 2013” in diagnosis of the disorder in the United States alone.¹⁵ Even more startling, “between 1993 and 2009, the prescribing of antipsychotic medications such as Risperdal and Seroquel for American children 12 and under increased more than 700 percent.”¹⁶ Children are being diagnosed with psychiatric illnesses and prescribed psychotropic and antipsychotic medication at an alarming rate.

However, if one were to talk just about children’s eating, physical fitness, and sleeping habits, the averages do not tell an optimistic story either. Sax says, “Healthy foods have given way to less healthy foods and beverages in the diet of the average American kid. Pizza, French fries, potato chips, and soda have displaced fruit, vegetables, and milk.”¹⁷ Sax also talks about the rate of obesity, “The proportion of obese kids more than quadrupled – from 4 percent to 19.6 percent – in less than four decades... And we’re

¹³ Peter Gray, “The Decline of Play and Rise in Children’s Mental Disorders,” *Psychology Today*, January 26, 2010, accessed October 5, 2015.

¹⁴ Leonard Sax, *The Collapse of Parenting* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2016), 60.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

talking *obese*, not merely overweight.¹⁸ Sax also reports that children are not as physically fit as they were even a decade ago.¹⁹ In fact, the percentage of children “who met the minimum standard for physical fitness” was only “42.2 percent in 2012.”²⁰ He further reports that the recommended sleeping hours for “elementary and middle school children...” are “at least 10 hours a day; and for teenagers; at least 9 hours per day.”²¹ The reality is “in every group from 6 to 18, the average American kid is sleep deprived; and the older the child, the more sleep deprived she or he is likely to be.”²²

In a lecture by Rev. Dr. Leanne Hadley, she reiterates the need to look at children as “hurting.” In her presentation, she shares some startling statistics; eighteen percent of children in the United States are living in poverty and seventeen percent of children are food insecure. 160,000 children skip school every day over fears of bullying and four million children are currently in therapy.²³ Hadley reports that 4,262 children are arrested each day and 2,482 children each day “are confirmed as either abused or neglected.”²⁴ There are almost half a million children currently in foster care in this country.²⁵ La Verne Tolbert, author of “Orphans Among Us” says, “The result is that every day, 3,000

¹⁸ Ibid., 33.

¹⁹ Ibid., 35.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 44.

²² Ibid.

²³ Leanne Hadley, “L.E.A.D. Kids” (lecture, The Holston Conference of the United Methodist Church, www.leannehadley.com, August 15, 2015).

²⁴ Leanne Hadley, *Spiritual Support*, DMin diss., Union Theological Seminary, 2007.

²⁵ La Verne Tolbert, “Orphans Among Us,” in *Understanding Children's Spirituality: Theology, Research, and Practice*, ed. Kevin Lawson (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 357.

children need either permanent adoptive families, connections with adults that will last once they are emancipated from the system, or both.”²⁶ Children experience divorce, as about half of all marriages end and sixty percent of second marriages end.²⁷ The United States also has the highest occurrence of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome of any country, including countries with less advances in medicine and health care.²⁸

Even if one believes children now have more physical protections, children have very few emotional ones. Walk into almost any gathering of children and one will likely find an adult who is yelling at them. Observe swimming lessons or after school pickups and one can quickly observe the harsh or mocking words often spoken to little ones. Further, the overexposure to electronics also creates emotional harm. For instance, the average child in America will observe through media “16,000 simulated murders and over 200,000 acts of violence by the time they reach the age of eighteen.”²⁹ Further, “Pornography exposure for children and adolescents has become almost ubiquitous.”³⁰

Additionally, Neil Postman, author of *The Disappearance of Childhood*, says, “We may conclude, then, that television erodes the dividing line between childhood and adulthood in three ways, all having to do with its undifferentiated accessibility: first,

²⁶ Ibid., 358.

²⁷ Hadley, *Holston Conference*, lecture.

²⁸ Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini, and Richard Lannon, *A General Theory of Love* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2000), 195.

²⁹ “Facts and TV Statistics,” Parents Television Council, accessed January 15, 2016, <http://w2.parentstv.org/main/>.

³⁰ David Perry, “The Impact of Pornography on Children,” American College of Pediatricians, June 2016, accessed July 15, 2017, www.acped.org/the-college-speaks/position-statements/the-impact-of-pornography-on-children.

because it requires no instruction to grasp its form; second, because it does not make complex demands on either mind or behavior; and third, because it does not segregate its audience.”³¹ Postman was especially concerned with children being exposed to inappropriate content because television’s images are accessible to anyone, even small children, because in television, “everything is for everybody.”³² Postman wrote these concerns several decades ago, before social media and before tablets, wireless internet, and handheld devices. As these inventions became more ubiquitous, electronics use has become a greater source of concern because even if one does not accept the premise of Postman’s work, the time now spent on electronics by parents and children, alike, is alarming.

In a comprehensive study by Common Sense Media, researchers found that American teenagers spend an average of almost nine hours per day on electronics and tweens (eight to twelve year old children) about six hours and those estimates are not including time spent on electronics at school or for homework.³³ The most common activity on these electronics is watching television.³⁴ Sixty-seven percent of teenagers have their own smart phones and fifty-three percent of tweens have their own tablets.³⁵ More than half of teens and tweens have their own televisions in their bedrooms.³⁶ And

³¹ Neil Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1994), 80.

³² *Ibid.*, 79.

³³ *The Common Sense Census: Media Use by Tweens and Teens*, report (www.common sense media.org, 2015), 13.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

while some would argue that there is nothing wrong with engaging in electronics, research shows that “there is a negative correlation between well-being and time spent with screen media...”³⁷ Additionally, “young people’s engagement with media still consists primarily of consumption rather than creation.”³⁸ Perhaps even more concerning “only thirty-two percent of teens report that their parents know ‘a lot’ about their social media activity and thirty percent report their parents know ‘little’ or ‘nothing.’”³⁹

Common Sense Media also completed a study on children zero to eight years old. In this age group, “seventy-five percent of all children have a mobile device at home.”⁴⁰ Smaller children also often have their own televisions in their bedroom, although in smaller percentages.⁴¹ Perhaps a greater threat, however, in the overuse of technology is that “thirteen percent of parents say they use media as a babysitter ‘often’” and “forty-two percent of parents ‘sometimes’ do.”⁴² About a third of parents admit to “entertaining themselves with their own mobile devices” while their children play. Again, many people would argue that the pervasiveness of technology is only the wave of the future, and not necessarily harmful. However, children, while they crave screen time, may be the most vulnerable to its negative effects, especially their parents’ overuse of their own devices.

³⁷ Ibid., 78.

³⁸ Ibid., 85.

³⁹ Ibid., 41.

⁴⁰ *Zero to Eight: Children's Media Use in America*, report (Common Sense Media, 2013), 17.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 26.

In “Smartphone=Not So Smart Parenting?” Amy Novotney writes, “Child development experts fear that children may feel they are competing for attention when parents are glued to their gadgets.”⁴³ She also addresses that “children are more likely to get hurt and engage in risky behaviors” when parents are distracted with their electronics and reports a CDC finding of a “ten percent uptick in unintentional childhood injuries” linked to parental electronic use.⁴⁴ She further reports that “parents’ smartphone use has also been linked to children’s misbehavior at mealtimes.”⁴⁵ She adds, “The researchers also found that the caregivers who were most absorbed in their devices were the ones who were most likely to respond harshly to their children, either physically or with a scolding tone of voice.”⁴⁶ Lastly, Novotney reviews a psychological study from the University of Essex on the presence of phones. “...the mere presence of a phone on the table – even if it’s turned off – makes those sitting around the table feel more disconnected, and keeps conversation lighter and more focused on topics of little controversy or consequence for fear of being interrupted.”⁴⁷

While adults, especially parents, complain that children are obsessed with their phones, adults also seem to use their devices to the extreme. Another study by Common Sense Media reports “that parents spend more than nine hours a day with screen media,

⁴³ Amy Novotney, “Smart Phone = Not so Smart Parenting,” *American Psychological Association* 47, no. 2 (February 2016), accessed January 11, 2017, <http://www.apa.org/monitor/2016/02/smartphone.aspx>.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

and the vast majority of that time is spent with personal screen media.”⁴⁸ That number is actually slightly higher than teenagers’ reported use. What is more amazing is that “seventy-eight percent of all parents believe they are good media and technology role models for their children.”⁴⁹ But adolescents may disagree. Lesley McClurg says, “A new study, however, has found that kids want the rules to run both ways, and that many adolescents would like their parents to stop texting while driving or posting their photos without permission.”⁵⁰ When researchers asked children what rules they would make for their parents when using their devices the most common responses were “set down your device, or close your screen when I’m talking to you; moderate online time; and you can’t use the phone at mealtimes, either.”⁵¹ Children are craving more focused attention and often find their parents unavailable. Further, most “parents overwhelmingly have positive attitudes about the role of technology in their children’s education and development of important skills.”⁵² But do leading experts share the same positive attitudes?

As already mentioned, the presence of a phone can hinder deeper communication; and children are more at risk for being unintentionally hurt or being more harshly

⁴⁸ *The Common Sense Census: Plugged-In Parents of Tweens and Teens 2016*, report (www.common sense media.org, 2016), 7.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Lesley McClurg, “Kids Think Parents Are Hypocrites When It Comes to Rules on Screen Time, Study Says,” *KQED Public Media*, March 11, 2016, accessed March 12, 2016, <https://www.kqed.org/futureofyou/2016/03/11/kids-think-parents-are-hypocrites-when-it-comes-to-rules-on-screen-time-study-says/>.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² *Common Sense: Parents*, 10.

disciplined for interrupting their parents' screen time. But there may be far more significant sociological, psychological and neurological effects as well. Psychologist Liraz Margalit suggests that "too much screen time too soon" may permanently damage the frontal lobe of the brain.⁵³ While many parents purchase electronics like tablets for educational purposes, physician Aric Sigman suggests that "is the very thing *impeding* developmental abilities that parents are so eager to foster through tablets. The ability to focus, to concentrate, to lend attention, to sense other people's attitudes and communicate with them, to build a large vocabulary – all these abilities are being harmed."⁵⁴ Rachel Roberts, author of "The Play Predicament" also presents information about the overuse of media, "In a study by the American Heart Association, researchers found that teens are now spending an average of 40 hours a week on screen time, or time with electronic media. Even small children are being overly exposed to media, with parents mistakenly thinking that media products are by definition educational for kids."⁵⁵ And not only is that impacting their brain development negatively, many researchers wonder if it is also creating anxiety. Lisa Tabb, associated with the new *Screenagers* documentary, writes that this generation is marked with "FOMO" or the "fear of missing out."⁵⁶ This has led to "compulsive texting" among some teenagers and at least one study averages the

⁵³ Liraz Margalit, "This Is What Screen Time Really Does to Kids' Brains," *Psychology Today*, April 17, 2016, accessed September 12, 2016, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/behind-online-behavior/201604/what-screen-time-can-really-do-kids-brains>.

⁵⁴ Aric Sigman as quoted in Margalit "Screen Time."

⁵⁵ Rachel Roberts, "The Play Predicament," *Parks and Recreation* 44, no. 4 (April 2009): accessed February 1, 2016.

⁵⁶ Lisa Tabb, "The New Summer Camp Anxiety: Unplugging Angst," *Screenagers*, July 11, 2016, accessed September 12, 2016, <https://www.screenagersmovie.com/tech-talk-tuesdays/the-new-summer-camp-anxiety-unplugging-angst>.

number of texts by teenagers sent per day to be around 167 texts.⁵⁷ The same study found that this negatively affects academic work for students.⁵⁸

Overuse of media also seems to have something to do with a decline in empathy. Sherry Turkle writes in “Stop Googling, Let’s Talk:” “Our phones are not accessories, but psychological devices that change not just what we do but who we are.”⁵⁹ She notes a 2010 University of Michigan study that reported that there has been a forty percent decline in empathy among college students.⁶⁰ She says, “Across generations, technology is implicated in this assault on empathy.”⁶¹ She blames the lack of real conversations: “Conversation is the most human and humanizing thing that we do.”⁶² Likewise, Psychologist Deborah MacNamara, reported in her United Nations address last year, that there has been a forty-eight percent decline in empathy in the last thirty years and a thirty percent decline in the capacity to see someone else’s perspective.⁶³ But consider the latest

⁵⁷ “How Compulsive Texting Affects Teens at School,” *CBS News*, October 5, 2015, accessed October 5, 2015.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Sherry Turkle, “Stop Googling. Let's Talk,” *The New York Times*, September 26, 2015, accessed March 28, 2016.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Deborah MacNamara, “Parenting in a Digital Age: United Nations Address for the Global Day of Parents” (address), accessed January 27, 2017, <http://macnamara.ca/portfolio/parenting-in-a-digital-age-united-nations-address-for-the-global-day-of-parents/>.

studies on “device free camps.”⁶⁴ “Children who spend even five days without their devices in tech-free camps, have restoration of the capacity for empathy.”⁶⁵

Additionally, children are constantly consuming as the research presented has shown, rather than creating and that has significantly affected play. Psychologist David Elkind says “Over the past two decades, children have lost twelve hours of free time a week, including eight hours of unstructured play and outdoor activities.”⁶⁶ This is especially concerning because play is “the dominant and directing mode of learning” for young children.⁶⁷ Play is vital to development, not only for brain function, but also social skills. Psychologist Gordon Neufeld says, “Perhaps we have been fooled by the seemingly innocuous and frivolous nature of play, which has kept us from realizing that it could deliver the outcomes we have been looking for.”⁶⁸ Gray says that when children are not allowed to engage in free play, adults are “depriving them of opportunities to learn how to take control of their own lives...diminishing their joy, diminishing their sense of self-control, preventing them from discovering and exploring the endeavors they would most love, and increasing the odds that they will suffer from anxiety, depression, and

⁶⁴ Tabb, “The New Summer Camp Anxiety: Unplugging Angst.”

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ David Elkind, *The Power of Play* (Boston, MA: Da Capo Lifelong, 2007), ix.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Gordon Neufeld, “A Playful Approach to Discipline,” editorial, *The Neufeld Institute*, March 10, 2016, accessed March 14, 2016, <http://neufeldinstitute.org/a-playful-approach-to-discipline/>.

other disorders.”⁶⁹ MacNamara adds “Play is the birthplace of personhood...”⁷⁰ But play and time to play have been compromised in the last few decades. Even though it is crucial to healthy development, play is being lost and some blame the push for early academics as the culprit for diminishing play. “Research continues to point out that young children learn best through meaningful play experiences, yet many preschools are transitioning from play-based learning to becoming more academic in nature.”⁷¹ Gray agrees, “My hypothesis is that the generational increase in externality, extrinsic goals, anxiety and depression are all caused largely by the decline, over that same period, in opportunities for free play and the increased time and weight given to schooling.”⁷² And as Neufeld said earlier, people may not see the serious need for play, but it is crucial to development, not just a luxury of childhood. Ironically, a larger educational focus has not changed academic achievements. MacNamara says, “Play becomes suffocated under an adultcentric quest for speedier development, despite research demonstrating that children’s brains reach the same cognitive benchmarks today as they did one hundred years ago.”⁷³

As if the disappearance of play and time to play were not enough, Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods* and *Vitamin N*, focuses on the difficulties presented by

⁶⁹ Lena Derhally, “Kids Don't Know How to Play on Their Own Anymore,” *The Washington Post*, May 19, 2016, accessed September 12, 2016.

⁷⁰ Deborah MacNamara, *Rest, Play, Grow* (Vancouver, BC: Aona Books, 2016), 55.

⁷¹ Valerie Strauss, “The Decline of Play in Preschoolers and the Rise in Sensory Issues,” *The Washington Post*, September 1, 2015, accessed September 12, 2016.

⁷² Anderson, “Why are Kids Miserable?”

⁷³ MacNamara, *Rest, Play, Grow*, 54.

lack of play outdoors. Paleontologist Scott Sampson, and host of the PBS show “Dinosaur Train” also has sounded the alarm about the “massive migration indoors.”⁷⁴ He cites concerns that “kids spend 4-7 minutes outside each day” and that is not enough.⁷⁵ He further says,

If all you’re exercising is your thumbs, that’s going to have an impact on your waistline. And we know it’s not just obesity. It’s ADHD. It’s depression. It’s inflammatory diseases like asthma. All of these have been skyrocketing to the point where one surgeon general said this generation of kids today could be the first to have a life expectancy shorter than that of their parents.⁷⁶

Louv calls this lack of outside time Nature-Deficit Disorder which “describes the human costs of alienation from nature, among them: diminished use of the senses, attention difficulties, and higher rates of physical and emotional illnesses.”⁷⁷ Louv also reports that in just six years, there was a drastic decline in outdoor activity, “From 1997 to 2003, there was a decline of 50 percent in the proportion of children nine to twelve who spent time in such outside activities as hiking, walking, fishing, beach play, and gardening...”⁷⁸ Louv is concerned about what children miss by not spending time in nature. “Nature inspires creativity in a child by demanding visualization and the full use of the senses.”⁷⁹ He also says, “...inexplicable nature provokes humility.”⁸⁰ Louv affirms, “Playtime –

⁷⁴ Scott Sampson as quoted in Ryan Warner, “Wild Child Author: 7 Minutes Outside a Day Isn’t Enough for Kids.” Colorado Public Radio, April 28, 2015. <http://www.cpr.org/news/story/wild-child-author-7-minutes-outside-day-isnt-enough-kids>.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books, 2008), 36.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 34.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 7.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 8.

especially unstructured, imaginative, exploratory play – is increasingly recognized as an essential component of wholesome child development.”⁸¹ He further adds, “Nature is often overlooked as a healing balm for the emotional hardships in a child’s life.”⁸² But at only four to seven minutes per day, children are not playing outdoors, they are not getting a sense of the larger world that they live in and they are perhaps not understanding their responsibility and needed interaction in what God has created. Further, occupational therapist Angela Hanscom points out there has been a significant increase in sensory motor problems among children, “...children need to have a multitude of whole-body sensory experiences on a daily basis in order to develop strong bodies and minds. This is best done outside where the senses are fully ignited and young bodies are challenged by the uneven and unpredictable, ever-changing terrain.”⁸³ The lack of outdoor play has caused many serious emotional, physical and sensory motor issues among children. Other arising issues from not enough time outdoors are “ramifications including Vitamin D deficiency, nearsightedness, and a decline in their ability to engage in physical activities like push-ups or sit-ups. This has also resulted in an increase in problems with cardio-respiratory systems.”⁸⁴

Many theories have been posited on why this generation is doing so poorly. Authors like Postman blame technology. Sax blames a “culture of disrespect” and too

⁸¹ Ibid., 48.

⁸² Ibid., 49.

⁸³ Strauss, “Decline of Play.”

⁸⁴ Cat Bleish, “New Study: Children Who Spend More Time in Nature Are Healthier and Happier,” *The Homestead Guru* (blog), accessed January 27, 2017.

much time with peers. Neufeld, while discussing peer orientation, further expands on loss of needed attachment. Some blame the lack of time to play, the lack of time spent outdoors, early academics and too much consumptive activity and junk food. None of these theories are inaccurate, but many of them lack a more comprehensive approach. Interdisciplinary research and holistic approaches are needed to address these issues. It is *all* these things and many others.

In addition, almost all these issues have two things in common. Each of these maladies represents a break-down in necessary and natural childhood development; as well as a serious breakdown in *relationships*. Children lack strong relationships with parents and other adults. And while science has repeatedly found that attachment (the need for secure relationships) is essential to positive outcomes and growth; that is what children are lacking the most. And if, as image bearers, children are lacking relational *nurture*, how can they embrace the relational *nature* God placed within them? In other words, mental health issues arise when there are interferences in development and when people are not themselves. But how can children become their true selves, when they are so physically and mentally unhealthy, and the deepest parts of them; their spirituality and relationality are neglected?

Psychologist Ross Greene asserts that “Kids do well if they can.”⁸⁵ He adds, “This is the belief that if your kid *could* do well, he *would* do well.”⁸⁶ But this dissertation argues that the essential time of childhood has been left unprotected. In this current culture, it is more a wonder that any children are doing well, rather than that so many are

⁸⁵ Greene, *Raising Human Beings*, 38.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

struggling. The basic elements for healthy development have been seriously compromised and children's attachment needs are not being met. Children are unable to do well. Linda Callahan, author of "Turning Down the Noise" cites a study that "an estimated one-fourth to one-third of American parents are not even minimally involved in their children's lives..."⁸⁷ Beckwith adds, citing the Commission on Children at Risk:

...the loss of connectedness is devastating America's youth in a host of ways. The commissioners, many of them physicians and mental health professionals, say they believe that human beings have an inborn need for connections, first with their parents and families, then with larger communities. It is, they say, the weakening of the connections between children and their extended families and communities that is producing a virtual epidemic of emotional and behavioral problems.⁸⁸

Beckwith also states that the report recommends, "the need for authoritative communities, places that are warm and loving but also exhibit reasonable expectations and limits."⁸⁹ Further, "These communities work best when a number of generations are involved in providing support and nurture as well as moral and spiritual meaning. And they work best when they are small."⁹⁰ Beckwith rightly concludes, then, "If what this report says is true, then churches are in a wonderful position to be these authoritative communities."⁹¹

⁸⁷ Linda Callahan, "Turning Down the Noise," in *Nurturing Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives and Best Practices*, ed. Holly Catterton Allen (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008), 165.

⁸⁸ Beckwith, *Postmodern Children's Ministry*, 99.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

Perhaps most interesting, however, is what this report concluded about children's behavior. Beckwith says,

The relationships children have with others in the community seem to facilitate behavioral changes in the children. As the report makes clear, "Good behavior is at least as much the result of relationships as of rules. The relationships are the source of the thing we call conscience, without which rules are only as strong as the ability of the rule makers to enforce them. Relationships are key."⁹²

Secure relationships serve to bring about positive behaviors, much more than any lectures, moralism, or punishments. Relational and spiritual nurture are critical to personhood and they are inextricably interconnected. But the spiritual nurture of children is also lacking. Children cannot become the people God so intricately and thoughtfully designed without deep and loving relational and spiritual nurture because that is the *whole* of who they are.

Kenda Creasy Dean and Christian Smith both write about the National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) in their books *Almost Christian* and *Soul Searching*, respectively. Dean says, "American young people are, theoretically, fine with religious faith – but it does not concern them very much, and it is not durable enough to survive long after they graduate from high school."⁹³ She adds, "Three out of four American teenagers claim to be Christians, and most are affiliated with a religious organization – but only half consider it important, and fewer than half actually practice their faith as a regular part of their lives."⁹⁴ Smith adds, "In our in-depth interviews with U.S. teenagers, we also found the vast majority of them to be *incredibly inarticulate* about their faith,

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian* (Oxford, UK: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010), 3.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 10.

their religious beliefs and practices, and its meaning or place in their lives.”⁹⁵ Leonard Sweet, author of *From Tablet to Table* adds, “When any species undergoes a reproduction crisis, a name is given it: ‘endangered.’ Arguably Christianity has entered such a crisis; our inability to reproduce faith is the number one problem facing our families and churches today.”⁹⁶ Kara Powell, author of *The Sticky Faith Guide for Your Family*, says, “Multiple studies indicate 40-50 percent of young people...who graduate from a church or a youth group...will leave their faith and the church after they head to college.”⁹⁷

Further, Marcia Bunge, professor and theologian, cites research from the Search Institute and The Youth and Family Institute, “...according to one study of 8,000 adolescents whose parents were members of congregations in eleven different Protestant and Catholic denominations, only 10% of these families discussed faith with any degree of regularity, and in 43% of the families, faith was never discussed.”⁹⁸ Bunge adds that there is almost no “coordinated effort between the church and the home in terms of a child’s spiritual formation.”⁹⁹ Further, parents and children are often separated from each

⁹⁵ Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011), 131.

⁹⁶ Leonard Sweet, *From Tablet to Table: Where Community Is Found and Identity Is Formed* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2014), 1.

⁹⁷ Kara Powell, *The Sticky Faith Guide for Your Family: Over 100 Practical and Tested Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Kids* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 18.

⁹⁸ Marcia Bunge, “Historical Perspectives on Children in the Church: Resources for Spiritual Formation and a Theology of Childhood Today,” in *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications*, ed. Donald Ratcliff (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2004), 43.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

other during worship time, which prevents important opportunities for intergenerational and whole community engagement.

Karen-Marie Yust also addresses concerns that spiritual formation is being “outsourced” by parents to the church.¹⁰⁰ She adds,

Just as children do not learn how to play an instrument or excel at a sport with just one sixty minute lesson a week, they do not become faithful disciples of Christ based on an hour of instruction each Sunday once per week. Children (and adults) need daily practice in living their faith if they are to learn how to love God with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength.¹⁰¹

But are the adults around children prepared to guide them in spiritual matters? Callahan addresses widespread biblical illiteracy: “Unfortunately, many parents and religious teachers are not equipped to lead children in biblical study and meditation because they have not studied the Bible themselves. A renewed commitment to studying and meditating on Scriptures is needed by all Christian adults in order to promote a child’s spiritual development.”¹⁰² But the problem is even larger; Gretchen Wolff Pritchard notes there are almost no children’s Bibles on the market today that adequately represent the complete canon.¹⁰³ She decries the way children are taught “a story” and not “my story” and the implication that children do not understand “a continuing pattern of exile and return, of loss, hope, and restoration...”¹⁰⁴ It is concerning when children do not have the

¹⁰⁰ Karen-Marie Yust, “Being Faithful Together,” in *Understanding Children's Spirituality: Theology, Research, and Practice*, ed. Kevin Lawson (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 225.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Callahan, “Turning Down the Noise,” 175.

¹⁰³ Gretchen Wolff Pritchard, *Offering the Gospel to Children* (Lanham, MD: Roman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 41.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 43.

opportunity to resonate with their faith ancestors, know the Story of their God, and draw their own conclusions about that Story, rather than be told what it means. Pritchard says, “In Sunday school and in devotional Bible reading at home, we are likely to violate the story even further by telling it in snippets, out of order, and treating it chiefly as a source of themes and moral maxims.”¹⁰⁵ She adds, “We can and must do much more to offer our children the nourishment of a rich variety of scriptural images. In the midst of a culture bloated on junk food, the church has offered its children only crumbs.”¹⁰⁶ Sharon Short adds, “Every alert Christian educator has run across Bible lessons that manipulate the text in a similar way to make a predetermined point.”¹⁰⁷ Many parents and Christian educators reduce Holy Scriptures into lessons about being “good.” In contrast, Short adds, “We tell children Bible stories to help them take their place in that great story, the true story about the world.”¹⁰⁸

But behavioral focused religiosity is far too common, partly due to a lack of serious reflection on the theology of childhood. Children are essentially missing from systematic theologies and stories about children in the Bible are often overlooked. Most concerning, however, is the way that many Scriptures about children’s obedience, for instance, have been taken out of context or worse still, reduced to sayings that do not represent the Biblical witness, such as “spare the rod, spoil the child.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 44.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 68.

¹⁰⁷ Sharon Warkentin Short, “The Story That Grew,” in *Understanding Children’s Spirituality: Theology, Research, and Practice*, ed. Kevin Lawson (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 56.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 57.

¹⁰⁹ “Spare the rod, spoil the child” will be discussed extensively in the second chapter.

Further, a lack of knowledge about childhood development does a disservice to children and appropriate religious education. Joyce Ruppell writes, “Finally, adults participating in faith-based programs frequently expect too much or too little of children. This problem is caused by adult ignorance of how they can build warm, nurturing, and secure relationships from which young children can build sound spiritual concepts and principles.”¹¹⁰ Bunge adds, “Other scholars note that children tend to be viewed as either all good or all bad.”¹¹¹

Further, the negative way children are often portrayed in some Christian parenting books or theology is concerning. Bunge cites studies of “religious roots of child abuse” that “show how the view of children as sinful and depraved, particularly in some strains of European and American Protestantism, has led Christians to emphasize that parents need to ‘break their wills’ at a very early age with harsh physical punishment.”¹¹² Mercer agrees and says of much evangelical parenting material, “children appear as willful, wild, and oriented toward sin unless brought under control by parents whose restraining parenting allows the children to become good.”¹¹³ The lack of balanced theologies and a lack of knowledge about childhood development hinders necessary spiritual nurture.

Lastly, when children are struggling there are very few holistic approaches to help them. Professionals tend to treat “parts” of children. Ministers can take care of soul care,

¹¹⁰ Linda Ruppell, “Using Developmentally Appropriate Practice,” in *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications*, ed. Donald Ratcliff (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2004), 344.

¹¹¹ Bunge, “Historical Perspectives,” 44.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 46.

¹¹³ Mercer, *Welcoming Children*, 119.

mental health professionals can treat mental issues, and pediatricians take care of physical health; but all aspects of health are intertwined. And children's spiritual care is often neglected. For example, a survey of mental health professionals found that "the overwhelming majority of psychotherapists saw a spiritual contribution to some forms of mental illness, but did not clearly understand the spiritual component in these illnesses, nor did they feel prepared to address the spiritual issues in treatment."¹¹⁴ Further, Hadley says there are almost no models of pastoral care for children.¹¹⁵

Some two thousand years ago, Jesus overheard an argument between His disciples about who would be the greatest. Jesus took a child and held the child up as the true owner of the Kingdom. He demands that children be allowed to come to Him. And where children may be missing from the pages of history and theology, they are not missing from the pages of Scripture. Some of the most powerful Biblical narratives have a child at the center of God's purpose. They serve, they obey, and they act with and for God. Adults are given serious commands about children's nurture. Children are people and are to be treated as such.

Children, today, are in trouble. They are not finding who they are or to Whom they belong. This dissertation seeks to re-examine verses about children found in Scripture, the theology of childhood and its apparent neglect, attachment theory and neuroscience, and children's innate spirituality. It will not give formulas or a "how to" manual on how to raise children, but will question other work that advertises "biblical"

¹¹⁴ Lisa Miller and Brien Kelley, "Spiritually Oriented Psychotherapy with Youth: A Child-Centered Approach," in *The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence*, ed. Eugene Roehlkepartain (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006), 421.

¹¹⁵ Hadley, "L.E.A.D Kids," lecture.

methods. It also will not solve every problem, but ask readers to deeply reflect if Christians are living into the Biblical witness, Jesus' words, church history's example, and ultimately the belief that children are indeed equal image bearers.

One caveat, as behaviorism and moralism are critiqued throughout this paper, in no way, is this writer advocating a permissive parenting approach or that right or holy living is unimportant. Quite the contrary, this writer believes in high (but developmentally reasonable) expectations for children, adults as impeccable role models, and an emphasis on spiritual formation. In many ways, the goals are the same, but a focus on attachment (relationships), rather than behaviors and compliance, is an emphasis that the relationship does the teaching: it grounds, secures, anchors, calibrates, regulates, and holds. Attachment is an idea that is both deeply relational and spiritual, like children themselves. Further compliance to parents, and obedience "in the Lord" are two different things.¹¹⁶ Authoritative parenting strategies are ideal (not to be confused with authoritarian ones) as research has shown consistently over the last several decades.¹¹⁷

While this dissertation seeks to talk about the importance of all children, readers may assume that in most cases, the writer is referring to younger children. Infants, toddlers, and children in pre-school or primary elementary school are often neglected from work about spiritual formation. Sources cited throughout this work will be mainly from professors and authors of children's spirituality, psychologists, sociologists, and social science researchers, as well as neuroscientists. Interdisciplinary studies will be utilized and Deuteronomy 6:5 will be a key verse throughout the dissertation to advocate

¹¹⁶ Eph. 6:1 and Col. 3:20.

¹¹⁷ John Santrock, *Psychology*, 6th ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2000), 341.

more integrative approaches: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might;” as well as Jesus’ reiteration of that passage in Matthew 22:37, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind (NRSV).” This is a comprehensive issue and requires a comprehensive discussion with integrative methods of heart, soul, might, and mind. Scripture passages will be cited from the New Revised Standard Version.

Lastly, the recommendations made here are for a best-case scenario. If adults have the power to re-examine the plight of children, this writer humbly asks for the reader to do so. However, this writer, as a minister and professional counselor, has also dedicated her entire life to children who have been abused, traumatized, neglected, and forgotten. The radical love of God is for them too. While this dissertation will advocate secure attachments and an early focus on spirituality, children who find themselves in a much darker world, are still under the Secure Base of God, and while it is not within the scope of this paper, the Church is responsible for those children too, “...for little ones to Him belong...”

Chapter two will begin with an exploration of the most remarkable Person to walk with God, Jesus Christ, the example and champion of what it means to truly welcome a child.

CHAPTER TWO: BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

While Scripture may not offer specific parenting formulas or suggested consequences for common childhood misbehaviors, it does offer a deep view of children as part of the covenant community of God and gives emphatic mandates for children's inclusion and the necessity of their spiritual formation. Children are part of Biblical narratives, Jesus' ministry, and sometimes at the heart of the purposes of God when the adults around them have failed to grasp God's movement in the story. This chapter will discuss some of the many narratives that include children and their unique place in the Kingdom to build a framework for discussing spiritual formation, especially focusing on the narratives that highlight the spiritual capacity of children and the deeply relational nature of young people, as well as the relational onus of Scripture and its serious commands to adults. In *Life in the Spirit*, Jeffrey Greenman and George Kalantzis define spiritual formation as "our continuing response to the reality of God's grace shaping us into the likeness of Jesus Christ, through the work of the Holy Spirit, in the community of faith, for the sake of the world."¹ Because spiritual formation is about the "shaping" of persons "into the likeness of Christ," it only makes sense to start any serious discussion of spiritual formation with Jesus Himself.

Jesus as a Child

While there are many times children encounter Jesus in the Gospels, it should be noted that the first mention of a child in the Gospel of Matthew, for instance, is in fact Jesus. The birth narrative is essential to the incarnation. Hans Urs von Balthasar in *Unless*

¹ Jeffrey Greenman and George Kalantzis, *Life in the Spirit: Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 24.

You Become Like this Child, makes an interesting point about Jesus' words about children: "...we must remember one overarching fact: Jesus speaks with such familiarity about the child's specific manner of being and dignity that such knowledge must be rooted in his own experience."² Balthasar concedes that "Jesus' experience of childhood must have been unique," but is nevertheless an important part of Jesus' life.³ He was indeed an infant, child, and adolescent in a very real way. Professor Catherine Stonehouse writes, "God did not arrive as a mature adult. No, Jesus came as a baby and lived each phase of childhood. He knew the love and comfort of parents and the fears, sorrows, and joys of a child. He could be a friend to children."⁴ The authors of *Children Matter* add, "The incarnation powerfully affirms the significance of childhood."⁵ Further, Jesus' incarnation also profoundly illustrates the spiritual nature of a child. Theologian Klaus Issler concludes,

Finally, a reference to Jesus' own childhood must be included as an indication for the child's capacity to relate with God and be blessed by God....Following the example of Jesus is not only an ideal for adults, but also for children. Jesus' own childhood demonstrates the possibility and capability for children to be blessed by God and to be guided by the Spirit. From birth on – and perhaps in the womb as well – children are receptive to God's overtures and interventions in their lives.⁶

² Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Unless You Become like This Child* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1991), 28.

³ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁴ Catherine Stonehouse, *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey: Nurturing a Life of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 34.

⁵ Scottie May et al., *Children Matter: Celebrating Their Place in the Church, Family, and Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2005), 38.

⁶ Klaus Issler, "Biblical Perspectives on Developmental Grace," in *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications*, ed. Donald Ratcliff (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2004), 64.

The birth narratives found in Matthew and Luke are not to be passed over lightly. Especially as children's spirituality is discussed, it is important that Jesus, the ultimate example on how to live, is there for adult and child alike, and that God powerfully interacts with young people. The discussion will now turn to some of Jesus' own interactions with children, starting with Matthew's account.

The Gospel of Matthew

Two main texts seem to be the most important encounters that all the synoptic gospels record. Matthew 18:1-6 and Matthew 19:13-15 record:

18 At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"² He called a child, whom he put among them,³ and said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.⁴ Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.⁵ Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.⁶" If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea.

¹³ Then little children were being brought to him in order that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples spoke sternly to those who brought them;¹⁴ but Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs."¹⁵ And he laid his hands on them and went on his way.

In these two texts, Jesus speaks emphatically about welcoming children and even uses them as an example of coming into the kingdom of heaven. Jesus also issues a stern warning to those who create barriers for children, although it is somewhat unclear what constitutes a "stumbling block." Children occupied a low, perhaps the lowest, social status, which makes Jesus' words somewhat radical to His hearers, especially to His disciples who had been previously fighting about who was the greatest. Professor Judith Gundry-Volf explains:

The teaching is, of course, ironic, for children occupied the lowest rung on the social ladder, and caring for children was a low-status activity. But according to

the principle of the eschatological reversal – ‘whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all’ –the humblest service characterizes the greatest. Jesus thus redefines care for children as a mark of greatness.⁷

There are some additional observations about these texts that are essential to understanding children and Jesus’ relationship with them, as well. First, it is a fair assumption that children were following Jesus in the crowds, just as adults were, since Jesus could call a child to place among them. Secondly, clearly from the Biblical passages, Jesus did, in fact, touch, bless, heal, and interact with children throughout the Gospels, especially the synoptics. And thirdly, Jesus gave a special significance to children. Theologian Keith White further observes, “Throughout the Synoptics, there are many who come to Jesus, including those who are unclean, poor, beggars, Gentiles, women and sinners. However, at no point does Jesus chose one of these as a sign of the kingdom of heaven by placing them in the midst of the disciples.”⁸ White talks much about the phrase the “kingdom of heaven” throughout his essay, pointing out that Jesus first mentions this theme in Matthew 3:2: “There will be over thirty subsequent references to the kingdom in the rest of the Gospel, and nearly all of Jesus’ teaching and actions reveals something of its nature and dynamics, with the child placed by Jesus in the midst having a special if not unique role in this revelation.”⁹ White also strongly argues against scholars who read these verses about children solely as a metaphor or symbol, “Once again there are actual children in the presence of Jesus and the disciples as

⁷ Judith Gundry-Volf, “The Least and the Greatest,” in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia Bunge (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2001), 43.

⁸ Keith White, “‘He Placed a Little Child in the Midst’: Jesus, the Kingdom, and Children,” in *The Child in the Bible*, ed. Marcia Bunge (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2008), 353-354.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 359.

he teaches and acts. Whatever else they may stand for metaphorically, they are real children, and their actual presentation in the narrative cannot be allowed to be eclipsed by other readings of the Gospel.”¹⁰ He adds later, “...such readings hardly do justice to the fact that a little child is actually standing beside Jesus and in the middle of, and as a contrast to, the group of disciples...”¹¹ This fact cannot be overemphasized; children were following Jesus, in His presence, and named representatives of His Kingdom.

Children seem uniquely descriptive of the “kingdom of heaven” in the Gospel of Matthew and it is not surprising, then, that one of the most overlooked stories about children is also found in Matthew. After the triumphal entry, as people shouted “Hosanna!” Jesus clears out the temple and then focuses on healing those that were coming to Him. At some point, the adults stopped shouting “Hosanna!” but the children persisted. Matthew 21:14-16 records:

¹⁴ The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he cured them. ¹⁵ But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the amazing things that he did, and heard the children crying out in the temple, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” they became angry ¹⁶ and said to him, “Do you hear what these are saying?” Jesus said to them, “Yes; have you never read, ‘Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself?’”

Just as when Jesus, quite shockingly, placed a child as a representative of the kingdom of heaven among the disciples, there is now a clear distinction between the religious of the day and their rising anger; and the children still shouting “Save” to the Messiah.

Certainly, the children had a better grasp on the purposes of Jesus in this narrative than the priests and the scribes. Gundry-Volf writes, “In this pericope children play a striking

¹⁰ Ibid., 365.

¹¹ Ibid., 367.

role of those who have true insight about Jesus, in contrast to the chief priests and scribes, who not only fail to recognize him but object to the children's acclamation."¹² She adds:

The scene is, of course, ironic. The chief priests and scribes, who, of all people, are in a position as religiously trained Jewish adults to see the significance of Jesus' deeds, recognize him as the Messiah, and lead the people in acclaiming him, do not do so; rather, the children, who are ignorant and untrained in religious matters and the least likely to play this role, in fact take it up.¹³

Jesus also quotes Psalm 8, another Scriptural affirmation of children, in response to the priests' anger and indignation. Gundry-Volf concludes,

In the pericope on the children in the temple, literal children speak divinely revealed knowledge about Jesus. In the gospel tradition, children are not mere ignoramuses in terms of spiritual insight. They know Jesus' true identity. They praise him as the Son of David. They have this knowledge from God and not from themselves, and because they do, they are living manifestos that God is the source of all true knowledge about Christ. Jesus' affirmation of the children's praise of him in this pericope is thus an affirmation that children who "know nothing" can also "know divine secrets" and believe in him.¹⁴

The Gospel of Mark

Mark also records the two main texts of Jesus welcoming children. Mark 9:33-37, 42 and Mark 10:13-16:

³³ Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" ³⁴ But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. ³⁵ He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." ³⁶ Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷ "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me." ⁴² If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea.

¹² Gundry-Volf, "Least and Greatest," 46.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 47-48.

¹³ People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. ¹⁴ But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. ¹⁵ Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” ¹⁶ And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

Mark records the story very similarly to Matthew, but begins his gospel much differently, namely Mark does not begin with the genealogy or birth story of Jesus. In all the synoptic texts, Jesus places a child as an example in front of his disciples in the first narrative; and then later Jesus must again sternly warn the disciples against hindering children from coming to Him. Jesus, unlike the other adults in these narratives, emphatically welcomed children.

Gundry-Volf points out that children are brought to Jesus and they are recipients of blessing and healing throughout Mark’s gospel. She concludes, “...Mark’s Gospel illustrates how, in the light of the dawning of God’s kingdom in Jesus, children’s traditional social and religious inferiority can no longer justify their marginalization, but instead requires their emulation and devoted service by adult members of Jesus’ ‘family’ of disciples.”¹⁵ As already mentioned, children had little to no social status. However, what exactly Jesus meant by becoming like a child is unclear. Was Jesus talking about the child’s social status, their humility, their eagerness to follow, their more simplistic faith, their innocence, or something else? As Jerome Berryman points out, “Jesus did not define the child he told adults to be like.”¹⁶ Jesus does not make this entirely clear, but three of

¹⁵ Judith Gundry, “Children in the Gospel of Mark,” in *The Child in the Bible*, ed. Marcia Bunge (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2008), 176.

¹⁶ Jerome Berryman, “Children and Mature Spirituality,” in *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications*, ed. Donald Ratcliff (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2004), 23.

the four gospels record these two exchanges, thus highlighting their importance. The complexity and nuances of these stories must be recovered as spiritual formation for children is explored because what is clear is that Jesus emphatically demanded children's inclusion. The authors of *Children Matter* add, "Understanding what Jesus says about children is at the heart of being a true disciple of Jesus."¹⁷

The Gospel of Luke

Luke 9:46-48 and Luke 18:15-17 record:

⁴⁶ An argument arose among them as to which one of them was the greatest. ⁴⁷ But Jesus, aware of their inner thoughts, took a little child and put it by his side, ⁴⁸ and said to them, "Whoever welcomes this child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me; for the least among all of you is the greatest."

¹⁵ People were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them; and when the disciples saw it, they sternly ordered them not to do it. ¹⁶ But Jesus called for them and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. ¹⁷ Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it."

Luke's version is more abbreviated, but Jesus still places children as an example before His disciples. And Luke offers some other interesting stories regarding children that no other gospel records. For instance, Luke is the only gospel to record Jesus teaching in the temple as an adolescent (Luke 2:41-52). Certainly, there are many applications for this story, but it is important to note that Luke captures at least one story of Jesus' childhood. Secondly, it seems that obedience to God is more important than compliance to parental expectations. Jesus' life guided by the Spirit was paramount. Jesus' actions broaden the discussion on what obedience really means. Luke 2:52 also is interesting because it suggests that Jesus was continuing to gain in wisdom. The gaining of wisdom is the crux of many verses that apply to children, especially in the book of Proverbs as will be

¹⁷ Scottie May et al., *Children Matter*, 39.

discussed later. And without getting into the debate about the theology of Jesus being fully God and fully human, at least some writers see that Jesus' good works are not just the result of Jesus being fully God, but Jesus' human life in the Spirit. Greenman and Kalantzis say:

One critical aspect of our coming to terms with a more biblical understanding of “spirituality” might be for evangelical believers to be done with their latent – I think at times almost rampant – tendencies toward the heresy of Apollonarianism, in which the deity of Christ is so strongly superimposed over the historical Jesus that he is basically a ‘little God’ walking among us. The biblical texts, on the other hand, are quite clear that his miracles and insights into people’s lives were the direct result of his living by the Spirit; or to put it in Lukan terms, “who went around doing good...because God was *with* him.”¹⁸

Jesus is the ultimate example of spirituality; a constant connection with God and a life led completely by the Spirit. The verses of Jesus growing in stature and wisdom are important to understanding the human journey that Jesus was on with God. And certainly, this relationship with God shaped the person of Jesus. Further, Ronald Rolheiser says in *The Holy Longing* that God shaped who Jesus became, partly because God saw goodness in all of God’s creation. “Awareness of that, God’s smile upon the planet, was very much part of the consciousness of Jesus.”¹⁹ He adds, “To understand Jesus’ attitude and his teachings, it can be helpful to imagine that through his entire lifetime, God, his Father, kept whispering into his ears that blessing from his baptism: ‘You are my beloved, my blessed one, my son, and in you I am well-pleased.’ Those words, in fact, form the consciousness of Jesus, especially in Luke’s gospel.”²⁰ Rolheiser concludes, “What we

¹⁸ Greenman and Kalantzis, *Life in the Spirit*, 43-44.

¹⁹ Ronald Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality* (New York, NY: Image, 2014), 239.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

see outside ourselves is very much colored by what is, first of all, inside of us. Thus, Jesus had within him a concept of God who was relaxed, smiling, and blessing the earth. Hence, Jesus too looked out at us and saw, in us, something worth smiling at and blessing.”²¹ Rolheiser’s words, especially in combination with Greenman and Kalantzis’ reminder about Jesus’ own life in the Spirit provide implications for the spiritual formation of children. Parents have an enormous role in shaping the consciousness of a child by whispering the very things of God into their ears and reminding them that they are loved and that they belong. Jesus keeps a constant connection to the Father and lives by the Spirit’s guidance. Parents, especially those rooted in God, can help shape the consciousness of their own children to be aligned with God and under the leadership of the Spirit. Jesus quite visibly exemplifies this very relationship. Not only does Jesus offer radical words about children’s welcome and emulation in the Kingdom, but also provides a powerful example of how this is to be accomplished. Jesus is continually quoting Scripture, praying, and fasting. His life is the model for spiritual formation and the ultimate type of personhood completely rooted in God. Spiritual formation is not just a religious process, it is about becoming the person God created each person to be; finding their true identity rooted in their loving and creative God.

Luke also is the only gospel to record the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32), which focuses on the mercy and grace of a relationship, rather than the poor behavior the child exhibited. Jesus told this parable in his trilogy of parables about lost things. Like most of His parables, what Jesus describes is fairly shocking. In other words, the younger son’s behavior was abhorrent, perhaps even unforgiveable in the culture of the day. Henri

²¹ Ibid., 240.

Nouwen says, “The son’s ‘leaving’ is, therefore, a much more offensive act than it seems at first reading. It is a heartless rejection of the home in which the son was born and nurtured and a break with the most precious tradition carefully upheld by the larger community of which he was a part.”²² However, Nouwen says later, “More than any other story in the Gospel, the parable of the prodigal expresses the boundlessness of God’s compassionate love.”²³ Indeed, this parable is rich in details about a father’s love for a wayward son. The son is lost and away from home, but the story indicates that the father diligently looks for him because “while he was still far off, his father saw him” (Luke 15:20). The story is about relationship (attachment), as is, arguably, every other story in the canon. Nouwen concludes, “Here the mystery of my life is unveiled. I am loved so much that I am free to leave home. The blessing is there from the beginning. I have left it and keep on leaving it. But the Father is always looking for me with outstretched arms to receive me back and whisper again in my ear: ‘You are my Beloved, on you my favor rests.’”²⁴ The onus of Scripture continually brings readers back to relationships.

The Gospel of John

John’s gospel does not record the two main narratives about children interacting with Jesus that are recorded in the synoptic gospels. However, professor and theologian Marianne Thompson points out that “the metaphor ‘children of God’ does occur in

²² Henri Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming* (New York, NY: Image Books, 1994), 36.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Nouwen, *Return of the Prodigal*, 44.

John.”²⁵ The parent/child metaphor to describe God and God’s people is used throughout the Bible beginning in Exodus.²⁶ However, Thompson adds that “Children are essentially missing from the pages of the Gospel of John.”²⁷ It is interesting, then, that the only mention of the boy with the five loaves and two fish is John 6:8-14. While all the Gospels talk about the feeding of the multitudes, only John records that it was a small boy whom Andrew brought to Jesus to give his lunch away. Again, biblical readers see a child within the crowd of Jesus’ followers. Presumably, the boy willingly gave his lunch to Jesus and one of Jesus’ best-known miracles is then performed. Children are present in the crowds following Jesus, and even part of Jesus’ ministry throughout all four gospels.

Other New Testament Readings

There are at least two main texts found in the rest of the New Testament that specifically address children. Ephesians 6:1-4 says, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ²”Honor your father and mother”—this is the first commandment with a promise: ³”so that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.”⁴ And, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.” Colossians 3:20-21 says, “²⁰ Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is your acceptable duty in the Lord. ²¹ Fathers, do not provoke your children, or they may lose heart.” These verses reiterate the fifth commandment, but it should be noted that both these passages are taken out of a larger context in discussing

²⁵ Marianne Thompson, “Children in the Gospel of John,” in *The Child in the Bible*, ed. Marcia Bunge (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2008), 195.

²⁶ Brent Strawn, “Israel, My Child,” in *The Child in the Bible*, ed. Marcia Bunge (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2008), 112.

²⁷ Thompson, “Children in John,” 195.

roles within Christ-led families. Gundry-Volf discusses the sometimes “limited” understanding of children in Scripture, “For example, children’s obedience to parents has received far more emphasis than parents’ responsibility to show Christ-like gentleness toward their children.”²⁸ She rightly calls for a need to “to recapture...the radicalness of Jesus’ teaching on children.”²⁹ These verses are often taken out of context or only read in partiality. The children indeed have certain responsibilities assigned by both Old and New Testament texts, but they appear directly with parental responsibilities to them. Warnings are also issued to fathers in these verses. Church historian O.M. Bakke further explains,

In the framework of a household code, the author of Ephesians addresses the children directly at 6:1 and exhorts them to be obedient to their parents. He justifies this exhortation by referring to the commandment in the Decalogue to honor one’s father and mother. But it is not only the subordinate partner in this relationship who has obligations: at 6:4, he addresses the fathers directly and urges them not to treat their children in such a way as to kindle anger in them, but to ‘bring them in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.’ We find a similar code in Colossians 3:20 and following. Here, too, the children are first exhorted to be obedient to their parents, and then the fathers are urged not to be too harsh in disciplining their children.³⁰

It is important to consider that many texts are focused on spiritual discipline as well, not merely behaving in family or social settings. They both place a condition of “in the Lord” in the exhortations. Of further note, children are being directly addressed in these verses (also in the Decalogue) as members of the covenant community. Bakke adds, “We note that in both cases, the authors directly address children. This implies that they take it for

²⁸ Gundry-Volf, “Least and Greatest,” 59.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 60.

³⁰ Odd Magne Bakke, *When Children Became People: The Birth of Childhood in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 153.

granted that the children are part of the community and are members of the group that assembles when the letter is read during worship in various domestic churches.”³¹

Children in the Bible

Certainly, by comparison to adult Bible characters, there are far less children mentioned in the Bible. Professor Esther Menn writes, “Although the Bible includes many examples of child characters of various ages, from the very young to teenagers, they are rarely the focus of biblical interpretation. Minor characters are sometimes overlooked.”³² However, there are at least a few times that children accomplish the purposes of God throughout the Biblical narrative. Biblical readers meet Joseph as a young man who grows up to meet much adversity and hardship before saving Egypt, and perhaps the world from starvation. Miriam follows her baby brother, Moses, down the river and makes sure he is reunited with his own mother as his wet nurse. She courageously talks to royalty to accomplish this purpose. Menn adds, “...Miriam, the older sister of Moses, takes personal initiative in negotiating with the daughter of the Pharaoh an arrangement that spares her brother from Pharaoh’s decree that all male Hebrew infants must be thrown into the Nile (Exod. 2:5-10).”³³

Samuel is promised to God by his mother Hannah and God speaks to him in the middle of the night. He becomes one of the greatest prophets ever known. David slays a giant with five small stones and no armor; and an unnamed servant girl from Israel brings

³¹ Ibid.

³² Esther Menn, “Child Character in Biblical Narratives: The Young David (1 Samuel 16-17) and the Little Israelite Servant Girl (2 Kings 5:1-19),” in *The Child in the Bible*, ed. Marcia Bunge (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2008), 324.

³³ Ibid., 349.

about a healing in 2 Kings 5:1-19. Menn talks about these two stories, David and the unnamed servant girl in her essay, “Both stories depict young people finding solutions to problems, intervening when adults are threatened and ineffectual, offering theological insights into God’s ways, and acting within the context of international conflict and tensions between cultures and national identities.”³⁴ Menn also points out that the two narratives “illustrate children’s vulnerability and marginalization.”³⁵ While the story of David slaying the giant is often told, the story of the servant girl is lesser known and rarely are either stories told with all their complexity. But the exceptional qualities of children are present in these narratives. Menn writes,

Their noteworthy qualities can include intelligence, altruism, and ethical impulses. While children are vulnerable and dependent, they also show themselves willing to take risks and to become involved in situations that adults sometimes find overwhelming or even defeating...God’s spirit is surprisingly present and active through what might appear to be weakness, vulnerability, and trust that children in particular represent so well.³⁶

Perhaps that is not so surprising after all. Recall verses like 2 Corinthians 12:9, “⁹ but he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.’ So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.” Perhaps that is another reason why Jesus hailed children as examples. The power of God, of the indwelling Christ, is evident through their apparent weakness and vulnerability. It is interesting that children can act in these stories, where adults were at a loss for solving these international crises.

³⁴ Ibid., 325.

³⁵ Ibid., 351.

³⁶ Ibid., 351-352.

Jeremiah and Josiah also play imperative roles in the reformation of Judah. Josiah became the king of Judah as an eight-year-old child. And Jeremiah's call is one of the most beautiful passages of Scripture within the canon. Jeremiah 1:4-6 records: "⁴Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,⁵ 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.'" ⁶Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy."

Proverbs

Despite the clearly important verses and passages already mentioned, much Christian parenting literature focuses on one verse, or to be clear one saying, that is *not* actually a verse in the Bible. "Spare the rod, spoil the child" is quoted in much literature and anecdotally by parents and professionals alike to tout of a "biblical" parenting approach. The flagship saying of many Christians, "spare the rod, spoil the child," is not actually part of the sacred canon. In fact, "it's from the long 17th century poem *Hudibras* written by Samuel Butler (1612-1680), a cheeky British poet who enjoyed mocking religious extremists and hypocrites."³⁷ This fact should provide motivation for Christians to abandon this saying if the fact that it does not appear in the canon is not enough.

There are several mentions of "the rod," however, throughout Proverbs that deserve a serious look. Proverbs 13:24 appears to be the closest to the saying: "Those who spare the rod hate their children, but those who love them are diligent to discipline them." In the book *God, the Rod, and Your Child's Bod*, Larry Tomczak lays out a

³⁷ Robert Deis, "Spare the Rod, Spoil the Child Is Not in the Bible and May Not Mean What You Think," This Day in Quotes, November 5, 2014, accessed September 6, 2015, <http://www.thisdayinquotes.com/2010/11/spare-rod-and-spoil-child-is-not-in.html>

“biblical” model for parenting and blames the current problems with children on the lack of firm discipline. “Everywhere people are realizing that yesterday’s permissive parental attitudes have produced the rebellion evidenced in the younger generation today.”³⁸ Further, Tomczak believes that children are not basically good. “Contrary to modern, humanistic thinking concerning the ‘inherent goodness of a child,’ the Bible makes clear that ‘foolishness’ (literal Hebrew, ‘waywardness’) is bound up in a child’s heart (the center of being).”³⁹ Whether children possess an innate goodness has been widely debated for the last several hundred years and will be discussed in the following chapter. However, Tomczak presents arguments throughout his book that children need to be corrected frequently and consistently. He makes several reasonable arguments and takes a very literal reading of Scripture. However, this is also where his argument seems to overextend the Biblical text. Tomczak contends that verses in Proverbs are talking about spanking and in his translation of the rod, he advises parents on exactly what the rod is referring to, how it should be used, and that parents should purchase wooden spoons as a close alternative. “The biblical definition of the rod is a small, flexible branch from a tree (a wooden stick). Many people carve out some rods of their own or simply purchase some inexpensive wooden spoons.”⁴⁰ He further contends, “God, in His wisdom, prepared a strategic place on our children’s anatomy which has enough cushiony, fatty tissue and sensitive nerve endings to respond to Spirit-led stimulation. This area is the

³⁸ Larry Tomczak, *God, the Rod, and Your Child’s Bod: The Art of Loving Correction for Christian Parents* (Old Tappan, NJ: Power Books, 1982), 34.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 117.

base of the back, above the thighs, located directly on the backside of every child. All children come equipped with one!”⁴¹ Although he quotes Proverbs 10:13 after this paragraph, it is unclear to which Biblical text Tomczak is referring to as having literally said this. But his description of the rod is also problematic. In Proverbs 13:24 and several others, the transliterated Hebrew word for rod is *sebet*.⁴² It appears 190 times in the Old Testament.⁴³ It is defined as “from an unused root probably meaning to branch off; a scion, i.e. (literally) a stick (for punishing, writing, fighting, ruling, walking, etc.) or (figuratively) a clan. Correction, dart, rod, scepter, staff, or tribe.”⁴⁴ In fact, it is translated as tribe or clan in most of its usages.⁴⁵ Its meaning is less clear than Tomczak presents in his writing. Of further note, the same word is used in Psalm 23, arguably one of the most tender and comforting texts of the canon. “Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your *rod* and your staff – they comfort me” (Ps. 23:4, emphasis added).

Bakke also writes about earlier understandings from church history of the “rod” citing texts like the *Didascalia* and the *Apostolic Constitutions*, and while neither of these texts were prohibitive of corporal punishment, they did not cite verses in Proverbs as

⁴¹ Ibid., 118.

⁴² John Kohlenberger and James Swanson, *The Hebrew-English Concordance to the Old Testament: With the New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publ. House, 1998), 1531.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ James Strong, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (McLean, VA: MacDonald), 111.

⁴⁵ Kohlenberger and Swanson, *Hebrew-English Concordance*, 1531.

justification. “The ‘rod’ in these texts is not understood literally, but as a metaphor for the Word of God, Jesus Christ...”⁴⁶

It cannot be ignored, however, that Proverbs indeed talks about correction and certainly in connection to children. Professor William Brown says, “there are at least thirty-three explicit references to children” in the book of Proverbs and quotes each of them within his essay, but takes a much different approach than Tomczak.⁴⁷ Brown says:

The child’s profile in Proverbs is not that of willful disobedience or intractable defiance, although the sages fully acknowledged that children *can* be disrespectful, lazy, and selfish. Rather, the child is primarily educable. Discipline and instruction (one and the same thing, as we will see) were deemed the most important investment in the family’s well-being. It was a matter of life and death.⁴⁸

Brown talks about the importance of the child and his or her contributions within the family. He contends that the focus of Proverbs is not that of punishment, but of teaching a child wisdom. Brown says, “Also significant is what the sages do *not* say about discipline. Lacking in any of the sayings is the language of punishment. Use of the rod upon the child is neither penalty nor punishment.”⁴⁹ He quotes Proverbs 19:18 “Discipline your child while there is hope, but do not set your heart on his destruction.”⁵⁰ Brown also talks much about the Proverbs warnings about anger and discusses an alternative to a literal reading of Proverbs and a justification of corporal punishment,

⁴⁶ Bakke, *When Children*, 158.

⁴⁷ William Brown, “To Discipline without Destruction: The Multifaceted Profile of the Child in Proverbs,” in *The Child in the Bible*, ed. Marcia Bunge (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2008), 63.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 71-72.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 72.

“...while the corporeal means of discipline is accepted in these sayings, biblical wisdom probes deeply into the rationales and motivations behind such usage with the effect of imposing limits: edification rather than punishment, love rather than hatred motivates acts of discipline. Anger, above all, is proscribed.”⁵¹ Brown offers a helpful word in taking all of the Proverbs together and concludes that discipline is important for everyone, not just children. It is also helpful to remember that the theme of punishment is absent in these verses.

Proverbs 22:6 is also an essential verse: “Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray.” The emphasis again is about imparting wisdom and teaching a child for the child’s benefit (and subsequently others’ benefit as well).

Proverbs 22:6 also seems to be referring more to a way of life than a set of specific behaviors; the NIV translates it “in the way he should go,” which implies the way of the Lord, indeed a life-long relationship with God.

Deuteronomy Rediscovered...Again

The book of 2 Kings records that “Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign” and that “before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him” (2 Kings 22:1 and 23:25). It is striking that a child becomes the ruler of Judah and becomes her greatest king. But what is more striking is the narrative that plays out under King Josiah’s rule. The high priest, Hilkiah, finds the “book of the law in the house of the Lord” (2 Kings 22:8). Bible scholar Eugene Peterson

⁵¹ Ibid.

notes that it is of interest that the high priest Hilkiah is named here; the prophet Jeremiah's father is also named Hilkiah and he was indeed a high priest, but it is unclear if this Hilkiah is one in the same.⁵² Regardless of whether Hilkiah and Jeremiah were related, both Josiah and Jeremiah were small boys when called by God, to bring about a huge transformation, a return, to the Lord. This "book of the law" is believed to be Deuteronomy and Josiah did not take its discovery lightly.⁵³

Judah had lost its way and now young servants of God were in a position to rediscover the Lord. This is a great affirmation, not only of children, but also of the value of Deuteronomy. Peterson states, "For thirteen years, Josiah and Jeremiah, the young king and the youthful prophet, were allies in leading a major reformation in Judah, restoring the ravished, decimated, corrupted people of God as a true worshipping community."⁵⁴ 2 Kings 23:1-3 records:

Then the king directed that all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem should be gathered to him. The king went up to the house of the Lord, and with him went all the people of Judah, all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the priests, the prophets, and all the people, both small and great; he read in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant that had been found in the house of the Lord. The king stood by the pillar and made a covenant before the Lord, keeping his commandments, his decrees, and his statutes, with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. All the people joined in the covenant.

Thus, the people of Judah began to make reforms and return to the law and covenant with God, under the leadership of Josiah. Scripture records that the people had not observed a

⁵² Eugene Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2005), 247.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 248.

Passover since the time of the judges.⁵⁵ It is presumable that Deuteronomy had not been read for hundreds of years and was finally being recovered.

Scripture records that Josiah immediately went to work not only retelling the commands in Deuteronomy, but also making immediate reforms and returning the people back to a covenant relationship with the Lord. And it cannot be lost on readers that the book that talks about how to pass on the story of God to children was rediscovered and reinforced by a boy king and a young prophet. Josiah and Jeremiah, called of God at young ages, were the chief protagonists that brought about the purposes of God in these narratives.

While any serious reader of faith formation for children (or a serious follower of God) will read the entire book of Deuteronomy, it is not feasible to discuss the entire book of the law within this dissertation. Instead, a summary of some of its key verses will follow. Many verses in Deuteronomy share the same language as the passages below and they repeat the need to recite the mighty deeds of God and to teach the way of the Lord to the young. Deuteronomy 4:9 says, “But take care and watch yourselves closely, so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children’s children...” And Deuteronomy 6:4-9 records:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

⁵⁵ 2 Kings 23:22

Deuteronomy focuses first on loving God in the most comprehensive and integrative way possible and issues an imperative that children are to be told the Story of God by their parents. In her essay, Elizabeth Caldwell says,

The text from Deuteronomy that reminds the hearers of the great commandment to love God requires more than intellectual assent. It must be integrated into a believer's very being. If Christian families are to thrive in the multifaith culture in which they live, it is imperative that parents come to accept their call, their vocation, as the primary faith educators.⁵⁶

In sum, Deuteronomy is talking about a way of life, *the God way of life*, which begins with loving the Lord. It does not give a specific formula for discipline of behavioral issues, but for disciplining (teaching or training) children in how to live in community with God and with others. Stonehouse writes, "Before discussing specific religious practices, Deuteronomy presents the bigger picture or, we might say, the heart of the matter. God called the people of Israel not just to the observation of a few religious rituals but to a way of life that flowed from the heart of love for God and others."⁵⁷ And Deuteronomy six exhorts parents to live this out in front of their children in each moment. Chris Boyatzis in *Children's Spirituality* adds,

Early in Scripture parent-child conversations about religion are deemed critically important. On the plains of Moab, Moses describes the laws that must be heeded for a good and faithful life and then exhorts his people to share these laws of faithful living with their children: "And you shall teach them diligently to your children, 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 (Deut. 6:7, RSV)." Parents have a Scriptural call to search for the sacred all day and all night, in all contexts.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Elizabeth Caldwell, "At Home with Faith and Family: A Protestant Christian Perspective," in *Nurturing Child and Adolescent Spirituality: Perspectives from the World's Religious Traditions*, ed. Karen-Marie Yust (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 331.

⁵⁷ Stonehouse, *Joining Children*, 28.

It is perplexing why Deuteronomy is not taken as literally as some verses in Proverbs. If Deuteronomy six were taken as literally as Proverbs 13:24, faith formation would be much more about a moment by moment immersing into God's Story through deep relationships and adult responsibilities rather than corporal punishment or a focus on compliance. Patrick Miller adds of Deuteronomy, "The children do not simply learn the rules. They learn the *story behind the rules*, out of which they come and on which they are grounded."⁵⁹ He adds later, "The religious and social practices of the community, when carried out in continuing and regular fashion, become the occasion for the young ones to learn who they are and whose they are."⁶⁰ Again, readers will see a theme throughout Deuteronomy about belonging to God and being faithful to God because of God's love for God's people and God's mighty deeds. Even the Decalogue represents this theme of how to honor God and live peacefully with neighbors within the community. It is also interesting that for many of these commands, there is a reason that goes with it. For instance, in Deuteronomy 4:1: So now, Israel, give heed to the statutes and ordinances that I am teaching you to observe, *so that you may live...*" (emphasis added) and later in verse 40, "Keep his statutes and his commandments, which I am commanding you today *for your own well-being* and that of your descendants after you..." (emphasis added). Even the fifth commandment (as Ephesians 6:2-3 observes) has a promise,

⁵⁸ Chris Boyatzis, "The Co-Construction of Spiritual Meaning in Parent-Child Communication," in *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications*, ed. Donald Ratcliff (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2004), 183.

⁵⁹ Patrick Miller, "That the Children May Know," in *The Child in the Bible*, ed. Marcia Bunge (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Pub., 2008), 50.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 51.

“Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God commanded you, *so that your days may be long and that it may go well with you* in the land that the Lord your God is giving you” (Deut. 5:16, emphasis added). In other words, the onus is on relationship and the quality of life God brings, not necessarily following commands to avoid punishment and wrath. There is a specific reason for following the law of God, in loving God with all one’s heart, soul, and might. God gave God’s people the Decalogue so they could live in shalom with God and their neighbors. They were a protection from harm and a warning against disharmony, not proscribed rules for rule’s sake. The commands of God are given out of a deep and compassionate love.

A Few More Verses

Hopefully the reader will have gained an appreciation for the depth of biblical material that is found in Scripture concerning children. Of course, Jesus’ incarnation began with His own entrance into childhood and He welcomed children boldly and emphatically. The Old Testament also includes several imperatives for forming a child in the community of God. The focus is on the relationship, who children belong to, not on a set of moralistic behaviors. Personal piety is indeed important, and Scripture certainly includes behaviors that are clearly holy, but Godly behavior is a natural outflow from living a life rooted in the Lord. As such, there are a few more verses that will be important as the dissertation explores theology, attachment research, and childhood development. First, it is important to remember what Scripture records as the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-25:

²² By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with

its passions and desires.²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.

The proof of life and guidance by the Spirit are in the way that believers *live*. They possess a character that reflects qualities like peace and joy and kindness in the whole of who they are as people. Secondly, it is important to keep the Bible's definition of love in mind. 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a says, "4 Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;⁶ it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.⁷ It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.⁸ Love never ends."

Positive behaviors and holy living are important. However, the focus of this dissertation will not be on behaviors, it will be on life with God (and others); an attachment to the Lord and that holy living is a direct (but natural) response. Spiritual formation, ultimately, is about becoming the people God intended and created, not just a religious or behavioral formula, or a small part of a person, but the whole of the person God designed. As will be discussed throughout the next several chapters, attachment to parents unlocks the potential of a child, it literally lights up children's brains, and good outcomes are a natural outflow. The same is true in spiritual formation. The fruit of the Spirit and the perfection of love are unlocked in the secure attachment to the Lord. The journey with God, being part of the Story of God will be the emphasis and as such it is important to note the attachment language found throughout Scripture, such as calling the Lord "rock, fortress, deliverer, in whom I take refuge, stronghold" as well as language of "my soul clings" to the Lord or calls God "my hiding place."⁶¹ These prayers assert

⁶¹ 2 Sam. 22:2-4, Ps. 18:1-2, Ps. 62:5-7, Ps. 94:22, Ps. 63:7-8.

believers' dependence on God and the security being rooted in God brings. Children may find hope, just as the Biblical writers and the saints throughout thousands of years that have prayed these prayers, in secure attachment to God. Peterson translates Psalm 63:7-8 in *The Message* this way, "Because you've always stood up for me, I'm free to run and play. I hold on to you for dear life, and you hold me steady as a post." Spiritual formation is about a relationship and pursuit of the things of God.

Lastly, as neuroscience and childhood development are explored throughout this paper, the words of Psalm 139:13-16 will ring all the more true. God made something complex and intricate when God created people and science's observation of creation is a testament to just how great is the Lord. Psalm 139 assures readers that attachment and spiritual life begins even before a baby's first breath.

For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them yet existed... Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting (Ps. 139:14-16, 23-24).

While all the passages of Scripture, discussed within this chapter, are crucial to understanding children through a Biblical framework, theologies of childhood have not been well developed and as the next chapter will discuss, there have been varied ways of looking at children, many of them negative and often not living up to the Biblical witness provided in this chapter. The next chapter will focus on the nature of children, as well as differing theologies, and theories from psychology. Ultimately, this dissertation emphatically argues that children are indeed made in the image of God. As such, they are worthy of respect and understanding. Thus, Genesis 1:27 will be an important verse to the

next chapter's discussion: "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."

CHAPTER THREE: HISTORY, THEOLOGY AND MODERN PSYCHOLOGY

The nature of childhood is a wide and complex field of study. Children are often misunderstood and the ways that they have been treated throughout history have varied widely. Children have been viewed in a multitude of ways, sometimes negatively. This chapter will seek to explore the treatment of children, especially in First Century Rome, how Jews and Christians differed from the cultures around them, the theology of childhood and its apparent neglect, and the wide variance found in how the prevailing theories of modern psychology have viewed children. This chapter will explore both theology and psychology to build a framework for a better understanding the nature of children that will be discussed in the following chapters. Children are deeply relational and spiritual, but this chapter will explore how their treatment has not always nurtured those innate qualities.

At first glance, it may seem that these two fields of study do not belong together, but both search for the nature of people. Further, the argument of this dissertation is that children are not being spiritually and relationally nurtured, which has caused significant distress; a matter that must be addressed both theologically and psychologically. Rebecca Nye, Cambridge University professor (and coordinator for Godly Play), has done groundbreaking research in the field of children's spirituality. She articulates the necessity for melding the fields well,

Empirical psychology takes to the extreme the practice of looking at just 'part' of the child, which is at odds with how spirituality is really the whole of them...Overlooking the primacy of spirituality develops, in effect, a potentially

life-long impression that faith involves just parts of the person, but does not really touch who people really are, and who they are continually becoming.¹

She adds,

Their spirituality was not about studying a novel and discrete *part* of a child's psychology. We had to take the child as a whole to get a feel for her spiritual life, which flies like a bird through their intellectual life *and* their emotional life *and* their social life *and* their cultural life *and* their moral life. It is about their 'being a child,' as of course someone else called people to notice and learn two millennia ago (Matt. 18:2-5).²

Thus, this thesis will continually advocate for interdisciplinary approaches, as well as the view that children are innately spiritual and relational, created in the image of their Maker; and that childhood is a special time of growth and development that requires protection. As mentioned in the second chapter, Genesis 1:27 is crucial to the theology of childhood because the reality of the image of God within children meant that Jewish and Christian traditions treated children as complete human beings, which was in stark contrast to the cultures around them.³

In *When Children Became People*, O.M. Bakke paints an almost unimaginable picture of the conditions for children in First Century Rome. "The Romans held that they were physically weak, particularly vulnerable, and exposed to sickness. When we bear in mind the high infant mortality rate among children, this view is not surprising."⁴ Bakke

¹ Rebecca Nye, "Christian Perspectives on Children's Spirituality: Social Science Contributions?" in *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications*, ed. Donald Ratcliff (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2004), 91.

² Ibid., 93.

³ While there are many complex theologies about the image of God beyond the scope of this dissertation, for the purposes of this paper, it is assumed that children are made in the image of God based on Genesis 1:27 and as this thesis has stated that part of their image bearing carries with it a deep relational and spiritual nature that is intrinsic and present at the start of life.

⁴ Odd Magne Bakke, *When Children Became People: The Birth of Childhood in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 18.

reports “studies of funeral inscriptions and other sources have concluded that perhaps as many as 50 percent of all children died before their tenth birthday.”⁵ Bakke points out that sanitation and hygiene were significant contributors to this fact, but also the lack of food. “Poverty and periods of famine meant that very many people in classical antiquity did not have enough to eat. This means that children were born into societal situations that represented a threat to their life and health from the very outset.”⁶

Further the cruel practices of abortion, infanticide, and exposure also led to the high mortality rate. Abortion was common and was not outlawed until the second century.⁷ Moreover, despite “that the complications in connection with abortions were one of the commonest causes of female death in the Greco-Roman world” and that abortion took the life of an unborn child, there was little moral debate about abortion. ⁸ Bakke writes, “We should note that the criminalization of abortion is not prompted by the value of the fetus per se, or by the idea that it is a human being: rather, it is the father’s interests that must be protected.”⁹ Bakke suggests the most common reasons for abortion, infanticide, and exposure were poverty, questions of paternity or illegitimacy, and deformities.¹⁰ Many children who were exposed either died or were sold into slavery, usually for the sex trade.¹¹ Professor and theologian, Marianne Thompson adds,

⁵ Ibid., 23.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 27.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 28.

¹⁰ Ibid., 29-31.

¹¹ Ibid., 31-32.

The data from antiquity cannot be construed to mean that pagan parents routinely disposed of their children or that there was no genuine affection for them... But the data does testify that, on the whole, children, and especially those particularly vulnerable, were viewed as less than fully human and, therefore, sometimes treated virtually as trash to be disposed of if inconvenient in any way.¹²

Further, Bakke shares that children were equated with “slaves and barbarians” because of their lack of “rational” thought.¹³ “Children’s lack of ability to communicate in an adult manner meant that they were defined as standing outside the rational world of adults.”¹⁴

Bakke further discusses views from philosophers: “Cicero made the well-known observation that it is difficult to find any reason to praise a child for its inherent qualities. It deserves praise only on account of the potential it has to become something in the future, that is, an adult human being with the qualities characteristic of adulthood.”¹⁵

Bakke reports that Aristotle felt that “children are not complete human beings” and that Pliny “does not attempt to conceal his contempt and lack of esteem for this phase in human life.”¹⁶ Bakke concludes, “Bearing in mind the fact that the philosophical tradition commonly grouped or compared children with animals, we are not surprised to find an approach we today would call authoritarian and brutal, with frequent use of physical force.”¹⁷

¹² Marianne Thompson, “Children in the Gospel of John,” in *The Child in the Bible*, ed. Marcia Bunge (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2008), 205.

¹³ Bakke, *When Children*, 15.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 22 and 19.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

While these historical cultures may not have viewed children as people, the Judeo-Christian tradition was much different because of the belief that children were created in the image of God, as full human beings with inherent value. Thompson explains that it is difficult to know how common the practices of exposure, infanticide, and abortion really were, “but what is clear is that both Jews and Christians repeatedly condemned both abortion and infanticide, because these acts were violations of God’s commands and destroyed that which God had created. There is to be a definite congruence between God’s own regard for children and human responsibilities toward them...”¹⁸ She adds that Jews and Christians are to protect children but “it is not merely because children are vulnerable or fragile, or because they are the responsibility of those who brought them into the world, but because they are created by God that they have status, dignity, and inestimable value.”¹⁹ She adds later, “Both Jews and Christians interpreted the prohibitions against infanticide or exposure of infants in *theological* terms...”²⁰

Shelley Campagnola adds that even though ancient Israel often found itself “slipping into conformity with other nations and repeatedly being called by God to be different from them” Israel did drastically part with other nations on how it treated children.²¹ She points out that “There were no laws in the ancient Near East or in the

¹⁸ Thompson, “Children,” 203.

¹⁹ Ibid., 204.

²⁰ Ibid., 205.

²¹ Shelley Campagnola, “Unless You Become as One of These: Biblical Perspectives on Children's Spirituality,” in *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications*, ed. Donald Ratcliff (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2004), 77.

Roman era that protected the fatherless or the orphan.”²² But, “how different it was to be in the house of Israel. There were no adoption laws because there was no need for them.”²³ She points out the Scriptural obligations of a kinsman redeemer and that children were entitled to inheritances.²⁴ In short, the covenant community included children. However, Campagnola reiterates that the Israelites were frequently prone to losing their way, and “in the New Testament era, children were forgotten as members of the covenant community; they returned to slave status in both language and life.”²⁵ But she adds,

And then, one day, Jesus did the unthinkable. After hearing his followers debate over which of them will be greatest in the kingdom of heaven, Jesus pulled a child from outside their circle and placed him in the midst and says, “I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” Jesus defied both Israelite and Roman culture, and for that matter, every culture in every age...Jesus took the movement in the Old Testament toward a positive view of the child and catapulted it to an ethical ideal that left his disciples silent, and perhaps wondering if they would ever make it into the kingdom of heaven of which Jesus spoke.²⁶

Considering the historical information about the cultures of the Ancient Near East and the Greco-Roman era, it is not surprising that the words of Jesus were difficult for the disciples to accept. After all, if children were not even considered people, how could they be representatives of the Kingdom? But Campagnola argues, “This teaching should not have been new to the disciples. This was not new theology. The Old Testament

²² Ibid., 80.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 86.

²⁶ Ibid. See p. 32-40 for previous discussion of Jesus’ welcome of children.

continually pointed with increasing intensity to the theological realities that Jesus so beautifully and succinctly summarizes here.”²⁷ She goes on to say, “But it *was* a surprise for the disciples, and it *was* difficult for them to understand. One might wonder how that could be, but in the contemporary church there are still many disciples who also do not fully understand Jesus’ words here.”²⁸ The Judeo-Christian tradition was called to be different from their surrounding cultures, but struggled to welcome children consistently. This is true even today, as will be discussed later, especially regarding Christian parenting literature that utilizes poor and unreflective theology.

As already mentioned and argued by Thompson, Jews and Christians were and are to view treatment of children in theological terms, and because children are created by God, they are to be protected and treated as full human beings. And that is where Genesis becomes crucial in understanding the theology of childhood. Genesis assures Biblical readers that children are made in the image of God. And this dissertation argues that image bearing is the *whole* of who children are; deeply spiritual beings created for relationship with God and others. Professor W. Sibley Towner writes, “Genesis 1:26-28 and related biblical texts affirm that human beings – regardless of gender, race, social status, or nation – bear with them the image of God from infancy through old age.”²⁹ However, as already pointed out, while children were supposed to be members of the

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ W. Sibley Towner, “Children and the Image of God,” in *The Child in the Bible*, ed. Marcia Bunge (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2008), 323.

covenant community, this was inconsistently practiced, and children often found themselves outside the circle. Professor and theologian, Marcia Bunge adds,

From a Christian perspective, children are whole and complete human beings who are made in the image of God. They are worthy of dignity and respect from the beginning of their lives. The basis for this claim is Genesis 1:27, which states that God made humankind, male and female, in God's image. It follows that children, like adults, possess the fullness of humanity and are fully human from the start. While this may seem obvious, Christian theologians in the past and today have spoken about children as "beasts," "pre-rational," "pre-adults," "almost human," "not quite human," or "on their way to being human."³⁰

As such, the belief in the image of God within children or the belief that children are fully human has had a tumultuous history, even within the church.

Many of the debates on the nature of children often center around the theologies of original sin and childhood depravity. Towner says, "Since early times, many Christian theologians have taken the 'fall' recounted in Genesis 3 to be the story of the smashing of the mirror, the irreparable loss of the 'image of God' within us. The notion that the image of God can be erased or defaced is expressed in a number of Protestant statements of faith."³¹ The implication, then, is if the image of God is lost within human beings, then infants and children would no longer possess this image as an innate part of their human nature and they are "lost." This view is further complicated by the idea of childhood depravity that would suggest that children, then, also have a propensity to wrongdoing due to this corrupted state. For instance, this writer has heard many preachers over the years say things like, "The first prayer God hears from a child is the sinner's prayer." Despite that statement being a blatant contradiction of God's omniscience and

³⁰ Bunge, "Biblical Perspectives," 8-9.

³¹ Towner, "Children and Image," 319.

omnipresence, it underscores the idea that until children are “saved” they are outside the will and purposes of God. Professor Karen Crozier adds, “Rather than grappling with the paradox or tension within the biblical witness concerning children’s spiritual status,” some Christian traditions focus primarily on “inherent unlawfulness.”³² She explains,

Children are viewed as sinful and alienated from both God and the faith community until they are converted to Christ. Prior to the conversion experience, they may rarely be affirmed or nurtured on spiritual matters but, rather socialized into a religious community that views them as spiritually dead. The clear implication of this view is that spiritual life begins the moment one accepts Jesus as Savior (even though one may be eight, ten, or twelve years old).³³

Further, while the idea of childhood depravity may or may not be overtly articulated in some Christian parenting materials, it is, at least, an underlying theme and often leads to an authoritarian parenting stance that does not have an affirming view of the child as an active and thoughtful human being.

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, theologians like Joyce Mercer, critique many Christian parenting materials that depict children as “sinful, willful young tyrants whose true need is for parental constraint...”³⁴ Children tend to be viewed very negatively within these works and the writers explicitly state that this is a “biblical” view. Best-selling author, Larry Christenson, for example, says, “The Bible does not look upon

³² Karen Crozier, “Reimagining the Spirit of Children: A Christian Pedagogical Vision,” in *Nurturing Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives and Best Practices*, ed. Holly Catterton Allen (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008), 342.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Joyce Ann Mercer, *Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2005), 127. Mercer critiques works from James Dobson, *Focus on the Family*, *Character First!* J. Richard Fugate, Larry Christenson, and Stormie Omartian for their view of childhood depravity and the perspective that “children are the prime exemplars of the universal tendency toward ‘willful defiance’ rooted in the original sin of humanity” (129). Larry Tomczak, mentioned in chapter two, also takes this approach. See p. 46-47 for previous discussion.

a child as basically good! ‘Behold I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me’ (Ps. 51:5). The Bible does not view a child as one who essentially wants to do the wise and right thing.”³⁵ Christenson’s interpretation of Psalm 51:5 is perplexing due to the vast Biblical material discussed in chapter two that shows that children often are protagonists throughout Biblical narratives that are indeed responsible for doing the “wise and right thing,” even when the adults around them were at a loss for how to act within God’s purposes. The Bible often portrays children as humble and ready servants of the Lord. Taking one verse, such as Psalm 51:5, and making the sweeping conclusion that children are not “basically good” ignores the whole of the Biblical witness. Christenson, and other proponents of childhood depravity, fail to reconcile Psalm 51:5 with the way the Bible depicts actual children in Biblical narratives, Jesus’ demand to welcome children and to emulate them, and the serious adult responsibilities that are given in books like Deuteronomy and Proverbs.

Further, using Psalm 51:5 as a proof text for childhood depravity ignores the rich context of Psalm 51 itself. Psalm 51 adds a superscript (like many other psalms) to identify it as a psalm of David after Nathan has confronted him about his affair with Bathsheba. King David, an adult, has failed miserably to uphold God’s standard of living, and pleads for God’s forgiveness, appealing to God’s mercy and steadfast love. Applying this verse as a general statement about the nature of children ignores the actual text of Psalm 51:5, as well as its context. Further, Christenson’s interpretation of this verse is at odds with Jesus’ words to the disciples, “unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:3). Jesus placed no conditions on

³⁵ Larry Christenson as quoted in Mercer, *Welcoming Children*, 132.

what kind of child He wanted His disciples to be like, instead there seems to be something about children, in general, that makes them receptive to the Kingdom, thus Jesus holds them in front of adults and calls for their emulation. Unfortunately, however, the view that children are inherently evil is cited in much “biblical” parenting literature and undergirds an authoritarian stance to parenting. Mercer adds, “Thus the emphasis in this material frequently falls upon parental control and authority, discipline, and the importance of constraining the child for his/her own good, in the face of a selfish rebellion against human authority that mirrors the ultimate human rebellion against God.”³⁶

Perhaps the most recent example of this type of “biblical” parenting book is John Rosemond’s *Parenting by the Book: Biblical Wisdom for Raising Your Child*.³⁷ Rosemond claims to be a psychologist, but spends much of his book bashing the psychological field and its research. Rosemond says, “God makes nothing complicated,” and suggests that raising human beings is not complicated if parents follow his “biblical” method of parenting.³⁸ He calls himself the “Great Parenting Plagiarist” because he is a “messenger, nothing more.”³⁹ He says, “the way described in these pages is straight from the Bible.”⁴⁰ Rosemond begins his book criticizing a woman who has adopted

³⁶ Mercer, *Welcoming*, 129.

³⁷ John Rosemond, *Parenting by the Book: Biblical Wisdom for Raising Your Child* (New York, NY: Howard Books, 2013).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

“attachment parenting.”⁴¹ He decries theories within psychology and says that the field “was hijacked by secular progressives who were focused more on advancing humanistic ideology than advancing the human condition.”⁴²

It is concerning that many people appear to resonate with his assertions. He is a best-selling author, his columns appear in more than 200 newspapers, and he has been featured on Focus on the Family.⁴³ Further, and even more problematic, he is asserting a “biblical” parenting stance that does not include any words from Jesus about children and interprets Deuteronomy 6:6-7 to mean speaking consistently to children about “the difference between right and wrong...”⁴⁴ He focuses only on behaviors and obedience. He says later, “No wonder the obedient child is pleasing to the Lord. It’s the only thing on his wish list.”⁴⁵ There is nothing about spiritual formation or spiritual disciplines. He seems to ignore the whole of the canon concerning children, and most of his arguments rest on Genesis 2:24 as an indication that the institution of marriage is paramount, even over a child’s needs, and that making children the focus will make them “entitled” for life.⁴⁶

While he articulates no theology, he clearly leans hard to childhood depravity and original sin saying that the Bible portrays children as “fundamentally sinful” and he frequently refers to children as “little criminals,” “criminals in the making,” “Spawn of

⁴¹ Ibid., 1.

⁴² Ibid., 2.

⁴³ John Rosemond, “Home Page,” accessed March 15, 2017, www.johnrosemond.com.

⁴⁴ Rosemond, *Parenting*, 131.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 194.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 123.

Satan,” and “demon child.”⁴⁷ He adds, “The real, honest-to-badness human being – a raging socio-path (although often charming, like many sociopaths) emerges from behind the deceptive mask of infancy sometime during the second year of life.”⁴⁸

Further, Rosemond suggests that the Bible is clear on parenting, which is an odd assertion given the lack of specific parenting material found within the canon. He says that “there is no evidence that in the Judeo-Christian world the fundamental principles governing child rearing has appreciably changed since its founding by Abraham and Sarah.”⁴⁹ But that is also a peculiar claim. There have been extensive theological debates about the nature of children, and parenting literature of antiquity represents a larger focus on spiritual formation than the behavioral focus of today, as will be discussed later.

First, it is important to note that infants were primarily seen as innocent for the first few hundred years of Christian theology, and the views of original sin and childhood depravity were not widely accepted until the fifth century. Bakke reviews the writings of most early theologians in his exhaustive work, including, Gregory of Nyssa, Clement of Alexandria, John Chrysostom, and Jerome, as well as Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Cyprian. He says of his research, “The idea that infants are innocent, or morally neutral, is found consistently in all the patristic material I have studied, until a clear break occurs among Western theologians at the beginning of the fifth century.”⁵⁰ The Council of Carthage adopted “the idea of original sin” in AD 418.⁵¹ Augustine codified this doctrine and

⁴⁷ Ibid., 65, 38.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 38.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 16.

⁵⁰ Bakke, *When Children*, 105.

believed that unbaptized infants that died would go to hell.⁵² It should be noted, that while the doctrine of original sin prevailed in some Christian traditions, Judaism does not have a doctrine of original sin and children are viewed primarily as blessings and “intrinsically spiritual.”⁵³ To suggest that the Judeo-Christian tradition has not “appreciably changed” is not true to church history, nor is it accurate to suggest that Jews and some Christian traditions have the same theology regarding children even today. Further, Rosemond’s assertion ignores that many serious scholars and theologians have read the same verses for hundreds of years and come to very different conclusions. Professor Dean Blevins adds, “An unreflective view of child depravity demeans children through an Augustinian lens without truly reflecting on the limits of that view from the perspective of theology, church history and neuroscience.”⁵⁴ It is unfortunate that a “biblical” parenting stance has become synonymous with authoritarianism and childhood depravity, rather than relational methods that treat children as image bearers with at least some measure of God-given goodness. Blevins rightly points out the need for reflection from several vantage points. Scripture, theology, church history, social science, childhood development, and brain research should certainly be taken into consideration in studying children’s spirituality and in developing theologies of childhood.

⁵¹ Kevin Lawson, “Baptismal Practices and the Spiritual Nurture of Children,” in *Understanding Children’s Spirituality: Theology, Research, and Practice*, ed. Kevin Lawson (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 126.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 124.

⁵³ Howard Schwartz, “Narrative and Imagination: The Role of Texts and Storytelling in Nurturing Spirituality in Judaism,” in *Nurturing Child and Adolescent Spirituality: Perspectives from the World’s Religious Traditions*, ed. Karen-Marie Yust (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 191.

⁵⁴ Dean Blevins, “What ‘Has’ Happened to Sin?,” in *Understanding Children’s Spirituality: Theology, Research, and Practice*, ed. Kevin Lawson (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 81.

For example, some interesting findings based on theology and social science research suggests a childhood propensity toward goodness, as evidenced in children's ability to forgive others, despite their subordinate role in most situations.⁵⁵ Kelly Flanagan and Rebecca Loveall point out that children "are subject to orders, adult-imposed structure, and adult irritation and frustration. They are often overlooked, ignored, and their needs may not be taken into account. In addition, they can be chastised and even shamed for their lack of knowledge and understanding even if age-appropriate."⁵⁶ They argue that "because children are less powerful in many relationships, they are in the constant functional position of having to forgive others."⁵⁷ Thus, "children may actually be more capable of forgiveness than adults, though they may not be able to articulate it as well."⁵⁸ This is an exceptional finding. Forgiveness is complex and abstract process. In fact, it may even be "outside of their cognitive abilities, but can still be an experiential and emotional process enabled by God and embodied by their moral communities."⁵⁹ Even very young children seemed to readily engage in the forgiveness process.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Kelly Flanagan and Rebecca Loveall, "Forgiveness, Peer Relations, and Children's Spirituality," in *Understanding Children's Spirituality: Theology, Research, and Practice*, ed. Kevin Lawson (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 383.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 385.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

While some may worry that finding innate goodness is a result of the influence of philosophies like humanism that see goodness in people apart from God, this writer would conclude that it is the *very* image of God within children that allows young children to engage in these complex acts. In other words, it is the image of God that allows them to reflect goodness; an image that *cannot* be lost. Towner adds “although the image of God in human beings can be obscured or distorted, it cannot be smashed or erased.”⁶¹ He further argues, “The problem with these antithetical juxtapositions of Genesis 3 with Genesis 1 is that nothing in either Genesis text suggests that a basic change in human nature, a new anthropology as it were, could or did occur in the Garden.”⁶² Instead, he adds, “But human nature, shaped in the divine image, remains constant. That is the biblical witness.”⁶³ Towner summarizes the image of God and its relationship with human nature well: “It would be better to say that we continually draw upon that proclivity which, according to Genesis, inalienably exists in human nature, and that we enact it – less than perfectly to be sure, except by the man from Nazareth – in varying degrees of fullness.”⁶⁴ As such, children, while born into a broken world and certainly capable of sin, also have a propensity toward goodness as people made in the image of God. Further, they have a proclivity toward relationships with God and others. Because there is a likeness of God in all of humanity, goodness must reside there even if imperfectly and inconsistently enacted.

⁶¹ Towner, “Children and Image,” 319.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 320.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 321.

However, this discussion also highlights two important difficulties in the theology of childhood; the lack of reflective theological material about childhood and the lack of balance in the theologies that are articulated. Bunge states, "...until very recently, issues related to children have tended to be marginal in almost every area of contemporary theology. For example, systematic theologians and Christian ethicists have said little about children, and they have not regarded serious reflection on children as a high priority."⁶⁵ Mercer adds,

In light of the words of Jesus that "whoever welcomes one such child welcomes me," it amazes me that every Christian congregation in North America is *not* searching frantically to find more ways to welcome children every day. I cannot imagine what is keeping all theologians of every ilk in this country from locating children and their welcome in a very prominent location within their theologies. Perhaps it is just too hard to believe that children – noisy, messy, playful, unpredictable, spontaneous children – could ever have that much in common with God as to be a means of welcoming God.⁶⁶

As chapter two discussed, Jesus gave emphatic commands about the welcome of children and their representation of the Kingdom. It is striking, then, that systematic theologians have not articulated theologies of childhood. The lack of theological reflection about children is neglectful and disrespectful and does not model the belief in children as equal image bearers.

The neglect of children within theology has also had wider implications for the mistreatment of children. Bunge adds, "The lack of complex thinking about children in the church and the wider culture has also undermined the church's commitment to them

⁶⁵ Marcia Bunge, ed., *The Child in Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2001), 3.

⁶⁶ Mercer, *Welcoming Children*, 262.

and had serious consequences for children themselves.”⁶⁷ She points to the “sexual abuse cases within the Roman Catholic Church, when financial concerns, careers of priests, and the reputations of bishops or particular congregations have come before the safety and needs of children,” as an example.⁶⁸ Certainly, there are other examples of children’s safety and needs not being a priority and the Catholic church is not alone in failing to address child abuse. For instance, a strict view of childhood depravity has at times led to child abuse because the doctrine was used by some to “justify harsh treatment of children in order, literally, to beat the hell out of them.”⁶⁹ While that is an extreme example, there is a more common focus within some denominations on the “need to ‘break their wills’ at a very early age with harsh physical punishment.”⁷⁰ Further, as already mentioned, some traditions possess an emphasis on a conversion experience before being spiritually nurtured. This is detrimental to spiritual formation because it does not model a lifelong journey with God. Ivy Beckwith adds, “Unfortunately, once that prayer is prayed, parents and religious educators often breathe a sigh of relief. ‘Whew! That one’s taken care of.’”⁷¹ However, Beckwith adds, “But parents and churches who are truly interested in the positive soul care of the child will not be as concerned about this one-time experience

⁶⁷ Marcia Bunge, “The Dignity and Complexity of Children,” in *Nurturing Child and Adolescent Spirituality: Perspectives from the World’s Religious Traditions*, ed. Karen-Marie Yust (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 54.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Barbara Pitkin, “The Heritage of the Lord,” in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia Bunge (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2001), 190.

⁷⁰ Bunge, “Biblical Perspectives,” 46. See p. 26 for previous discussion.

⁷¹ Ivy Beckwith, *Postmodern Children’s Ministry: Ministry to Children in the 21st Century* (El Cajon, CA: Youth Specialties, 2004), 62.

as they will about the ongoing immersion of the child in the things of God and Jesus.”⁷² Spiritual formation for young children is too often neglected. Further, as already mentioned in the introductory chapter, children often do not have reasonable expectations, as either too much or too little is expected of them, again due to a lack of serious theological reflection and ignorance of their developmental strengths and limitations.⁷³ All these issues undermine the dignity and respect of little ones as fully human and members of the Kingdom and has also produced theology and parenting material that does not represent the whole of the canon concerning children and their spirituality.

As such, there is a need for a more balanced theology of childhood. Bunge proposes six main views of children that should be “incorporated into theologies of childhood and held in tension.”⁷⁴ She says that children should be seen as:

- Gifts of God and Sources of Joy
- Sinful Creatures and Moral Agents
- Developing Beings Who Need Instruction and Guidance
- Fully Human and Made in the Image of God
- Models of Faith and Sources of Revelation
- Orphans, Neighbors, and Strangers in the Need of Justice and Compassion.⁷⁵

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ See previous discussion p. 26.

⁷⁴ Bunge, “Dignity and Complexity,” 55.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 58-62.

Bunge says, "...these six perspectives have tremendous implications for combating simplistic and destructive conceptions of children and strengthening the church's commitment to them."⁷⁶ For instance, Bunge goes on to identify practical applications of each of these perspectives such as more welcome within churches, greater emphasis on religious education, and an emphasis on the family.⁷⁷ She adds,

Finally, if they believe, as Jesus did, that children can teach adults and be moral witnesses, models of faith, and sources of revelation, then they will listen more attentively to children and learn from them; structure religious education programs in ways that honor children's questions and insights; and recognize the importance of children in the faith journey and spiritual maturation of parents and other adults.⁷⁸

As already mentioned, contemporary theologies often neglect childhood, and many Christian parenting manuals at present, tend to have an authoritarian and behavioral focus. What is striking, however, is that spiritual formation for children tended to be emphasized more in the literature of the past, rather than how to specifically address behavioral problems. Bunge says,

...the study of past theological perspectives discloses that childhood has not always been a marginal theme in theology. Although references to children are often scattered throughout a theologian's writings and not discussed in a systematic way, many theologians, especially prior to the mid-nineteenth century, seriously reflected on issues of child rearing, education, and moral and spiritual formation.⁷⁹

Two theologians, in particular, John Chrysostom (c. 349-407) and Horace Bushnell (1802-1876), focused a great deal on soul care and the spiritual task of

⁷⁶ Ibid., 62.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 62-63.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 63.

⁷⁹ Bunge, *Child in Christian Thought*, 11.

parenting. Professor Vigen Guroian explains that John Chrysostom believed raising children in the faith was the most crucial aspect of parenting. Guroian says of

Chrysostom's work:

The kind of love to which God calls parents is above natural love and transcends every corruption of it. It is the deepest sort of respect for the child as a divine 'statue,' an icon of God. This respect obligates parents to bring up their children "in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." Chrysostom proposes the highest doctrine of the parent-child relationship, rooted in the agapeic love (and fear) of God.⁸⁰

Chrysostom believed that parents' own salvation was tied to their child's salvation: "the relative weakness and dependency of children set certain conditions for the salvation of both them and their parents. Parents and children together suffer when the former do not assume responsibility for the latter."⁸¹ In fact, Guroian says, "Since the value of children is so great in God's estimate and their weakness equally evident, parental neglect ranks among the gravest evils and injustices" for Chrysostom.⁸² He wrote, "I would say that these parents [who put their own needs before their children's needs and neglect the good of the children's souls] (and I am not speaking out of anger) are even worse than those who kill their children."⁸³ Chrysostom had equally harsh words for "parents more concerned with secular standards of success."⁸⁴ Bushnell, several hundred years later, also strongly emphasizes soul care as the essential task of parenting.

⁸⁰ Vigen Guroian, "The Ecclesial Family," in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia Bunge (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2001), 72.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., 73.

⁸³ John Chrysostom as quoted in Guroian, "The Ecclesial Family," 73.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 74.

Bushnell's work, *Christian Nurture* was originally published in 1847 and "was one of the first extended reflections on the religious lives of infants and young children."⁸⁵ His overall care and concern for nurturing children at even the youngest of ages is noteworthy. Perhaps Bushnell's most famous quote is, "That the child is to grow up Christian, and never know himself as being otherwise."⁸⁶

Bushnell, like many of his predecessors, saw the family, parents specifically, as the primary agents responsible for Christian nurture of children. Bushnell saw the necessity of parents being exemplary role models and treating their children with gentle methods. He offers stern words for parents or adults who treat children harshly, believing that this would hinder children from coming into a relationship with Christ. He says,

For myself, when I look over this field of misuse, misconception, misdirection, seeing in how many and subtle ways children are turned off from Christ, when they might be and ought to be drawn to his fold, it is no longer a wonder that they go astray; it would only be a greater wonder if they met the call of Christ more faithfully, and stood in a character more answerable to the privilege he gives them.⁸⁷

Bushnell believed that children being held back from worship services, church membership, or punished too harshly would ultimately negatively affect their relationship with Jesus Christ. In her review of Bushnell's work, Margaret Bendroth says:

The careful modern reader might find in Bushnell a calm voice of sanity. Many children today are often left to fend for themselves on the street or in front of a television set, or they are shuttled around to a dizzying array of soccer games, ballet classes, and day-care providers. Even a mature adult would have difficulty finding a moral center in such an unstable setting. Raising good children, as Bushnell argues, is a long, slow, subtle process; it takes a lot of time and

⁸⁵ Margaret Bendroth, "Horace Bushnell's *Christian Nurture*," in *The Child in Christian Thought*, ed. Marcia Bunge (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2001), 350.

⁸⁶ Horace Bushnell, *Christian Nurture* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000), 10.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 313.

attention, many hours of being present, the effort to curb a sharp word, the energy to answer just one more question. Bushnell's emphasis on the moral efficacy of parents is perhaps a hard word to hear today, but it is still, without question, a wise and timely one.⁸⁸

And while attachment theory had not yet been articulated, Bushnell was advocating for an emphasis on relationships over an emphasis on behaviors; time and presence over material things, and reasonable expectations according to their developmental needs. It is to modern psychology and childhood development that the discussion will now turn, especially as it relates to the nature of childhood.

Sigmund Freud (1856 – 1939), the father of modern psychology and psychoanalytic theory believed that the mind consisted of an interplay between the id, ego, and superego.⁸⁹ “Id forces seek immediate satisfaction...They operate according to the pleasure principle, concerned with reducing tension by seeking pleasure and avoiding pain.”⁹⁰ The self-serving id dominates in Freud's theory and requires the ego to “mediate” it.⁹¹ The superego “develops early in life when the child assimilates the rules of conduct taught by parents or caregivers through a system of rewards and punishments. Behaviors that are wrong and bring punishment become part of the child's conscience...”⁹² The superego, then, “represents morality.”⁹³ Freud tended toward a

⁸⁸ Bendroth, “Horace Bushnell,” 364.

⁸⁹ Duane Schultz and Sydney Ellen Schultz, *A History of Modern Psychology*, 7th ed. (Orlando, FL: Harcourt College Publishers, 2000), 408-409.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., 409.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

negative view of humanity, especially children, and believed that to attain some level of goodness or morality, children needed strict control from their parents, including punishments and rewards to shape their behavior. It is difficult not to see similarities between Freud's theories and much Christian parenting literature that is on the market today. Both approaches put children in a negative and passive role with a need for parental constraint. However, Freud did take these theories to the extreme. Psychologist John Gottman points out that Freud saw children as "highly sexualized, aggressive creatures."⁹⁴ Gottman observes that most of Freud's ideas have been disproven and even research beginning in the 1930s "showed that most small children are, by nature, primarily altruistic, and empathetic toward one another, particularly toward another child in distress."⁹⁵

Behaviorists saw children as more neutral, but also put them in a passive role. The most famous behaviorists were Ivan Pavlov (1849-1936), B.F. Skinner (1904-1990), and John B. Watson (1878-1958). Pavlov and Skinner both were interested in theories of learning and developed theories of conditioning; classical and operant, respectively. They believed that learning could be completely shaped by environmental responses. While the reader may not be familiar with Skinner, most will be familiar with the idea of positive and negative reinforcements and punishments. "Skinner's behaviorism is devoted to the study of responses. He was concerned with describing rather than explaining behavior. His research dealt only with observable behavior..."⁹⁶ In other words, Skinner was not

⁹⁴ John Gottman, *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1997), 32.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Schultz and Schultz, *History*, 322.

concerned with emotions because he believed that modifying behavior in an observable and objective way would produce learning. While there are many legitimate critiques of Skinner’s work, many people disregard his conclusions about punishments. At the end of his work, Skinner found that punishments were ineffective for true learning. “Skinner’s position that positive reinforcement is more effective than punishment in altering behavior is supported by considerable human and animal research.”⁹⁷

John B. Watson, however, is one of the most noted behaviorists who turned his attention to precisely how children should be raised. He published *Psychological Care of the Infant and Child* in 1928. As a behaviorist, he believed that the interaction with the environment was the primary source for learning and saw no value in relationships and bonds with parents. One of his most famous quotes about raising children was his instruction to “never hug and kiss them, never let them sit on your lap.”⁹⁸ He added, “...you will find how easy it is to be perfectly objective with your child and at the same time kindly. You will be utterly ashamed at the mawkish, sentimental way you have been handling it.”⁹⁹ Behaviorists like Watson believed one could completely control the environment with rewards and punishments to get the most optimal outcomes from children. Watson said,

Give me a dozen healthy infants, well-formed, and my own specified world to bring them up in, and I’ll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select – doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant-chief, and yes, even beggarman and thief, regardless of his talents, penchants, tendencies, abilities, vocations, and race of his ancestors.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Ibid., 329.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 280.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 295.

The authors of *A General Theory of Love* add, “Behaviorists advised parents to treat their babies like unruly lab animals. Comforting crying infants was verboten; rewarding distress with attention, they taught, merely reinforces and promotes noxious displays of whining.”¹⁰¹ Of interest, Watson burned all of his writings before he died and his wife publicly disagreed with his views on child-rearing.¹⁰² However, psychologist Deborah MacNamara says, “The legacy of these words has been proliferation of child-rearing practices that rely on sculpting techniques, such as negative or positive reinforcement, rewards, consequences, and coercion, to correct signs of immaturity. Dealing with a child’s immature behavior is the primary focus, and parenting skills are used to modify learned responses.”¹⁰³ Further, the emotional and inner world of the child is ignored.¹⁰⁴ MacNamara says, “The unspoken assumption is that a child learns to be mature, with parents controlling this process rather than growing them towards maturity by providing conditions for it to unfold.”¹⁰⁵ Again, it is difficult to miss the correlations between behaviorism and much Christian parenting literature. While their underlying theories are different, their ending point is the same, with children in a passive role and a parent controlling the process of development with a strict adherence to a behavioral system. Developmental and attachment theories, on the other hand, suggest that parents cultivate

¹⁰¹ Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini, and Richard Lannon, *A General Theory of Love* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2000), 71.

¹⁰² Schultz and Schultz, *History*, 281.

¹⁰³ Deborah MacNamara, *Rest, Play, Grow: Making Sense of Preschoolers (or Anyone Who Acts like One)* (Vancouver, CA: Aona Books, 2016), 15.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

the right conditions for a natural growth process. Due to their weight and importance, however, attachment and brain science will be discussed in the next chapter.

While the field of psychology originally focused on pathology in adults, developmental psychology began to dedicate itself to the study of children and how they develop beginning in early infancy. Developmental psychology also provided some necessary correctives to psychoanalytic theory and behaviorism because its findings would no longer allow children to be viewed completely in a passive role. And while there are many legitimate criticisms of developmental theories of the past, especially stage theories, such as their overreliance on cognitive processes and rigidly limiting children to earlier stages based on their age, the study of childhood progressed significantly because of these researchers.

Jean Piaget (1896-1980), perhaps the most famous of the stage theorists suggested that there are stages of development that are universal to all children and not completely dependent on the environment. Further, he suggested that “developmental stages rest on fundamental maturational changes in brain and cognitive function.”¹⁰⁶ One of Piaget’s most interesting findings was that young children are incapable of appreciating context.¹⁰⁷ MacNamara explains what is referred to as the “5 to 7 shift” based on Piaget’s work that “signals a significant change in cognitive development in a young child” that usually occurs between five and seven years of age.¹⁰⁸ She adds, “At this time a child can

¹⁰⁶ Jean Piaget, Jerome Kagan, and Barbel Inhelder, foreword, in *The Psychology of the Child*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2000), xiii.

¹⁰⁷ MacNamara, *Rest, Play, Grow*, 22.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

appreciate context and take into account more than one perspective at a time.”¹⁰⁹ Further, they “become increasingly tempered in their expression of thoughts and feelings. They will start to exhibit impulse control in the face of strong emotions.”¹¹⁰ Prior to this shift, however, children struggle to manage emotions, appreciate the larger picture, and understand other people’s feelings. This is crucial information because some of the behaviors that small children often struggle with are natural developmental limitations. They are neither intentional, nor sinful. When children are viewed as primarily sinful, thus all their perceived missteps as also sinful, children will be shamed for behavior that is not completely within their control. Understanding childhood development can help parents create more realistic expectations and work with the natural processes of development, rather than antagonize them. MacNamara says of developmental science in present day, “Developmentalists don’t seek to carve maturity into a child but work to support the conditions to grow children up organically.”¹¹¹ Over the last several decades, developmental researchers have found invaluable information in children’s developmental strengths and limitations. The advent of sophisticated neuroscience has helped immensely with this endeavor. Further, instead of taking an outside (behaviors) in (feelings/development) approach, it has allowed researchers to begin to understand children from the inside out.

Stage theorists Erik Erikson (1902-1994) and Lawrence Kohlberg (1927-1987), in this country, also furthered the field significantly. Erikson is perhaps most famous for his

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 16.

“eight ages of man” which he placed in a chart, along with approximate ages.¹¹² While many of these stages have some psychoanalytic carryover and appear rigid, they were helpful to continue growing the discussion of development and Erikson, himself, warned against their concrete approach. “But a chart is only a tool to think with, and cannot aspire to be a prescription to abide by, whether in practice of child-training, in psychotherapy, or in methodology of child study.”¹¹³ And while there are many legitimate criticisms for developmental theories, they did, especially Erickson’s work, include a spiritual element. Eugene Roehlkepartain says that “Erickson gave unprecedented attention to the potential role of religion and spirituality in development.”¹¹⁴ Likewise, Kohlberg is notable because he offered theories and research about how people morally reason.

On the more religious side, James Fowler (1940-2015), one of the most well-known developmental psychologists in faith formation, also liked the idea of stages of development. A contemporary of Piaget, Erikson, and Kohlberg, Fowler even contrives a “fictional conversation” between them about development.¹¹⁵ Fowler takes the same type of developmental approach to the stages of faith formation. He says, “I believe faith is a human universal. We are endowed at birth with nascent capacities for faith. How these

¹¹² Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993), 270.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Eugene Roehlkepartain, “Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence: Moving to the Scientific Mainstream,” in *The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence*, ed. Eugene Roehlkepartain (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006), 7.

¹¹⁵ James Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1981), 40-52.

capacities are activated and grow depends to a large extent on how we are welcomed into the world and what kinds of environments we grow in.”¹¹⁶ Roehlkepartain says, “Although stage theories such as Fowler’s have been criticized for their strong cognitive basis and for suggesting children are limited to less mature faith, they have been invaluable in allowing the study of transcendent domains of religion, spirituality and faith to gain more serious consideration.”¹¹⁷ All of these developmental psychologists made large contributions to the field of psychology, but also the understanding of childhood development and subsequently their spirituality.

While this chapter has covered much information from theology and psychology, it is hoped that readers will see the vast array of beliefs and thoughts about children throughout history. In the first century, their lives were in peril, not only due to factors such as poor sanitation and high infant mortality, but also due to the widespread use of abortion, infanticide, and exposure. These practices were acceptable because children were not viewed as full human beings. Jews and Christians were called by God to be different from their surrounding cultures, and while they did see children as fully human and made in the image of God, they have struggled to welcome children consistently in the past and even today. It is hoped that the reader will see the overt, as well as the subtle ways, that children are not treated with dignity and respect, and that they have intrinsic worth as children *now*. Ratcliff and Nye say, “Children are more than creatures that will potentially become whole adults; rather they are whole persons as children and should be

¹¹⁶ Ibid., xiii.

¹¹⁷ Roehlkepartain, “Spiritual Development,” 7.

valued for who they are, not just for what they will become. They are more than bodies and brains to be educated; they are deeply spiritual in their day-to-day lives...”¹¹⁸

Further, as developmental research, and especially brain development research becomes more understood, children can be placed in a more active role, which is consistent with Scripture. Psychologist and spirituality researcher Tobin Hart says, “...before we try to mold who they are from the outside in, can we try to understand and appreciate who the child is from the inside out?”¹¹⁹ Ultimately, he asks, “can we be as willing to let what we learn from children change *our* theology and theory as we are willing to change children by the imposition of our theology and theory on them?”¹²⁰ Hart makes an excellent point, as science from many vantage points has begun to understand childhood more fully. Will Christians be willing to re-evaluate doctrines of childhood depravity and provide relational and spiritual nurture, trusting that God has designed a natural path for development? If not from science, will Christians be willing to re-examine the full Biblical account that affirms children as image bearers and active in their faith? Will Christians, at least, be willing to understand that not every misbehavior is a sinful conscious rebellion on the part of the child? Gretchen Wolff Pritchard says, “We need to remind ourselves again and again that adults, for all their competence and power, for all their apparent immunity to criticism, sin just as much—no,

¹¹⁸ Donald Ratcliff and Rebecca Nye, “Childhood Spirituality: Strengthening the Research Foundation,” in *The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence*, ed. Eugene Roehlkepartain (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006), 481.

¹¹⁹ Tobin Hart, “Spiritual Experiences and Capacities of Children and Youth,” in *The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence*, ed. Eugene Roehlkepartain (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006), 174.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 175.

much more than—children.”¹²¹ She adds later that adults often abuse their power with children, “but it is the child – who is trying so hard to be ‘good’ – who feels guilty.”¹²²

The welcome of children, so emphatically articulated by Jesus, and His demand to become like a child, should provide motivation enough to learn everything possible about children, their nature, and their needs.

The next chapter, then, will explore John Bowlby’s attachment theory, its growth to an interdisciplinary field, studies of secure attachment as related to religion and spirituality, and relatively recent findings in neuroscience. Ultimately, the next chapter will continue to argue that children are indeed fully human, what happens to them in their earliest of years matters greatly, and that they are worthy of respect and understanding.

¹²¹ Gretchen Wolff Pritchard, *Offering the Gospel to Children* (Lanham, MD: Roman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 63.

¹²² *Ibid.*

CHAPTER FOUR: ATTACHMENT RESEARCH AND BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

This dissertation argues that a significant reality of being made in God's image is that children have an innate relational and spiritual nature which is evident in the earliest stages of life. This chapter will take an extensive look at the relational nature of children by addressing the work of John Bowlby, and his colleague Mary Ainsworth, who articulated attachment theory and provided a large research base demonstrating that children, indeed, are hardwired for connection. The last part of the chapter will incorporate new findings in neuroscience and why an understanding of basic brain development can help gain a better understanding of children's developmental strengths and weaknesses. However, because there is often a reluctance on the part of many Christians to engage in scientific research, the discussion will first address these concerns.

As already stated, interdisciplinary study is ideal because in addressing spiritual formation it is important to address the *whole* of the child. Their physical health, emotional wellbeing, and societal and cultural circumstances are all important to understanding a child and their developmental needs; both relationally and spiritually. While some may be uncomfortable turning to other sources than the Bible; science and Christian faith do not always contradict.

Two models may be helpful for Christians who find themselves reluctant to look at scientific research. First, it is important to remember that God owns all truth and interdisciplinary studies gives a larger picture of that truth. Professor Catherine

Stonehouse advocates for an integrated approach to spiritual formation with children by using “tradition, social-science research, and Scripture.”¹ She goes on to say,

If God is the source of all truth, science and theology should be in harmony. When they are not, either our science has failed to capture the truth revealed in creation, or our theology has not adequately understood the revelation of Scripture and how it is to be applied. Apparent disharmony between science and theology should send serious Christians to look again at their understanding of both science and theology.²

However, it is important that science is critically read and actively studied. Motivations in studies, research, and even parenting books should be carefully weighed. Not all studies are created equally.

Secondly, science can simply be viewed as an observation of what God has made. And what God designed in the human brain, for instance, is the most intricate and baffling subject science has ever attempted to study. Take, for instance, what is now known about the complexity of potential on/off firing patterns within the brain. Each person, at birth, has an estimated one hundred billion neurons.³ Most of those neurons have around 10,000 to 15,000 connections, which means that there are trillions of supportive cells within the brain.⁴ The brain is so complex that the number of potential on/off firing patterns within one brain can be estimated at ten multiplied by ten one million times.⁵ To put that in perspective, that number is larger than all the atoms in the

¹ Catherine Stonehouse, *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey: Nurturing a Life of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 14.

² Ibid, 15.

³ Daniel Siegel, *The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2015), 15.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Daniel Siegel, “Brainstorm: A Clinician's Guide to the Changing and Challenging Adolescent Brain” (lecture, The Mindsight Approach to Childhood and Adolescence, PESI, January 15, 2017).

universe and that is in just one person's head!⁶ Believers may truly marvel in God's intricate design of the human brain. Further, what attachment research of the last several decades has observed in the need for human bonds and relationships is also an affirmation of the intricate work God created in humanity.

In the 1950s psychoanalytic theory was the prevailing theory in psychology based on Freud's theory of the interplay between the id, ego, and superego, and that human behavior, because of the id's dominance, was completely motivated by the seeking of pleasure or the avoidance of pain.⁷ Behaviorism was also an influential branch of psychology during this time that believed a strict adherence of punishments and reinforcements could condition a child into a productive and healthy adult. But John Bowlby, a British psychoanalyst, began to wonder about the role of attachment and bonding and if human behavior was shaped by a need for relationships instead. Authors of *A General Theory of Love* write, "A natural renegade, Bowlby had barely completed his psychoanalytic training before he launched a revolution against the mother church."⁸ Bowlby began exploring the relational bonds between mothers and infants. While it is hard to imagine that this would be groundbreaking, his theory was heavily disputed.

At the time, Bowlby's ideas were scandalous. The Freudians viewed the mother-infant bond as the 'cupboard of love:' an infant values his mother because she gratifies his id, as she feeds him. Bowlby's biological bonding system and its infringement on the id's supremacy infuriated psychoanalysts. They alternatively denounced him as naïve and a blasphemer.⁹

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ See p. 80-81 for previous discussion.

⁸ Thomas Lewis, Fari Amiri, and Richard Lannon, *A General Theory of Love* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2000), 70.

⁹ Ibid.

And while Bowlby's work initially started as smaller scientific observations and theory, other scientists began producing similar independent findings.

In 1959, researchers Harry Harlow and Robert Zimmerman, did a noteworthy comparative study on monkeys. They took infant monkeys away from their mothers and made substitute mothers; one out of wire and one out of cloth with bottles of milk, and a cloth mother with no milk. "Regardless of whether they were fed by a wire mother or by a cloth mother, the infant monkeys overwhelmingly preferred to be in contact with the cloth mother, demonstrating the importance of contact comfort in attachment."¹⁰ The authors of *A General Theory of Love* add,

Without fail, the immature monkeys frequented the wire mother only long enough to dine and treated the furry mother as Mom; they clasped her, squealed at her, embraced her, hid behind her when alarmed. Milk, whether a reinforcing reward or an id-satisfying elixir, failed spectacularly to establish any bond. In trial after trial, the more a doll could be made to resemble a mother monkey, the more infatuated the little monkeys became.¹¹

Harlow and others proved that the need to satisfy hunger was secondary at best.

Mary Ainsworth, a colleague of Bowlby, produced groundbreaking studies of her own. She set up studies of observation, where she and her colleagues would record how quickly mothers responded to the cries of their infants. (Recall that strict behaviorism advocated not reinforcing crying by picking an infant up.) She found, "whereas by the end of the first year mothers who had attended promptly to their crying babies had babies who cried much less than did babies of mothers who had left them to cry."¹² Bowlby says

¹⁰ John Santrock, *Psychology*, 6th ed. (Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2000), 339.

¹¹ Lewis et. al., *General Theory of Love*, 72.

¹² John Bowlby, *A Secure Base* (London, UK: Routledge, 1988), 49.

of Ainsworth's study, "In some cases a mother sits it out as long as she can bear to, believing that it would be bad for the baby and make him cry more were she to attend to him – a belief that Ainsworth's findings firmly disprove."¹³

In fact, not only was Ainsworth finding that infants cried less over time if they were picked up immediately, but there were other benefits as well, such as self-reliance. Bowlby reports,

At the least, Ainsworth's findings show that an infant, whose mother is sensitive, accessible, and responsive to him, who accepts his behaviour and is co-operative in dealing with him, is far from being the demanding and unhappy child that some theories might suggest. Instead, mothering of this sort is evidently compatible with a child who is developing a limited measure of self-reliance by the time of his first birthday combined with a high degree of trust in his mother and enjoyment of her company.¹⁴

In other words, early attachment researchers were finding the paradoxical relationship between cultivating dependence and the independence that resulted. Their results were dismissing ideas that children could be "spoiled" by attentive mothers. Perhaps more groundbreaking, Ainsworth found that by the children's second birthday, children who were securely attached to their caregivers continued to cry less and continued to be more self-reliant, but the children were also "*more willing to fall in with parent's wishes.*"¹⁵ Bowlby said, "Human infants, we can safely conclude, like infants of other species [mammals and birds], are preprogrammed to develop in a socially cooperative way; whether they do so or not turns in high degree on how they are treated."¹⁶ Bowlby

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid, 48.

¹⁵ Ibid., 9, emphasis added

¹⁶ Ibid.

acknowledged that “this view of human nature” is “radically different from the one that has long been current in western societies and that has permeated so much of the clinical theory and practice...”¹⁷ He adds, “It points, of course, to a radically different conception of the role of the parent.”¹⁸ Bowlby was suggesting that there was a hardwiring in infants to bond with their parents and that a secure and attuned relationship *naturally* brought about cooperative behaviors, as well as natural development. He says, “What emerges from these studies is that the ordinary sensitive mother is quickly attuned to her infant’s natural rhythms and, by attending to the details of his behaviour, discovers what suits him and behaves accordingly. By doing so she not only makes him contented but also enlists his cooperation.”¹⁹ Bowlby saw a positive correlation between a parent being attuned to the child and the child adopting a cooperative stance with the parent. If parents cultivated relationships with their children, they were not the rebellious opposition of parents, but seemed eager to follow parental instructions and expectations. Further, he believed this was a natural course of action and that parents should parent out of instinct and intuition.

Implicit in this approach is the assumption that parenting behaviour, like attachment behaviour, is in some degree pre-programmed and therefore ready to develop along certain lines when conditions elicit it. This means that, in the ordinary course of events, the parent of a baby experiences a strong urge to behave in certain typical sorts of ways, for example, to cradle the infant, to soothe him when he cries, to keep him warm, protected, and fed.²⁰

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 5.

And while Bowlby does later address that some of parenting is learned (especially by how parents themselves were parented), he does give tremendous credit to a “biological pre-programming.” This was a crucial corrective to John B. Watson’s work that essentially asked parents to ignore their parental intuitions and not even pick up their infants.²¹

Further, as the science progressed, this biological pre-programming was also observed physiologically in infants and parents. The writers of *A General Theory of Love* say:

Although it sounds outlandish to some American ears, exposure to parents can keep a sleeping baby alive. The steady piston of an adult heart and the regular tidal sweeps of breath coordinate the ebb and flow of young internal rhythms. Intuitive accordance with these ancient programs leads women, whether right- or left-handed, to cradle a baby in the left arm – with his head close to her heart.²²

Further, with the explosion of neuroscience in the 1990s, researchers identified cells in the brain called mirror neurons.²³ While that research is complex, in general, mirror neurons may be the wiring in the brain that allows infants to imitate their parent’s behavior even in the first few hours of life, such as sticking out a tongue to mimic the parent.²⁴ Neuroscientist and attachment researcher Daniel Siegel summarizes that “mirror neurons may allow us not only to imitate others’ behavior, but actually resonate with their feelings.”²⁵ He adds, “For this reason, we could also call these special neural cells

²¹ See p. 82-83 for previous discussion.

²² Lewis et. al., *General Theory of Love*, 196.

²³ Siegel, *Developing Mind*, 164.

²⁴ Daniel Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson, *The Whole-Brain Child: 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind* (New York, NY: Bantam Books Trade Paperbacks, 2012), 124.

²⁵ Ibid.

‘sponge neurons’ in that we soak up like a sponge what we see in the behaviors, intentions, and emotions of someone else.”²⁶ While research is ongoing in the study of mirror neurons, especially as they relate to empathy, Siegel points out that the idea that people can directly influence the internal state of another by their own internal state is called “emotional contagion” and it is powerful between parents and children.²⁷ Siegel says, “the internal states of another –from joy and playfulness to sadness and fear – directly affect our own state of mind. We soak people into our own inner world.”²⁸ Secure attachment to warm and attuned parents, then, shapes the inner world of their children, and their own neurological functioning is influenced by their parent’s neurological functioning.

Babies depend on their parents to regulate their systems both biologically and neurologically. Children innately turn toward their parents for this regulation. Authors of *A General Theory of Love* add, “...the typical baby, whether placed on his mother’s left or right side, spends the entire night turned toward her, with ears, nose, and occasionally eyes drinking in the sensory stimulation that sets his nocturnal cadences.”²⁹ However, even with this knowledge, many still adopt a behavioral approach to newborns or a push for early independence utilizing strategies such as the “cry-it-out” method. Thus, “Despite its advanced medical technologies and sophisticated pediatric care, the United States has the highest incidence of SIDS in the world...”³⁰

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid., 125.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Lewis, et.al., *General Theory*, 196.

Ainsworth, then, observed both secure and insecure attachment in her studies and categorized mother-infant relationships into three attachment categories: secure, insecure-avoidant, and insecure-ambivalent.³¹ These categories continue to be widely used today, but researcher, Mary Main, added the fourth category of disorganized/disoriented insecure attachment later to account for the many children who are abused.³² And while the early attachment research focused on mothers and infants, Bowlby expanded his work to include fathers, and later to emphasize the importance of attachment in a lifelong way. Bowlby wrote, “All of us, from cradle to grave, are happiest when life is organized as a series of excursions, long or short, from the secure base provided by our attachment figure(s).”³³

In the 1980s, Bowlby wrote *A Secure Base*, which provided an excellent metaphor for understanding secure attachment. “Secure base” is a term coined by Ainsworth to describe her studies called “strange situation tests” in which infants and toddlers were exposed to a novel setting.³⁴ Securely attached infants and toddlers, would “commonly use mother as a base to explore.”³⁵ Further, “such infants explored actively, especially in mother’s presence, and used mother as a base by keeping note of her whereabouts, exchanging glances, and from time to time returning to her to share in enjoyable mutual

³⁰ Ibid., 195.

³¹ Ibid., 74.

³² Siegel, *Developing Mind*, 91-93.

³³ Bowlby, *Secure Base*, 62.

³⁴ Ibid., 46.

³⁵ Ibid.

contact.”³⁶ Bowlby concluded, then, that the main role of parenting was one of availability and attunement that provided such a secure base:

This brings me to a central feature of my concept of parenting—the provision by both parents of a secure base from which a child or an adolescent can make sorties into the outside world and to which he can return knowing for sure that he will be welcomed when he gets there, nourished physically and emotionally, comforted if distressed, reassured if frightened. In essence this role is one of being available, ready to respond when called upon to encourage and perhaps assist, but to intervene actively only when clearly necessary.³⁷

He goes on to say, “No parent is going to provide a secure base for his growing child unless he has an intuitive understanding of and respect for his child’s attachment behaviour and treats it as the *intrinsic and valuable part of human nature* I believe it to be.”³⁸ Bowlby believed attachment behavior was hardwired into human nature. He also believed that “a child’s attachment behaviour is activated especially by pain, fatigue, and anything frightening, and also by the mother being or appearing to be inaccessible.”³⁹ He saw this as a natural and necessary part of human behavior because of children’s need for love and protection. Bowlby also asserted that “most children are indulgent towards their parents, preferring to see them in a positive light and eager to overlook many deficiencies.”⁴⁰ Most concerning, however, was that this trusting and dependent nature also makes children more vulnerable to abuse. Perhaps due to his findings, Bowlby

³⁶ Ibid., 47.

³⁷ Ibid., 11.

³⁸ Ibid., emphasis added.

³⁹ Ibid., 3.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 108.

frequently advocated for children, their protection, and prevention of maltreatment and neglect.

Bowlby's critics, however, believed a focus on attachment would invite dependency in children. Bowlby says,

Dependency always carries with it an adverse valuation and tends to be regarded as a characteristic only of the early years and one which soon to be grown out of. As a result, in clinical circles it has often happened that, whenever attachment behaviour is manifested during later years, it has not only been regarded as regrettable but has even been dubbed regressive. I believe that to be an appalling misjudgment.⁴¹

But something remarkable was happening in the psychological world because independent studies from multiple countries were confirming what Bowlby had articulated in the observation of attachment. Researchers like Rene Spitz and James Robertson were calling attention to the negative impacts for children raised in isolation (in institutions due to illness). They were not only finding that these children had compromised functioning from the lack of human bonds, but most of them *died*.⁴² Further, Harlow and other comparative researchers replicated their own studies for the next decade. Add to that, Bowlby and Ainsworth's compelling findings, and Bowlby says, "Thereafter nothing was heard of the inherent implausibility of our hypothesis; and criticism became more constructive."⁴³ Constructive criticisms mainly centered around the fact that some children grew up in devastating situations and still became healthy adults. To this, Bowlby responded, "...the fact that some heavy smokers survive is no

⁴¹ Ibid., 12.

⁴² Ibid., 22.

⁴³ Ibid., 23.

argument for tobacco.”⁴⁴ Attachment theory is now the prevailing theory of human bonding behavior and has continued to expand since the 1950s with many compelling studies and interdisciplinary work, which will be discussed later.

Since it has gained the respect of the scientific community, further criticism of attachment theory is more often found in popular literature. For instance, John Rosemond, as already discussed in the last chapter, calls it “attachment parenting babble.”⁴⁵ Rosemond claims that “psychology has caused more problems than it has solved for American parents.”⁴⁶ Rather than accept the compelling findings of his field of study that cooperative behavior is the natural result of secure attachment, he continues to assume that children naturally resist authority and push back against their parents. He writes in a post from February 2017:

Getting a child to obey is a matter of six features of parent communication that I call The Formula:

1. Speak from an upright position. I know what some other “experts” say. They are wrong.
2. Use as few words as possible to convey the instruction.
3. Precede the instruction with an authoritative phrase such as “I want you to...,” “It’s time for you to...” or “I expect you to...”
4. Do not explain why you are giving the instruction. That results in the question, “Why?”
5. Answer “Why?” with “Because I said so.” Yes, and again, I know what some other “experts” say. They are wrong.
6. If possible, walk away. Do not stand there, giving the child someone to push back against.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Ibid., 180.

⁴⁵ John Rosemond, “ParentGuru.com Helping Parents Raise Responsible Adults,” ParentGuru Helping Parents Raise Responsible Adults, “More on Attachment Parenting”, accessed March 15, 2017, <https://www.parentguru.com/articles/view/1652?return=%2Farticles%2Findex%2Ftopic%3A16>.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

He ends the article by saying, “Your great-grandmother could have told you this. Despite what people in my profession have been saying for fifty years, there is nothing new under the sun concerning children.”⁴⁸ But as the last chapter revealed, the vastly variable beliefs about children’s nature and how to handle discipline does not afford anyone a standard or widely accepted way of raising children. Even before the attachment research or developmental theories of the last century, there were many who offered an alternative to this type of compliance-focused parenting.

Attachment theory capitalizes on the pre-programming of cooperation from children, and emphasizes that warm and nurturing relationships are the most effective tool in cultivating positive behavior. Further, attuned parents are sensitive to the developmental capabilities of children, which will be discussed later. It should be noted, however, that attachment theory is still based on the view of a hierarchical relationship between parent and child. Most researchers would advocate an authoritative parenting stance, especially over an authoritarian or permissive one. However, if parents assume that their children are inherently rebellious and tend toward wrongdoing, it may have more adverse effects than just failed behavior modification. Bowlby says, “because a child’s self-model is profoundly influenced by how his mother sees and treats him, whatever she fails to recognize in him he is likely to fail to recognize in himself.”⁴⁹ Children have a goodness, a creativity, an eagerness to follow and an innate need to love and be loved back that must be recognized by their caregivers. In this way, secure

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Bowlby, *Secure Base*, 132.

attachment is not only foundational, but *formational*. It shapes who a person becomes; and as mentioned earlier that “turns in high degree on *how they are treated*.”⁵⁰ What parents do with very young children matters a great deal. Further, because attachment theory is based on intuition and attunement, a “behavioral formula” such as Rosemond’s serves as a threat to that intuition. Canadian developmental psychologist and attachment researcher Gordon Neufeld, author of best-selling *Hold on to Your Kids*, laments that this type of intuitive and attachment-based parenting is in danger, especially considering children’s rising mental health issues.

We struggle to live up to our image of what parenting ought to be like. Not achieving the results we want, we plead with our children, we cajole, bribe, reward, or punish. We hear ourselves address them in tones that seem harsh even to us and foreign to our true nature. We sense ourselves grow cold in moments of crisis, precisely when we would wish to summon our unconditional love. We feel hurt as parents, and rejected. We blame ourselves for failing at the parenting task, or our children for being recalcitrant, or television for distracting them, or the school system for not being strict enough. When our impotence becomes unbearable we reach for simplistic, authoritarian formulas consistent with the do-it-yourself/quick-fix ethos of our era.⁵¹

Further, Neufeld’s colleague, developmental psychologist Deborah MacNamara adds concerns that while attachment theory is prevailing in science, behavioral models continue to be used in most parenting literature, rather than the relational/developmental model attachment theory suggests.⁵²

Neufeld is a strong advocate for the work Bowlby started and sees attachment not only in humans and other mammals, but throughout the universe. He argues that

⁵⁰ Ibid., 9.

⁵¹ Gordon Neufeld and Gabor Mate, *Hold on to Your Kids: Why Parents Need to Matter More than Peers*, updated ed. (New York, NY: Ballantine Books Trade Paperbacks, 2014), 5.

⁵² Deborah MacNamara, *Rest, Play, Grow*, 15.

attachment can be seen in particles and plants, magnets and even gravity.⁵³ Further, he believes that everything about an infant's reflexes represent attachment behavior. In his six stages of attachment, Neufeld explains that the foundation for attachment occurs in the first hours of life, infants attach with their senses; all their reflexes are about a need for touch; they grasp fingers, suckle, turn toward warmth, etc.⁵⁴ Further, in the next few years of life, attachment grows deeper through the last five stages: "sameness (we want to be like those to whom we are attached); belonging and loyalty (the stage where children become possessive, "this is my mommy!"); significance (the idea that we hold close what we hold dear); love (emotional intimacy); and being known (closeness, who a child shares his or her secrets with)."⁵⁵ Each stage builds on the others and like many attachment researchers, Neufeld uses the plant as a metaphor; the deeper the roots, the more the child/parent in the relationship feels known and the healthier the relationship and the child.⁵⁶ Ultimately, MacNamara concludes, "The secret to unlocking the ancient patterns of human growth lies not in *what we do* to our young children but in *who we are* to them. Within our children is the promise of a mature future we play mid-wife to – and this is why making sense of them matters."⁵⁷ Neufeld and MacNamara believe that parents are meant to be the experts on their own children and fostering secure attachment

⁵³ Gordon Neufeld, "The Vital Connection" (lecture, The Power to Parent, The Neufeld Institute, October 15, 2015).

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ MacNamara, *Rest, Play, Grow*, 5.

is essential to the task of parenting, as well as to a child growing into their own personhood. Further, Neufeld believes that parents can “prime dependence by acting as the child’s *compass point*, orienting them to their world and helping them get their bearings (help them interpret the world)” and by being “generous with your offers to take care of them, look out for them, be there for them, assume responsibility for them, hold on to them, etc. (always provide more than what is pursued.)”⁵⁸ Neufeld advocates that attachment is a powerful force and that the relationship is used as the context for learning and growing; ultimately attachment allows “understanding a child from the inside out.”⁵⁹ Further, Neufeld is deeply respectful to the personhood of a child and understands that children have complicated and, at times, difficult circumstances. He says of children, “It takes a lot of courage to live with monsters under the bed.”⁶⁰ However, Neufeld also believes that attachment can shield children from emotional harm; the hurt may still be evident, but Neufeld believes that secure attachment mitigates negative experiences.

Much research has supported this idea, for instance, studies have concluded that securely attached children experience negative stimuli differently than insecurely attached children even in events of physical pain. For example, a University of Minnesota experiment measured the levels of cortisol, a stress hormone within the brain, during well-child exams where children received injected vaccinations. The research shows that a “fifteen-month-old who is securely attached, will cry at the pain, but the level of

⁵⁸ Neufeld, “Vital Connection,” lecture.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Gordon Neufeld, Facebook meme, digital image, The Neufeld Institute Facebook, October 4, 2015, accessed October 4, 2015.

cortisol in his body will not rise” and the child will immediately reach for his caregiver.⁶¹ Insecurely attached children, on the other hand, will cry, not reach for their caregiver, and have shooting levels of cortisol.⁶² Also, in studies where an incline is made with an optical illusion, giving infants the frightening impression that they could fall, children behave very differently per their level of attachment. “When they [insecurely attached infants] are placed on the edge of a scary incline, even as early as twelve months, they don’t look toward their mothers for help, the way secure babies do. They look away from their mothers.”⁶³

A key component of more recent attachment research is the way a secure relationship can shield children and mitigate the effects of negative emotional experiences, even at school when the parent is not physically present or actively intervening. Neufeld, says that a “strong emotional connection with an adult actually protects children.”⁶⁴ Because frequent family dinners have a positive correlation with many health benefits and positive outcomes, as well as with secure attachment, they have become the source of much scientific inquiry. Not surprisingly, these studies have shown that family dinners provide a “protective factor” against hardships, such as cyberbullying.⁶⁵ In another study, researchers drew this conclusion, “The power of

⁶¹ David Brooks, *The Social Animal the Hidden Sources of Love, Character, and Achievement* (New York, NY: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2011), 64.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Lewis et. al., *General Theory*, 65.

⁶⁴ Neufeld, “Vital Connection,” lecture.

⁶⁵ Alison Knopf, “Cyberbullying Linked to Mental Health Problems in Teens; Protective Factor Seen in Family Dinners,” *The Brown University Child and Adolescent Behavior Letter* 31, no. 1 (2014): 4-5, accessed January 11, 2016, doi:10.1002/cbl.30012.

sharing food and social time does not stop in infancy. Research shows that children who eat dinner regularly with their families are more successful in school.”⁶⁶ Further in *From Tablet to Table*, Leonard Sweet cites the work of sociologists, who found that “‘frequent family dinners’ is strongly associated with reduced risk of drug use, obesity, depression, and suicidal thoughts; and an increase in health, intelligence, kindness, larger vocabulary in young children, and future academic success.”⁶⁷

Not surprisingly, relationships have also been shown to have a significant effect on religion and spirituality. Two textbooks are of note: *Psychology of Religion Classic and Contemporary*⁶⁸ and *The Psychology of Religion*.⁶⁹ Both offer hundreds of studies in the field of spirituality and religion, in relationship to psychology. Here are some key findings from several studies:

- “Parents’ religious affiliation and participation were positively related to children’s religiousness.”⁷⁰
- “A number of studies have suggested that the *quality* of young people’s relationships with parents can also affect religious socialization.”⁷¹
- One study suggested “the main determinants of offspring religiosity were parental religiosity, the *quality* of the family relationship, and traditional family structure.”⁷²

⁶⁶ Helen Altman Klein, “For Parents Particularly: Family Dinners,” *Childhood Education* 77, no. 2 (2000): 102, accessed January 11, 2016, doi:10.1080/00094056.2001.10521641.

⁶⁷ Leonard Sweet, *From Tablet to Table: Where Community Is Found and Identity Is Formed* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2014), 12.

⁶⁸ David Wulff, *Psychology of Religion: Classic and Contemporary*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, 1997).

⁶⁹ Ralph Hood, Peter Hill, and Bernard Spilka, *The Psychology of Religion*, 4th ed. (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2009).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁷² *Ibid.*

- “Parents are *the* most important influence in developing religious attitudes.”⁷³

Further, *The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence* also includes hundreds of studies on spirituality in children and adolescence, as well as the profound role of relationships in spiritual formation.⁷⁴

Despite the role of secure attachment being well-studied and researched, and Bowlby, especially, calling for the education of parents and others to prevent child maltreatment, many children in this country do not enjoy a securely attached bond with their parents. Siegel reports that about one-fifth of children in the United States are not “emotionally close to their parents.”⁷⁵ Another one-sixth have an ambivalent attachment, and most concerning is as many as fifteen percent of children in America have disorganized attachment to caregivers.⁷⁶ It is important to note that those fractions and percentages would include *millions* of children. And while Siegel says that “insecure attachment is not equivalent to mental disorder” it does indeed “create a risk of psychological and social dysfunction.”⁷⁷

While there are many negative ramifications of insecure attachment, one crucial deficit of those that are insecurely attached is often resilience. Securely attached children,

⁷³ Ibid., 118.

⁷⁴ Eugene Roehlkepartain, ed., *The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006).

⁷⁵ Daniel Siegel, “Secure Attachment: Parenting from the Inside Out,” *US News*, January 9, 2017, accessed January 9, 2017, <https://health.usnews.com/wellness/for-parents/articles/2017-01-09/secure-attachment-parenting-from-the-inside-out>.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Siegel, *Developing Mind*, 111.

on the other hand, are shown to be the most resilient throughout their lifespan (again the paradoxical relationship should be noted). Bowlby says,

Given affectionate and responsive parents, who throughout infancy, childhood, and adolescence provide a boy or girl with a secure base from which to explore the world and to which to return when in difficulty, it is more than likely that he or she will grow up to be a cheerful, socially cooperative, and effective citizen, and to be unlikely to break down in adversity.⁷⁸

Siegel adds, “Studies of attachment have revealed that the patterning or organization of attachment relationships during infancy is associated with characteristic processes of emotional regulation, social relatedness, access to autobiographical memory, and the development of self-reflection and narrative.”⁷⁹ In other words, even, or perhaps especially, the early experiences of children shape issues of vital importance to mental and social health.

But there is something even more compelling about secure attachment: it aids in natural development. Siegel says, “For the infant and young child, attachment relationships are the major environmental factors that shape brain development during its period of maximal growth.”⁸⁰ MacNamara adds, “When children’s relational needs are satiated, they will be freed from their greatest hunger and at rest – released to their play.”⁸¹ Play is imperative to learning, growth and development. Further, the brain develops in a rest state; the brain can only learn in its receptive state, not a reactive one.⁸²

⁷⁸ Bowlby, *Secure Base*, 179.

⁷⁹ Siegel, *Developing Mind*, 91.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁸¹ MacNamara, *Rest, Play, Grow*, 17.

⁸² Daniel Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson, “The Whole-Brain Child Approach” (lecture, The Mindsight Approach to Childhood and Adolescence, PESI, January 15, 2017).

MacNamara adds, “A garden of growth can be cultivated only by generously offering children fulfilling relationships to tether themselves to. If you are not rooted, you cannot grow.”⁸³ Attachment unlocks the natural development and growth of the intricate brain.

MacNamara compares this to physical development:

We keep a watchful eye on their health, diet, and fitness while their limbs silently grow longer. We measure height, weight, temperature and movement to determine if we are on track. When they are sick, we take care of them, trusting that their body has defenses to help with their healing too. We seem to trust intuitively in the developmental potentials that have guided physical growth for centuries, knowing that our role is to provide the *conditions* for well-being.⁸⁴

MacNamara asserts that this is true for psychological and neurological development, as well. Parents cannot make development happen, but can provide the conditions for natural development to proceed. “There is a natural development plan that drives growth, and parents are the key providers when it comes to creating conditions to unlock it.”⁸⁵

However, MacNamara, like others, believes parents and society have become impatient with children and wish to grow them up too quickly.⁸⁶ She says, “It is our human potential to become *separate, adaptive* and *social beings*, but this can be realized only when adults play a supportive role in cultivating the conditions for growth.”⁸⁷ In other words, just as parents cannot make their children grow taller, they cannot demand that they become more mature, instead they must let the natural path of development take its course by supporting that development with secure relationships that allow for growth.

⁸³ MacNamara, *Rest Play Grow*, 17.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

Further the last thirty years of neuroscience has not only supported attachment research, but also provides imperative information about children’s development. One reason why early experiences may be so crucial is due to implicit memory. While most people will have no explicit memories from early childhood, “research has shown that infants are able to demonstrate recall for experiences in the form of behavioral, perceptual, somatosensory and emotional learning.”⁸⁸ Siegel adds, “An infant who has a healthy, secure attachment has had the repeated experience of nurturing, perceptive, sensitive, and predictable caregiving responses from her mother which have been encoded implicitly in her brain.”⁸⁹ Further, then, young children may not have detailed explicit recall of an event or repeated events, but they do have an encoded implicit memory of how they *felt*. Siegel and psychologist Tina Payne Bryson add, “Implicit memory encodes our perceptions, our emotions, our bodily sensations, and as we get older, behaviors like learning to crawl and walk and ride a bike...”⁹⁰ Also, since the brain is wired to be as efficient as possible, “neurons that fire together wire together.”⁹¹ In other words, the brain quickly makes associations between things that happen together. Neural pathways are created based on these associations whether positive or negative.

Much of Siegel’s work focuses on integration, or getting the differentiated parts of the brain to work together through linkages (neural pathways.)⁹² While Siegel’s

⁸⁸ Siegel, *Developing Mind*, 51.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁹⁰ Siegel and Bryson, *Whole-Brain Child*, 72.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Siegel and Bryson, “Whole-Brain Child,” lecture.

models of integration are vast and complex (he addresses nine integrations in *The Developing Mind*), two models of integration are especially helpful in understanding children's brain development: horizontal (or lateral) integration and vertical integration. Horizontal integration is allowing the differentiated right and left hemispheres to form linkages to work together. Siegel and Bryson explain the functions of both hemispheres. "Your left brain loves and desires order. It is *logical, literal, linguistic* (it likes words), and *linear* (it puts things in a sequence or order). The left brain loves that all four of these words begin with the letter *L*. (It also loves lists.)"⁹³ Left brain activity is imperative for functioning, however, "In terms of development, very young children are right hemisphere dominant, especially during their first three years. They haven't mastered the ability to use logic and words to express their feelings, and they live their lives completely in the moment..."⁹⁴ The right hemisphere can be described as "holistic and nonverbal, sending and receiving signals that allow us to communicate, such as facial expressions, eye contact, tone of voice, posture and gestures. Instead of details and order, our right brain cares about big picture – the meaning and feel of an experience – and specializes in images, emotions, and personal memories"⁹⁵ When parents and other caregivers understand that children rely more on their right hemisphere, they can better tailor interventions, but also have patience that verbal processing or sequential instructions can be very difficult for children. Play and symbols are much more meaningful to young children. Further, their emotions are often more dominant than their

⁹³ Siegel and Bryson, *Whole-Brain Child*, 15.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

attention to detail and thought. Siegel and Bryson say, “We want them to become horizontally integrated, so that the two sides of their brain can act in harmony. That way, our children will value both their logic and their emotions; they will be well-balanced and able to understand themselves and the world at large.”⁹⁶

While Siegel acknowledges criticisms that his view of the brain in *The Whole-Brain Child* is simplified, he also argues that it is important for adults and children to understand how the distinct parts of the brain work together, thus he makes complicated neuroscience accessible to parents and children. He and Bryson illustrate the brain as a house.⁹⁷ So, vertical integration is about building a staircase between the upstairs and downstairs of this house. The basic architecture of the brain is built from the bottom upwards and from the back to the front.⁹⁸ As the brain develops, it differentiates its parts and their functions, but also integrates through neural pathways so all the parts work together quickly and efficiently, but the lower regions of the brain are built first. The downstairs brain, then, is more developed and functioning at birth. The downstairs brain contains the brain stem and limbic region of the brain (including the amygdala) and it is responsible for many things such as “basic functions (like breathing and blinking), for innate reactions (like fight or flight), and for strong emotions (like fear or anger).”⁹⁹ Siegel and Bryson say, however, “Your upstairs brain is completely different.”¹⁰⁰ It

⁹⁶ Ibid., 18.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 39.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 40.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 39.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

includes the cerebral cortex, which contains the middle pre-frontal cortex.¹⁰¹ “The upstairs brain is highly sophisticated, controlling some of your most important higher-order and analytical thinking.”¹⁰² However, because the middle prefrontal cortex is at the front and top of the brain, it is the last to develop.¹⁰³ It is the part of the brain most responsible for “sound decision making and planning, control over emotions and body, self-understanding, empathy, and morality.”¹⁰⁴ This does not mean that a small child cannot exercise these skills, but it does mean that they are developmentally unable to use them consistently. Siegel and Bryson encourage parents to have “reasonable expectations” because “the upstairs brain remains under massive construction for the first few years of life, then during the teen years undergoes an extensive remodel that lasts into adulthood.”¹⁰⁵ Parents and other caregivers do well to have a basic understanding of brain development because sometimes, children are simply not developmentally capable of what is expected of them. Bryson and Siegel add, “...kids are prone to getting ‘trapped downstairs,’ without the use of their upstairs brain, which results in them flying off the handle, making poor decisions, and showing a general lack of empathy and self-understanding.”¹⁰⁶ Again, that is due to a lack of full development, not a desire to do poorly, childhood depravity, or selfishness.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 40.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 41.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 40.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 41.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 42.

However, because of the neuroplasticity of the brain, Siegel and Bryson encourage parents to help build a metaphorical staircase in the brain that allows the upstairs and downstairs to work together more efficiently.¹⁰⁷ Neuroplasticity is a fairly new finding (within the last thirty years) that the brain is more moldable than previous thought; “...recent studies into neuroplasticity reveal how the brain continues to modify its structural connections with experiences throughout life.”¹⁰⁸ Because the brain can be shaped, parents can help children make connections both vertically and horizontally. They recommend several helpful strategies in their books *The Whole-Brain Child*, *No-Drama Discipline*, and *The Yes Brain* (not yet released) that are neurobiologically informed such as getting a child to move his or her body when upset (“brain research shows bodily movement directly affects brain chemistry”) or engaging the upstairs brain by calming the downstairs brain first through empathy and validation.¹⁰⁹ However, they also advocate for firm limits and structure if a child is making the choice to misbehave (attuned parents know the difference).¹¹⁰ When a child is struggling due to developmental issues, however, Siegel and Bryson encourage parents to ask themselves three questions, “Why did my child act this way? What lesson do I want to teach in this moment? How can I best teach this lesson?”¹¹¹ Parents managing their own emotions, offering connection and providing positive role modeling are always part of the equation.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 38.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 4.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 50.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 45.

¹¹¹ Daniel Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson, *No-Drama Discipline: The Whole-Brain Way to Calm the Chaos and Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 2016), 7.

Secure attachment is the best context for learning and development. Attuned parents understand children's behavior and respond intuitively and compassionately.¹¹² Further, it should be noted that because relationships are not perfect, secure attachment depends on a "rupture and repair" model.¹¹³ That is, when a rupture occurs in the relationship, it is repaired. Parents lose patience, sometimes their tempers, and children also can hurt their parents emotionally, but secure relationships allow for repair of hurts on either side of the relationship.

A parent's attuned presence is crucial to a child's well-being. Within the last several years, researchers have found that secure attachment releases oxytocin within the brain.¹¹⁴ Nicknamed the "bonding hormone," oxytocin is released in the brain when securely attached children are near their parents, thinking about their parents, glancing at their parents or being affectionately touched by their parents. (Oxytocin is also released within the parent's brain). Oxytocin calms the amygdala (region in the limbic area that is most responsible for processing strong emotions, such as fear or anger, and triggers the fight or flight response) and helps the pre-frontal cortex grow and integrate through GABA bearing fibers.¹¹⁵ It should also be noted that while parents can depend on their cortex (upstairs brain) to process information which may give them three to five seconds

¹¹² It is important to note that attachment theory focuses on at least four types of attachment, with secure attachment being the ideal. Secure attachment allows for parents to use their intuition to parent as Bowlby postulated. Attunement, as has already been discussed in the work of Bowlby and Ainsworth, as well as Neufeld, is about knowing a child from the inside out, adapting parental behavior to the child's needs, and using a cooperative and flexible stance that allows the relationship to be the conduit for growth and development.

¹¹³ Siegel, *Developing Mind*, 314.

¹¹⁴ Linda Graham, "The Neuroscience of Attachment," *Resources for Recovering Resilience*, Fall 2008, <https://lindagraham-mft.net/the-neuroscience-of-attachment>.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

to respond, children must depend on their amygdala (located in the downstairs brain) which triggers fight or flight in less than 200 milliseconds.¹¹⁶ However, because of mirror neurons, children may actually “borrow” their parent’s brain functioning.¹¹⁷ A parent’s calming and compassionate presence cannot be underestimated.

Further, when parents have an attuned presence to their children, researchers have also found that this releases an enzyme called telomeres that maintains the ends of chromosomes and makes cells healthier.¹¹⁸ It increases the immune system and may even prevent some inflammatory illnesses.¹¹⁹ Attuned relationships aid in brain development, mental and emotional health, and even physical health, for both parent and child.

This chapter has covered much ground in the origins of attachment theory, its compelling interdisciplinary research, and secure attachment’s impact on brain development. As Neufeld pointed out, attachment seems to be woven into the very fabric of the universe. It is in plants, particles, magnets, gravity, but most strikingly in people. Children are born with an innate need to connect and form relationships that are secure and foundational. Their very formation depends upon it. Further, lack of human bonds, threatens life itself. When secure attachments are not present, children’s development is compromised in a lifelong way. Everything about an infant reaches upward; to make a connection, whether physical, emotional, or neurological. Infants depend on the very patterns of their parents’ biology to regulate their own patterns of life. Relationships, in and of themselves, give children life.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Siegel and Bryson, “Whole-Brain Child,” lecture.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

Parents who rely on their own innate intuition of parenting respond quickly and warmly to their children. They gain an understanding of who they are and what they need. They attend to their children promptly and provide for them. As Neufeld said, they provide more than what is ever pursued.¹²⁰ In turn, children do not become narcissists and believe that the world revolves around them, nor do they become clingy and overly dependent. Instead, they actively approach the world, knowing there is a great foundation and power behind them. They put their full trust into the people who are attuned to them and meet their needs. Thus, they readily follow their parents.

Bowlby took the derogatory word of “dependency” and framed it in the context of normal and necessary human behavior. Cultivating dependency was necessary to create later independence and resilience. As Neufeld says, “We need to hold on to them until they can hold on to themselves.”¹²¹ Children were meant to be held both physically and emotionally.

While this chapter has emphasized the relational nature of children, the need for secure attachment for healthy outcomes (and life itself), it also has deeply spiritual applications, which will be discussed in the two final chapters. The focus of the next chapter is on the spiritual nature of children, and not surprisingly, that the relational and spiritual nature of children are inextricably interconnected. The next chapter will explore the spiritual capacities of children, as well as how the nurturing of warm relationships aids in spiritual formation. But, first, one last word, about dependence. Noted children’s spirituality author, John Westerhoff writes:

¹²⁰ See p. 105 for previous discussion.

¹²¹ Neufeld, *Hold On*, 264.

We are interdependent creatures. One Christian is no Christian; you cannot be Christian alone, only in a community. And we are all dependent on God, absolutely. Dependence is part of what it is to be a spiritual being. Children know that because that is who they already are; that's their characteristic. If we do things with them, and let them influence us, we will regain that sense of absolute dependence.¹²²

¹²² John Westerhoff, "The Church's Contemporary Challenge: Assisting Adults to Mature Spiritually with Their Children," in *Nurturing Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives and Best Practices*, ed. Holly Catterton. Allen (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008), 361.

CHAPTER FIVE: NURTURING CHILDREN’S INNATE SPIRITUALITY

The last chapter explored attachment theory, and its understanding of a child’s “biologically pre-programmed” relational need. Children have an innate need for secure attachments and their nature is deeply relational. Secure relationships unlock their natural development path both emotionally and neurobiologically. This dissertation argues that children’s spirituality is also innate. This chapter will focus on the spiritual capacity of children, the way that spirituality and relationality are inextricably interconnected, and how children need to be welcomed the way Jesus demanded. It will also make spiritual applications of attachment theory.

Like many things in the theological world whether children are innately spiritual is widely debated. As already mentioned in chapter three, there are some traditions of faith that say children do not have a relationship with God until they are “saved,” or that they are “spiritually dead.”¹ However, since humans were made in God’s image, an innate spiritual capacity is implied. Professor Catherine Stonehouse says, “Since God is Spirit, those created in the image of God are spiritual beings.”² She further quotes Dallas Willard who “describes the spirit within as ‘the fundamental aspect of every human being.’”³ Additionally, like an infant’s hardwiring to attach relationally, there is also a hardwiring to attach spiritually. Also, as in attachment theory, how children are nurtured matters a great deal in how they attach; making spiritual nurture of the utmost

¹ See p. 66 for previous discussion.

² Catherine Stonehouse, “After a Child’s First Dance with God: Accompanying Children on a Protestant Spiritual Journey,” in *Nurturing Child and Adolescent Spirituality: Perspectives from the World’s Religious Traditions*, ed. Karen-Marie Yust (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 95-96.

³ *Ibid.*, 96.

importance. Further, as already discussed in chapter two, there are Scriptures that talk about children still in the womb being formed by God and even called to God's purposes (David in the Psalms and Jeremiah).⁴

Some may argue that until children have received the Holy Spirit, they cannot be guided by the Spirit, but nineteenth century theologian Horace Bushnell strongly argues this point.

And what more appropriate to the doctrine of spiritual influence itself, than to believe that as the Spirit fills all the worlds of matter, and holds a presence of power and government in all objects, so all human souls, the infantile as well as the adult, have a nurture of the Spirit appropriate to their age and wants? What opinion is more essentially monstrous, in fact, than that which regards the Holy Spirit as having no agency in the immature souls of children who are growing up, helpless and unconscious, into the perils of time?⁵

Bushnell believed it to be “monstrous” to suggest that an all-powerful God would not also use the Holy Spirit to guide the lives of children.

Sofia Cavalletti was also a strong voice for the innate spirituality of children. Cavalletti, influenced strongly by Maria Montessori and her child-led education strategies, wrote *The Religious Potential of the Child*.⁶ Deeply respectful of children, Cavalletti suggests that children need religious education in early childhood due to their innate spirituality. “Therefore, it is from the point of view of moral formation as well that the religious experience before six years of age seems so important to us. Before this age, the relationship with God is established without contrasts; the child is free from any preoccupation and open to the encounter with God and to the enjoyment he derives from

⁴ See p. 45 and 57 for previous discussion.

⁵ Horace Bushnell, *Christian Nurture* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000), 17.

⁶ Sofia Cavalletti, *The Religious Potential of the Child*, trans. Patricia Coulter and Julie Coulter (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1983).

it.”⁷ Cavalletti believed that God was already powerfully working in children’s lives and that they had a large capacity for a spiritual life. “In the religious sphere, it is a fact that children know things no one has told them.”⁸ She further adds, “It is a fact that the child seems capable of seeing the Invisible, almost as if it were more tangible and real than immediate reality.”⁹ Cavalletti, and Jerome Berryman later, recognized that children were being underestimated within the church. This was due in part to children having different language ability than adults. Adults may assume that children are not yet capable of interacting with God because they cannot verbalize their experiences in the same way that adults can.

Cavalletti and Berryman are not the only scholars who have suggested that there is an innate spiritual quality to children. Recall James Fowler’s words, “I believe faith is a human universal. We are endowed at birth with nascent capacities for faith.”¹⁰ Donald Ratcliff, editor of *Children’s Spirituality*, says (with Scottie May), “There is a spiritual essence that all humans share.”¹¹ Eugene Roehlkepartain says, “...there is an intrinsic human capacity for spirituality” and calls spirituality an “integral part of humanness.”¹²

⁷ Ibid., 155.

⁸ Ibid., 42.

⁹ Ibid., 43.

¹⁰ Ibid., xiii.

¹¹ Donald Ratcliff and Scottie May, “Identifying Children’s Spirituality,” in *Children’s Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications*, ed. Donald Ratcliff (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2004), 7.

¹² Eugene Roehlkepartain, “Exploring Scientific and Theological Perspectives on Children’s Spirituality,” in *Children’s Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications*, ed. Donald Ratcliff (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2004), 122.

Eighteenth century theologian, John Wesley said that children are “immortal spirits who God hath for a time entrusted to our care...”¹³ And as already quoted in chapter three, Rebecca Nye says of children that “spirituality is really the whole of them.”¹⁴ Further, Jewish author and educator, Shoshana Silberman asserts that “from a Jewish perspective, children have an innate capacity for spirituality.”¹⁵

Researchers Carl Johnson and Chris Boyatzis affirm that people are spiritual in nature from a developmental perspective. They say, “Spiritual development is an integral part of normal, human cognitive-developmental mechanisms and processes.”¹⁶ They rightly reiterate other scholars encouraging the “recognition of spiritual development as ‘a core developmental process that deserves equal standing in the pantheon of universal developmental processes.’”¹⁷ Spirituality and its development should be studied as a natural part of human growth. Johnson and Boyatzis find that children tend to be spiritual early in life and that “the cognitive-cultural foundation for spiritual development is normally established in the first few years of life.”¹⁸ While they cite much interesting

¹³ John Wesley, as quoted in Catherine Stonehouse, “Children in Wesleyan Thought,” in *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications*, ed. Donald Ratcliff (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2004), 148.

¹⁴ Rebecca Nye, “Christian Perspectives on Children's Spirituality: Social Science Contributions?” in *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications*, ed. Donald Ratcliff, (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2004), 91.

¹⁵ Shoshana Silberman, “Sanctifying Time: A Jewish Perspective on Prayer, Holy Days, and Blessings in the Life of Children,” in *Nurturing Child and Adolescent Spirituality: Perspectives from the World's Religious Traditions*, ed. Karen-Marie Yust (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 199.

¹⁶ Carl Johnson and Chris Boyatzis, “Cognitive-Cultural Foundations of Spiritual Development,” in *The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence*, ed. Eugene Roehlkepartain (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006), 212.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

research, there are two findings that are particularly noteworthy. First, “when children extend their causal explanations beyond the constraints of local objects and events to explain the origins of things (e.g., dinosaurs), they display a natural tendency toward teleological, creationist explanations. Even children from nonreligious families tend toward such explanations.”¹⁹ It is not until the upper elementary years, that children adopted a non-creationist view in nonreligious families.²⁰ Further, in their exploration of another study that asked children to which degree certain things had “souls,” such as parents, pets, plants or furniture, children gave high percentages that decreased respectively.²¹ “These judgements apparently reflect children’s own thinking about the subject, not something they’ve been directly taught.”²²

In fact, the idea that children think about issues of greater concern and have existential thoughts has been a wider subject of recent study. Perhaps there has been no greater voice in the awareness that children, indeed, think deeply about existential issues than that of Jerome Berryman. He says, “Some people have concluded that children do not experience existential questions. This is more than an error in fact. Undervaluing the existential experience of children can be very destructive for their spiritual growth.”²³ Robert Coles, a clinical psychologist and researcher interested in children’s spirituality,

¹⁹ Ibid., 214.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 215.

²² Ibid.

²³ Jerome Berryman, *Godly Play: An Imaginative Approach to Religious Education* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1991), 137.

made similar observations in asking children about their spiritual development. Children think about these issues, but cannot give this information to adults in the form they are asking.

Often, for instance, we are told, on the basis of questions given to children in a school or a social scientist's office, that young people can or cannot understand one or another line of reasoning. No doubt those claims are true – but what a child may not show comprehension of in a formal, academic setting, in choosing among multiple-choice alternatives, that child may well think about and talk about in his or her own manner and time.²⁴

He later concludes that children think much about existential issues and they “are the eternal questions children ask more intensely, unremittingly, and subtly than we sometimes imagine.”²⁵ And while it may seem strange to some readers that verbal language is not the natural language of the child, it is not. Recall the information about the brain and the right hemisphere domination in childhood.²⁶ Play is the true language of childhood.

Berryman recognized that children did not possess the same language of adults and that through play, children's more natural language, one could tap in to the deep and rich world of children's spirituality. “The deep pleasure of Godly Play comes from the mastery and growth that take place within our human limits by means of our relationship with God, the Creator. This relationship helps us discover our deep identity as creatures who create.”²⁷ Berryman designed a specific curriculum devoted to play as a method of

²⁴ Robert Coles, *The Spiritual Life of Children* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1990), 23.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

²⁶ See p. 112-113 for previous discussion.

²⁷ Berryman, *Godly Play*, 13.

formation called Godly Play. Berryman makes the argument that “children’s knowledge of God was undifferentiated and mostly nonverbal.”²⁸ He goes on to say, “If this is true, then what children need is not to be filled with facts or to be entertained but to learn the art of how to use the best language possible to identify their experience of God.

Intuitively, play seemed to me to be the best way to help children learn and practice this language and to name and express what they already know.”²⁹ After a contemplative story time, in Berryman’s model, children are invited to respond through many creative modes, including art and other forms of play. The Godly Play time ends with a “feast” with the community of children and utilizes a space that is conducive to children’s developmental needs.

Berryman acknowledges that this method is much different than more traditional modes of teaching children. He writes, “What is difficult to do, however, is to present a detailed alternative to the status quo with a method, curriculum, theoretical foundation, and history to deepen or even reframe the discussion about what is best for the spiritual quest of children.”³⁰ Berryman certainly furthered the discussion about children’s spirituality. He is profoundly respectful to their modes of learning and to the innate spiritual quality and even potential leadership that children exhibit. He emphasizes community and experience of God. Berryman also warns against adult impositions and advocates for an emphasis on formation, rather than just instructional teaching. After a

²⁸ Jerome Berryman, *Teaching Godly Play: How to Mentor the Spiritual Development of Children* (Denver, CO: Morehouse Pub., 2009), 14.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Jerome Berryman, *The Spiritual Guidance of Children: Montessori, Godly Play, and the Future* (New York, NY: Morehouse Publishing, 2013), 17.

slow retelling of a Bible story, Godly Play teachers say, “I wonder...” and let the children share their own thoughts and leadings. Berryman says, “The problem is that if you, the teacher, tell the children about each new discovery, you take away the child’s opportunity to discover such things personally.”³¹ This gives enormous respect to the child (and their already working thought processes about important matters), their spirituality, and the Spirit’s guidance.

But letting the Spirit lead is something that is notoriously difficult for parents and churches. Jeffrey Greenman and George Kalantzis, authors of *Life in the Spirit*, say:

I would make a general plea to church leaders to throw away the boxes in which they have kept the Spirit securely under their own control, and to trust the Spirit to guide the whole community to a life in the Spirit that leads to genuine *Spirituality* in the believers’ daily lives. And even more so this plea would be for a similar genuine *Spirituality* in the gathered believing community that remains open to the Spirit to do things his way rather than to be invited in to be the silent partner of the Trinity so that we may continue to “do church” our often ineffective and powerless way.³²

The same could also be said for parenting. Not trusting in the Spirit’s guidance is a severe hindrance for faith formation, especially for children, because they are not allowed to live into what God has already hardwired within them and share their own insights and leadings with others, not only because they do not have the language to do so, but often people are wary of what small children have to say, especially in spiritual matters. But children do have much to say about God and their relationship with God. For instance, in a small study that “examined parent-child discussion about religion,” researchers asked

³¹ Berryman, *Godly Play*, 63.

³² Jeffrey P. Greenman and George Kalantzis, *Life in the Spirit: Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 43.

families to keep diaries of their conversations.³³ They found, “In diaries, God was discussed in one out of two conversations. Data from surveys and diaries demonstrated that in such conversations children are active: They initiate and terminate about half of family conversations about religion, they speak as much as the parents do, and they ask questions and offer their own views.”³⁴ Again, children seem to possess an innate spiritual quality that propels them forward in initiating conversations, asking questions, and actively discussing matters of faith. But, as Berryman shared, adults’ tendency may be to take on a method of instruction that does not actually nurture children in their spiritual development.

John Westerhoff also had significant questions about the way children’s curriculum and methods of teaching were carried out within churches. In *Will Our Children Have Faith?* Westerhoff makes many observations about the possible flaws in the way children are being taught within the church and at home. Not surprisingly, Westerhoff found relationships to be essential to learning and cites researchers that made conclusions from their work in the 1960s. “They acknowledged that the church teaches most significantly through nurture in a worshipping, witnessing community of faith, and they clearly explained that explicit instruction in the church schools was only a part of Christian education.”³⁵ Westerhoff, like Berryman, also questioned adult impositions, seeing the relationship as much more interdependent. He says in a later article,

³³ Chris Boyatzis, David Dollahite, and Loren Marks, “The Family as a Context for Religious and Spiritual Development in Children and Youth,” in *The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence*, ed. Eugene Roehlkepartain (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006), 299.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ John Westerhoff, *Will Our Children Have Faith?* 3rd ed. (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Pub., 2012), 4.

Adults are considered to be intellectual; they are rational, productive and independent. Children, on the other hand, are dependent, pre-rational, and non-productive. So in the past, we considered it our duty to do things *to* or *for* our children to make them into adults. In our new way of thinking, we could say that maybe those very characteristics of a child are what adults need as well. St. Paul reminds us to no longer be *childish*, but Jesus reminds us to be *childlike*. The best way for us to learn to be childlike is to be with children so they can influence us as we influence them.³⁶

Throughout his book, Westerhoff argues for a deeper understanding of education and nurturing children into the Story of God. “Unless the story is known, understood, owned, and lived, we and our children will not have Christian faith. The struggle to know, understand, interpret, live, and do God’s word must be at the center of our educational mission.”³⁷ As such, Westerhoff, as many other writers quoted in this dissertation, has offered critical, but helpful words to adults attempting to lead children to Jesus. But for Westerhoff and many others, adults lack of deep and authentic faith is a problem that must be addressed.

The problem facing the church is in the bland, unconverted, ignorant lives of its members. Until adults in the church are knowledgeable in their faith, have experienced the transforming power of the Gospel, live radical lives characteristic of the disciples of Jesus Christ, no new curriculum, no new insights on learning, no new teacher-training programs, and new educational technology will save us.³⁸

In other words, Westerhoff reminds readers that faith “is more caught than taught and we cannot teach what we do not know and believe.”³⁹ Children must be immersed into a

³⁶ John Westerhoff, “The Church’s Contemporary Challenge: Assisting Adults to Mature Spiritually with Their Children,” in *Nurturing Children’s Spirituality: Christian Perspectives and Best Practices*, ed. Holly Catterton Allen (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008), 361.

³⁷ Westerhoff, *Will Children?*, 32.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 86.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 85.

community of faith, but when that community does not possess a deep attachment to God, children will struggle to root themselves in the One who made them. And while this paper advocates for an integration of developmentally sensitive methods, and a deep respect for the child as an image bearer, as well as their innate spirituality; parents cannot lead children, as Scriptures exhort them to do, to a place they, themselves, have never been. The same levels of attachment can be applied spiritually. Many may have shallow roots in the God of the universe, but to reach secure attachment, *the level of being known*, takes discipline and time; time that many say they do not have for church, God, or family. In that way, it is hard to hold children accountable for the lack of commitment they may show to God or the church or their parents. Kenda Creasy Dean says in *Almost Christian*, “Since the religious and spiritual choices of American teenagers echo, with astonishing clarity, the religious and spiritual choices of the adults who love them, lackadaisical faith is not young people’s issue, but ours.”⁴⁰ She says later, “We have received from teenagers exactly what we have asked for: assent, not conviction; compliance, not faith. Young people invest in religion precisely what they think it is worth – and if they think the church is worthy of benign whatever-ism and no more, then the indictment falls not on them, but on us.”⁴¹ Further, researchers Chris Boyatzis, David Dollahite, and Loren Marks point out that “important evidence is emerging that children’s religious belief is less related to their parents’ (self-reported) beliefs than to the children’s perception of the parents’ religious views. Thus, what parents do and believe may matter less than what

⁴⁰ Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (Oxford, UK: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010), 4.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 37.

children think parents do and believe.”⁴² The commands of Deuteronomy 6:4-9 do not allow for lip service or ambivalent faith practices. Children internalize the values they *see*. They are ardently seeking and require adults’ nurturance to help them discover who they are in God or just as the potential for secure attachment begins to crumble as children get older, so will their potential for secure attachment to their Creator.

Perhaps one of the most profound ways of rooting children to their God is through the telling and re-telling of God’s Story, as Deuteronomy instructs. Professor and author, Leonard Sweet, draws comparisons between Jewish children and Christian children, saying that Jewish children recite the stories of God. He says, “Jewish children are given the privilege of viewing themselves as if they had come out of Egypt, to so identify with Hannah and Samuel, Abraham and Sarah, that they become Hannah and Samuel, Abraham and Sarah. Then and only then have they really learned the story.”⁴³ Sweet says, “Now compare that rich narrative foundation with the circumstances of most Christian children, who, after being raised on weak narrative diets in the home and church, are encouraged to take their bare narrative bones into the posh cultures of consumerism and celebrity and ‘find yourself’ or ‘discover who you are.’”⁴⁴ Sweet concludes, “The stories and metaphors of Christian faith are not options to be chosen, but a heritage to be bestowed. The stories of Jesus are our past, our present, and our future. The most important gifts that parents can give their children are an identity as God’s

⁴² Boyatzis et.al., “The Family as a Context,” 301.

⁴³ Leonard Sweet, *The Well-Played Life: Why Pleasing God Doesn't Have to Be Such Hard Work* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2014), 100.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 101.

child and the security of knowing they belong to a Story much bigger themselves.”⁴⁵

Perhaps the modalities of Godly Play could be a good starting place for adults as well.

Much of the Bible is written in narrative form and is widely accessible to children who “own” their faith, when they are part of the Story.⁴⁶

The onus of Scripture is on relationships and formation, not behaviors and obedience. Obedience is a natural result of attachment to parents and God. In short, churches’ and parents’ priorities have been reversed. While Jesus issued clear words about letting the children come to Him, and Deuteronomy emphasized the importance of training and teaching children, the church and Christian parents have struggled with these words since they were spoken. As chapter three explored, the history of childhood has not always been pleasant and as chapter one reiterated, the present offers some unique challenges and alarming statistics. Professor Marcia Bunge writes, “As a mother, professor, and theologian deeply interested in child-related issues, I have been both impressed and disturbed by our conceptions and treatment of children today and in the past.”⁴⁷ She goes on to say, “Although I see many wonderful programs, resources, and initiatives for children, I also see a mixed record in the church, in my own country, and in countries around the world regarding our attitudes toward children. Both in Church and society, children are too often treated as the very ‘least of these.’”⁴⁸ Bunge, like many

⁴⁵ Ibid., 104.

⁴⁶ Westerhoff, *Will Children?*, 97.

⁴⁷ Marcia Bunge, “Biblical and Theological Perspectives and Best Practices for Faith Formation,” in *Understanding Children's Spirituality: Theology, Research, and Practice*, ed. Kevin Lawson (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 5.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

others, have noted this “mixed record” but challenge adults and parents of their obligations to children. She says, “One of the first obligations of adults to children in the biblical and Christian theological tradition is that adults are to treat children with dignity and respect.”⁴⁹

But are children truly respected in congregations as not only part of the community of believers, but as fellow image bearers? Johnathan Aigner writes a comparison of two churches in his article, “Which One of these Churches Really Loves Kids?”⁵⁰ Aigner decries the megachurch model that often separates children from corporate worship. He particularly takes aim at a megachurch that turns children (twelve and under) away at the door for worship services.⁵¹ He quotes their pastor as saying in a sermon,

Part of our vision is 6th grade and up can come in the services. Wouldn't you agree that we have PG-13 services? I already get letters from middle school moms all the time, ‘My kid heard about this, blah, blah, blah.’ I'm like, “Do you have internet in your house? Holy crap!’ So, whatever. Can you imagine the emails we'd get from the second grade moms? Oh my God! 2nd grade dads? It would just get bad...I'll bet you there are some parents here tonight that praise God we have a church that invests in children the way we do, and are glad your kid's not with you. I'll bet we do. Because if your kid's with you, the whole time, you're like, ‘Sit down! Shut up! Sit down! Shut up!’

While this pastor no doubt got some laughs, if one truly reflects on his words, they are harsh and disrespectful to the little ones that Jesus demanded His followers to welcome. Aigner shares concerns that when children are separated, it is not really so they can have

⁴⁹ Ibid., 8.

⁵⁰ Jonathan Aigner, “Which One of These Churches Really Loves Kids?” Patheos, June 27, 2016, accessed September 12, 2016, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/ponderanew/2016/06/27/which-one-of-these-churches-really-loves-kids/>.

⁵¹ Ibid.

their own teaching time, but because they are seen as a burden and an interruption or distraction for adults, as this pastor's words indicate. Aigner adds about the necessity of corporate worship, "and our children must be a part of that, not just because we want them to stay in church when they're older, but because it belongs to them now. When the biggest churches in the country are turning children away at the door, we know something has gone desperately wrong."⁵² Theologian Joyce Mercer adds the words from a sign in a church just inside the sanctuary, "Welcome Families. Parents: Please Control Your Children During Worship. Especially in times of silent prayer, as worshippers seek the Spirit's inbreaking, restless children disrupt. Please remove unruly children to the crying room located outside the narthex. Thank you."⁵³ It is difficult to reconcile the words of Jesus with the attitudes of these two churches and many others that undervalue children and are disrespectful to childhood in general. Further, for children who can read, what does this sign truly communicate to them? Would a church dare post a sign like this about any other group of people? But Aigner also adds an announcement from the bulletin of a different, smaller church:

A Special Welcome to Those with Young Children
 We are very happy that you are here today! At St. John we want you to feel at home. First, please relax and enjoy your time here. Jesus knows that children tend to wiggle and squawk a bit, so please don't feel embarrassed by it. Your children are welcome at St. John.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Joyce Ann Mercer, *Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2005), 117.

The bulletin goes on to give parents helpful guidance such as sitting near the front, engaging children's senses, and encouraging their participation. They add, "What Jesus does here promises to engage them..." It ends with:

If you and your child must leave, please hurry back. We want your children here so much that we didn't build a nursery in our new space. Like Jesus, we want your children in the Liturgy, not out. If you need a little help, just ask. There are lots of folks here who will lend you a hand. Please know that while you are caring for your children, the rest of us will be rejoicing in Jesus' words, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Luke 18:16). We know that your children are a gift to the Church, so we will do our best to welcome, smile, encourage, help and bless you all. Welcome to St. John.⁵⁴

The churches mentioned represent the stark contrast between welcoming children and dismissing them. While there is a strong need for children to have developmentally appropriate formation time, relationships are also key, which means corporate worship and the intergenerational relationships found there are essential. As such, developmentally sensitive approaches include the relational aspect of church life.

In "Unfettered Wonder," T. Wyatt Watkins says, "Children are still routinely absent from worship, ignored there, or put on exhibit. Likewise, parents often remain conditioned to chuckle patronizingly over children's spiritual vocabulary and habits, not to greet them with a sense of earnestness and wonder."⁵⁵ But Watkins argues that adults may gain much from children. "Equal to my concern over nurturing a child's innate spiritual awareness is my interest in the potential benefit for the adults who take seriously children's unvarnished sense of the Holy, who place themselves at the feet of the very

⁵⁴ Aigner, "Which of These Churches."

⁵⁵ T. Wyatt Watkins, "Unfettered Wonder: Rediscovering Prayer Through the Inspired Voices of Children," in *Nurturing Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives and Best Practices*, ed. Holly Catterton Allen (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008), 136.

young for a change.”⁵⁶ As stated in chapter three, children can be sources of revelation, and certainly through this chapter, there have been many arguments for a more interdependent relationship with mutual influence.⁵⁷ Also, as already argued the whole faith community can benefit, but also as Bushnell and others have said, it is really a trust in God to lead. As Megan Hill writes about the children praying and the power of God,

But God is pleased with the prayers of children because the prayers of children proclaim his greatness. He is the God who takes lisping, slightly nonsensical, theologically wobbly and entirely sincere prayers and uses them to accomplish his eternal purposes. He is the God who shuts the mouth of the Evil One with the praises of infants (Ps 8:2). And he is the God who can –and does!—amplify his own glory through the small sound of little children praying.⁵⁸

As such, there are some refreshing voices in the quest for a more sensitive and respectful approach to children. The church bulletin above is only one of many examples of including children in worship and in the life of the church that communicates welcome and understanding to children who are Scripturally mandated not to be hindered in coming to Jesus.

In an explorative survey of churches done by Scottie May, Katie Stemp, and Grant Burns, they found many examples of families and children being incorporated into the larger faith community. They found that smaller churches tend to be more “relational.”⁵⁹ They also found that intergenerational worship is found more in smaller

⁵⁶ Ibid., 135.

⁵⁷ See p. 76-77 for previous discussion.

⁵⁸ Megan Hill, “Let the Children Have a Turn to Pray,” ChurchLeaders.com, April 5, 2016, accessed September 12, 2016, <https://churchleaders.com/children/childrens-ministry-articles/276590-let-children-turn-pray.html>.

⁵⁹ Scottie May, Katie Stemp, and Grant Burns, “Children's Place in the New Forms of Church,” in *Understanding Children's Spirituality: Theology, Research, and Practice*, ed. Kevin Lawson (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 249.

churches and larger churches are much more likely to utilize media.⁶⁰ Interestingly, smaller churches in the survey “employed a reflective, responsive approach to the Bible story.”⁶¹ Further, from a church they labeled as “Church U” within their study, they shared about their commitment to children not being separated from adults and their sanctuary including a space with quiet toys for young children to play with during the service.⁶² This same church also utilizes children as ways to remember others in prayer. “If a baby fusses or cries, the congregation knows to use that noise as a signal to pray for those in our world who are in need or cannot care for themselves.”⁶³ In this way, even infants are part of the purposes of God and welcomed into the community of faith.

This welcoming into the larger community is essential to nurturing faith. Holly Catterton Allen, editor of *Nurturing Children’s Spirituality* says,

Probably nothing will foster children’s relationships with God more than their being with adults who hold them, lay hands on them, bless them, and pray for them and with them. Nurturing children of the church toward the time when they will commit their lives to Christ requires, more than anything else, a faith community where children and committed adult believers are regularly and intentionally *together*.⁶⁴

Using what scientists have learned in the last several decades about the power of relationships unlocking (God-designed) development; churches and parents can begin to use the Spirit’s leading to include children, honor and respect childhood as a time for

⁶⁰ Ibid., 249.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., 250.

⁶³ Ibid., 252.

⁶⁴ Holly Catterton Allen, “Theological Perspectives on Children in the Church: Anabaptist/Believers Church,” ed. Holly Catterton Allen, in *Nurturing Children’s Spirituality: Christian Perspectives and Best Practices* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008), 124.

nurturance, and allow their own faith to deepen and grow by letting little ones lead and follow. This is a place where science and Scripture have fully aligned. Passages such as Deuteronomy 6:4-9, give instructions for leading children by telling the Story of God and God's people and implies that children are present in worship. The fact that children learn best through play and stories; and the fact that the Bible is overwhelmingly in narrative form is not an accident. While not everyone will have the benefit of coming to know Jesus at an early age, just as not everyone will have the benefit of having strong and secure attachment to their parents, this is a roadmap of how things work the best; and there is no question that the Bible gives directives for the very young to be nurtured into the people of God.

If childhood were looked at as a precious time for development, rather than something to hurry or to survive, it may change the perspective of parents and churches, alike, to transform their behavioral approaches to relational ones. And if the crux of Biblical passages about children is on teaching, then utilizing the best ways to reach children makes the most sense. One can assume that an all knowing and all-powerful God designed the human brain and its pattern for growth and development intentionally, so meeting children where they are at developmentally is an acknowledgement of what God has created in the special period of growth called childhood; in fact, then, this time of childhood is sacred.

The behavioral focus of getting children just to “behave” is too small of a goal for spiritual beings. For instance, in a widely viewed blog post by The Domestic Fringe, a mother shared about how to train children to sit still in church, by making them sit quietly at home for increasing intervals of time. She says, “Children who know how to sit and be

quiet are a blessing to their parents and all those around them.”⁶⁵ While one may not necessarily disagree, that cannot be the goal of having a child sit within the congregation. Behavioral focuses are not the point of life with God. Robbie Castleman, author of *Parenting in the Pew*, offers a bigger vision and says that her book “is written to help parents train children in the only ‘proper behavior’ for church: worship! This book is an expression of my joy in learning with my children how to remember the Lord’s Day and keep it holy.”⁶⁶ Castleman adds,

... biblical worship is partly intended to help God’s people remember, rehearse, and reenact God’s great story of salvation. To enter into that story week after week with one’s children is a great reminder of our place in that story. It’s good for us to realize that we are *not* the ‘star’ of God’s story, but that God is the ultimate means and ends for faith and life – for ourselves and our children.⁶⁷

Changing adult perspectives and attitudes can transform the way that ministry and parenting is carried out enabling children and parents to find joy in worshipping God together in their families. When children are seen not as a burden, but fellow pilgrims on the same journey of faith, their own faith is nurtured and adult faith may become re-ignited as children sincerely and authentically experience God. And when behavioral approaches give way to relational ones, parents can stop teaching children to “behave” in church, but to fall in love with the Savior in whom they are committing their lives.

While it is not the intent of this dissertation to give specific instructions, curriculums or guides to parents and churches, it does propose to adults that children

⁶⁵ “No Fuss Parenting - Teach Kids to Sit Still,” *The Domestic Fringe* (blog), April 17, 2013, accessed February 12, 2017, <http://thedomesticfringe.com/no-fuss-parenting-teach-kids-to-sit-still/>.

⁶⁶ Robbie Castleman, *Parenting in the Pew: Guiding Your Children into the Joy of Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 23.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

need more focused and intentional spiritual nurturing and formation than what they are currently receiving. And while there are many ways to engage children in worship, intergenerational relationships, and developmentally sensitive modalities of teaching; it is important to spend time listening to the Spirit and engaging with Scripture and scientific study to find what is best for children as members of the Kingdom; as a special class that cannot advocate for themselves. However, there are at least some ideas that can be helpful.

In *Teaching Kids Authentic Worship*, Kathleen Chapman shares several ideas for “worship moments.”⁶⁸ Chapman calls worship “the glue” that keeps children close to God.⁶⁹ She says, “There is an urgency today, like never before, to glue children to the God of the universe.”⁷⁰ Although she does not directly reference attachment, what she describes is secure attachment in a spiritual sense. Chapman shares about a challenge that was made to her entire church that asked the faith community to come up with as many names for God as possible called the “God wall challenge.”⁷¹ She reports, “The children’s division winner...rattled off eighty-seven names of God from memory. She beat the entire pastoral staff, the elders, and the deacons!”⁷² While every church may not have a “God wall challenge,” Chapman provides a perfect example of ways to involve everyone in the faith community that is playful (the language of childhood), but also

⁶⁸ Kathleen Chapman, *Teaching Kids Authentic Worship: How to Keep Them Close to God for Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003).

⁶⁹ Ibid., 17.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 24.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., 53.

creating worship experiences. It also is an affirmation of how earnestly children participate. When churches listen to the Spirit's leading about how to engage children within the entire community of faith, there are literally unlimited possibilities for congregations to create curriculums and programs that teach, nurture, and lovingly respect children.

In *You Can Preach to the Kids Too!*, Carolyn Brown presents several ways that children can be included in sermons, including trying to see biblical texts from a child's perspective; considering times of the year that are more stressful for children, such as the beginning of school and preparing sermons that address children more specifically; choosing translations of the Bible that are child-friendly; and "assigning sermon seat work" that includes activities and places to draw that are directly related to the sermon.⁷³ Likewise, in *Enduring Connections: Creating a Preschool and Children's Ministry*, Janice Haywood, encourages churches to ask difficult questions about children's ministry and programming, including motivations and intentions.⁷⁴ While it may not give specific instructions, it does ask adults to seriously reflect on how and why children's ministry is happening in congregations. She says,

Whatever parents identify as their needs, churches must encourage and support parents while providing strong, effective programming that supports the family's faith efforts for their children. The African proverb is true for the church too: 'It takes a village to raise a child.' For sure it takes a church to support families in raising their children to know and love God and others.⁷⁵

⁷³ Carolyn Brown, *You Can Preach to the Kids, Too!: Designing Sermons for Adults and Children* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997), 38, 41, 46, and 90.

⁷⁴ Janice Haywood, *Enduring Connections: Creating a Preschool and Children's Ministry* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2006), 13-29.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

When priorities, intentions and motivations are thoroughly explored, the entire faith community can benefit; and goals can be expanded to be lifelong relationships with God and other believers, rather than how to keep a child quiet for an hour, so the adults may experience God. Karen-Marie Yust says in *Real Kids, Real Faith*, “Spiritual journeys are communal undertakings that require energy and attentiveness from those who participate in them. Faith, then, is significant for childhood because it is a place where spiritual journeys begin and healthy young (and older) lives are nurtured and sustained.”⁷⁶

What many of the writers cited in this dissertation have asked for, then, is an assessment of how children are being nurtured within homes and within faith communities. If children are innately spiritual, occupy a special status within the Kingdom (as Jesus indicated), and are equal image bearers, then the treatment of children and the ways of ministering to them must reflect those beliefs. In *Postmodern Children’s Ministry*, Ivy Beckwith asks, “What happens to our churches when we dare to assume that children have the same claim on worship space, ritual, style, and content of worship as the adults? Truthfully, grappling with this question may mean we need to rethink the way our worship spaces are designed as we create spaces with children in mind.”⁷⁷

Beckwith acknowledges that this may mean shorter sermons or that sermons may become

⁷⁶ Karen-Marie Yust, *Real Kids, Real Faith: Practices for Nurturing Children’s Spiritual Lives* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 2.

⁷⁷ Beckwith, *Postmodern Children’s Ministry*, 146.

“a less important part of the worship service.”⁷⁸ She adds, “This may not necessarily be a bad thing.”⁷⁹ Beckwith also makes a compelling case for corporate worship.

Children of any age are never intruders in our corporate worship of God, and I believe it is an affront to God to ever consider them so. Children of this generation and with the generations to come crave experience with God and the people of God. The corporate worship of the community of God’s people is meant to be, more than anything else, an experience of God and of our relationship with God.⁸⁰

As such, many writers have offered ideas on how the community of God can best help children, families, and other adults support each other and expand the goal of Christian education to focus on spiritual formation, not behavioral expectations and only teaching instruction. Beckwith reminds readers that children are gifted too and those gifts should be drawn out and utilized.⁸¹ She also asserts that parents and other adults need frequent reminders of the commitment and responsibility that they have to children through dedication and baptism services.⁸² She also shares the idea of “baby holders” in church worship services to help young parents who may be overwhelmed.⁸³ This is a powerful message that the whole church is invested in young people and takes responsibility for them. This is true, especially, in cases of children who have no adults or parents with them.⁸⁴ Beckwith advocates family acts of service and churches offering

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 161.

⁸¹ Ibid., 86.

⁸² Ibid., 96.

⁸³ Ibid., 105.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 120-121.

parenting classes on “soul care” for their children, instead of traditional parenting classes.⁸⁵

Haywood emphasizes the importance of children hearing the testimonies of mature Christians.⁸⁶ She adds that children need to be part of worship services, lead prayer or the reading of Scripture, and contribute to the offering.⁸⁷ Haywood also indicates that children do well when they are helped to find passages of Scripture in their own Bibles or when parents and ministers prepare them for worship by asking them to listen for certain words or ideas.⁸⁸ Likewise, Castleman suggests having a child squeeze their parent’s hand when they hear certain words like “Jesus.”⁸⁹ One can grasp the sweetness that may come from engaging in these types of religious experiences, rather than a sole focus on whether or not the child is being still or quiet.

In *Offering the Gospel to Children*, Gretchen Wolff Pritchard gives ideas about encouraging “pew art” so that children may color and draw as they listen to services.⁹⁰ She also reminds readers that children need repetition; singing simple songs that are meditative can help them participate, as well as saying simple prayers.⁹¹ Brown also encourages “sermon seat work or children’s worship kits” such as, giving children an

⁸⁵ Ibid., 114, 119.

⁸⁶ Haywood, *Enduring Connections*, 17.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 19.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 162-163.

⁸⁹ Castleman, *Parenting in the Pew*, 85.

⁹⁰ Gretchen Wolff Pritchard, *Offering the Gospel to Children* (Latham, MD: Roman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 65.

⁹¹ Ibid., 93.

outline of the sermon so they may better follow along.⁹² Brown provides a sample letter that can be sent out to parents of children about to sit in corporate worship for the first time (in this case, children in the third grade) that advocates for families sitting together, talking about sermons on the way home, and writing notes to each other during the worship time “about the Scripture and sermon.”⁹³ One of the bullets in this letter offers some crucial information to parents, “Remember that few children listen to entire sermons. Instead, they tune in and out as things catch their attention. The trick is to pay attention to what they do hear, not what they miss.”⁹⁴ Again, the onus is not on behaviors, but maximizing the positives and the potentials for growth. Parents may find a great deal of joy in using many of these approaches and find they are far more effective in formative experiences.

Further, because passages in Deuteronomy give instructions for faith to be carried out throughout the day and night, not just at church on Sundays, Chapman offers ways to “direct focus” back to God.⁹⁵ She presents ideas for asking kids questions, such as “What kind of sky did God make this morning?” or “Which of God’s birds did you see today?”⁹⁶

This chapter has focused on the need for spiritual nurturance based upon the belief that children are innately spiritual and have significant spiritual capacity. As Bushnell pointed out, it is “monstrous” to think an all-powerful God is not using the

⁹² Brown, *Preach to the Kids Too*, 89 and 58.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Chapman, *Teaching Kids Authentic Worship*, 76.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

Spirit to guide children.⁹⁷ And while much of this chapter has explored ways that churches may rethink their curriculum and programming, it has also made a case for the importance of intergenerational relationships and inclusion in corporate worship. Just as Bowlby found in attachment research that what a mother does with her infant is uniquely important in a lifelong way, what the faith community and parents do even with infants and young children may impact their faith in a lifelong way. Just as an infant comes hardwired to attach and that attachment unlocks their personhood; infants come hardwired to attach to God, and spiritual nurturance becomes monumentally important when the spiritual quality of people is understood. In short, children (and all people) can become the people God desired them to be when they are securely attached to their Creator. What churches and parents do to nurture children's faith is the most essential task in helping a child be who they were created to be.

So, what the church does with infants is essential, as well as what the church and parents do with young children, elementary aged children, and adolescents. In their article, "Nurturing the Infant Soul," Shirley Morgenthaler, Jeffrey Keiser and Mimi Larson, write,

For young children in the church, implicit memories are laid down through relational experiences as well as through instruction. These memories carry with them strong emotional content that will stay with the child throughout his or her life and may be transformed into explicit memories – memories that shape faith formation and draw the child closer to Jesus Christ.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ See p. 121 for previous discussion.

⁹⁸ Shirley Morgenthaler, Jeffrey Keiser, and Mimi Larson, "Nurturing the Infant Soul: The Importance of Community and Memories in the Spiritual Formation of Young Children," *Christian Education Journal* 11, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 246, accessed September 28, 2015.

They add, “Our prayer is that ministry leaders recognize the significance of the spiritual formation of infants and toddlers as Jesus Christ did. These are not empty years, but a precious time of growth and development that is unique to their developmental stage.”⁹⁹

What adults do with, for, and to children *matters*. How children are treated, how they are talked to, and how they are included has eternal ramifications. When children are rooted to the One who made them, and to nurturing faith communities, including their secure attachment to Godly parents, they will know who they are and to Whom they belong. Berryman says, “We are an unstable mixture of the human and the divine. We need the stable paradox of Christ to stabilize our ambiguity and yet call us to use this unique quality to be creatures who are called upon to create rather than destroy.”¹⁰⁰

Berryman adds that his method of Godly Play is not just about resolving existential questions or deepening experiences of God, but discovering oneself. “Godly play is a way to keep open the opportunity for the true self to emerge in childhood and the possibility that adults may return to where they began and begin to grow again.”¹⁰¹

When the statistics and bleak picture of childhood from the introductory chapter are called to mind, it is clear that children are unhappy, unfulfilled, and desperately seeking. Whether one calls it identity crises, existential crises, or mental illness, children are needlessly suffering. They do not have intergenerational relationships, strong supporting “villages” of faith communities, and uninterrupted time with their parents. Children need the presence and attention of adults in their lives and for their

⁹⁹ Ibid, 256.

¹⁰⁰ Berryman, *Godly Play*, 131.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 158.

developmental place in childhood to be respected. They need patience and nurture; kindness and compassion; and above all, relational approaches over behaviorism. Children need to be loved. Children are spiritual beings and they cannot find their true selves without their spirituality being nurtured. Children are born with a divine spark (they had it even in the womb) and they require the love and nurture of those around them to keep bringing them before the Lord; the true Secure Base and stabilizing force in a shaky world.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation began with a story about a ten-year-old girl named Katie. Anyone who spends time with children knows a girl just like her: sad and lonely, merely existing on Netflix and junk food, instead of embracing the amazing world God has created. Her relationships are muddled and she is adrift. She is not being nurtured relationally or spiritually. Ironically, she is a member of the “protected generation.” The generation that older Americans lament and bitterly judge for their lack of motivation and their entitled behavior. But chapter one, illustrated that this generation is far from protected. Katie has a remarkable chance of taking her own life, as the suicide rate continues to climb for her age group.

The introduction sought a more comprehensive look at a deeply hurting generation. The statistics presented in the first chapter challenge the narrative that this generation is a group of spoiled babies who have been given everything. Many children, to be sure, have an excessive amount of material wealth (there are also millions of children who are living in poverty and do not have enough to eat), but they lack the attention and focus from the adults around them, and they are often not given the things they need the most like secure attachment and spiritual nurture. Even fundamentals for health, such as sleeping well, eating nutritious food, and getting plenty of exercise have been significantly compromised. Further, play, and play outdoors is essential to development, and its loss creates permanent damage. Play is not a luxury of childhood, it is instead, essential to the development of body and brain; as well as both the outside social world of a child and his or her inner emotional world. Play is the language of childhood and the most crucial form of learning for children. And while this dissertation

is not an argument for the complete exclusion of technology, its negative effects, as mentioned in the first chapter, must be considered. Children are struggling. But Christian adults and parents, as well as the church, may be in the best position to do something about the crisis children are currently facing because the things that make little humans healthy— playing outside (in God’s creation and touching the things that God has made), taking care of one’s body, mind and soul, being part of something larger and having deep and meaningful relationships - are the very things of God.

The second chapter gave a brief look at children in the Bible, and began specifically with Jesus. The incarnation is powerful for many reasons, but especially as it relates to children, it represents a God who not only was willing to enter this world, but a God who entered *their* world first. Jesus came as an infant and lived an entire childhood. Jesus was acutely aware of how difficult it was to be a child. His life was immediately in peril, as Herod’s order attempted his murder and slaughtered all the Hebrew male babies under the age of two.¹ Children were expendable in the days of Jesus. They were not viewed as fully human. His Old Testament culture, however, knew better. They knew children were made in the image of God. They knew Deuteronomy and the emphatic demand to walk *with* children in the ways of the Lord. They had Proverbs that told them to impart wisdom to children. And even though the people of God lost their way from time to time, they were called to respect children and give them dignity. Jesus welcomed children and demanded that His followers do the same.

¹ Matt. 2:16.

While there is very little written about Jesus' own spiritual formation, John Carroll observes, "Though the details are hidden from us, the narrative intimates Jesus' emerging sense of vocation springs from his religious formation within a household where fidelity to God's ways matters, a family in which Jesus' own mother ponders everything, even what lies beyond her comprehension."² Jesus had a Heavenly Father, as Ronald Rolheiser noted, that whispered in Jesus' ears that he was beloved and pleasing to God.³ He had an earthly father who was "righteous" and a mother who complied with the will of God.⁴ Mary and Joseph, no doubt, raised Jesus in a home where the commands of God were written on their doorposts and gates, bound on their hands, and were emblems on their foreheads.⁵ Jesus walked with God in every moment and with his heart, soul, mind, and might. People followed Jesus wherever he went, including children. Catherine Stonehouse adds,

Jesus valued children and took time for them. Parents wanted Jesus to bless their children. It was not enough for them to bring the boys and girls to see and hear Jesus from a distance, parents wanted Jesus to touch their children, to hold them in his arms, to look into their eyes, and to speak a blessing. Something about Jesus caused parents to assume he would bless their children.⁶

² John Carroll, "'What Then Will This Child Become?' Perspectives on Children in the Gospel of John," in *The Child in the Bible*, ed. Marcia Bunge (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2008), 184.

³ Ronald Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality* (New York, NY: Image, 2014), 239. See p. 38-39 for previous discussion.

⁴ Matt. 1:19, Luke 1:38.

⁵ Deut. 6:8-9.

⁶ Catherine Stonehouse, *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey: Nurturing a Life of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 34.

But the disciples did not want the children to come. Stonehouse adds, "...the disciples saw children as less important than adults."⁷ The cultures around them did not see children as full human beings or worthy of time and energy, yet Jesus demanded their welcome. He issued stern warnings, but the disciples did not understand because just a few narratives later, Jesus, again, must demand that children come to Him. All the synoptic gospels record both these exchanges. All of them record children as part of Jesus' ministry, as having been touched, healed, or blessed by Jesus. Jesus cared about children more radically than anyone could ever grasp including His own disciples. Jesus even held them as models of the Kingdom.

While many may overlook the role that children have in the Bible, chapter two highlights that children of all ages are found throughout the pages of Scripture. Some of the most powerful narratives within the canon have a child acting within the purposes of God. Readers meet Joseph, Miriam, Moses, Samuel, David, Jeremiah, Josiah, and Jesus as children. Further, narratives like Matthew 21 show children, at times, to be more perfectly attuned to the purposes of God and the true identity of Jesus than the adults in the story. God used children for God's glory and does still today.

One of the most engaging narratives within the canon is the story of Jeremiah, Josiah, and a recovered book of the law. Hilkiah, the high priest, finds the lost book (lost for hundreds of years) and takes it to Judah's greatest king, Josiah, who began his reign as a child. The people had previously not even been celebrating Passover. In short, they had forgotten who they were in the Lord and the mighty deeds of God, who with "a

⁷ Ibid.

mighty hand and an outstretched arm,” had always walked with God’s people.⁸ Josiah went about reformation in a serious and integrative way. Scripture records that he turned to the Lord with all his heart, soul and might.⁹

Perhaps that is where devout followers of God find themselves in modern day America. Biblical illiteracy is a huge problem, verses are taken out of context or only partially read, and awful quotes from the seventeenth century (spare the rod, spoil the child) are quoted over beautiful passages of Scripture. Further, behavioral models that ignore the relational and spiritual capacity that God so intricately placed in all of humanity, including precious children, are promoted over developmentally sensitive relational ones. When it comes to parenting, telling the Story of God, and rooting children to the One who made them, American Christian parents have indeed lost their way. And finding this book of the law, rediscovering its insistence on a moment by moment immersion into the way of the Lord, may serve to restore families, just as it did for the people of Judah. Perhaps an oversimplification of its thirty-four chapters, but Deuteronomy says to parents and children to live out a faith life together. It’s a moment by moment, day to day, year to year journey that believers engage in *together*. The starting point is loving God with all one’s heart, soul, and might. Stonehouse adds of Deuteronomy, “The commands of God are taught best in the normal flow of life.”¹⁰

Deuteronomy cannot be lost again. Deuteronomy addresses the community of believers directly in how to live. Deuteronomy is the book that Jesus quotes when He is

⁸ Deut. 5:15.

⁹ 2 Kings 23:25.

¹⁰ Stonehouse, *Joining Children*, 25.

asked the greatest commandment. Jesus answers, “You shall love the Lord with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment.”¹¹ He adds, “And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”¹² Jesus reiterates what the Decalogue had already taught, loving God and loving others is what the whole faith life rests on. Patrick Miller says of Deuteronomy:

No single book of Scripture attends more directly and so often to the education of the children in the community of faith than Deuteronomy. It is itself a book of teaching and one that is deeply aware that the starting point for learning the faith is in the family circle and early in life. If the fear of the Lord – that is, reverence, obedience, and worship of God who has saved and cared for us – is the aim of human existence, as surely as it is for those who live by and with the Holy Scriptures, then that fear is something to be learned and developed from the earliest days onward.¹³

He says later,

Deuteronomy as a whole offers a cohesive and persuasive argument for the importance of excellent and comprehensive faith formation within families and communities. Reading this text as a parent or teacher or member of a religious community allows one to see more clearly the complex and communal process of children’s instruction, nurture and discipline today and in the past. It invites one—indeed, pulls one – into the enterprise of teaching the young that they may be ready to serve the Lord as they grow older.¹⁴

Recovering Deuteronomy is essential and not only so children may serve the Lord as they grow older, but even *now*. The Biblical narrative is full of stories of children interacting with and serving the Lord. Children are often at the heart of the purpose of God. The

¹¹ Matt. 22:37-38.

¹² Matt. 22:37-40.

¹³ Patrick Miller, “That the Children May Know,” in *The Child in the Bible*, ed. Marcia Bunge (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Pub., 2008), 62.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Biblical witness, indeed, shows children acting in profound ways, listening to God, and following God's commands.

Jesus affirmed children as a special grouping of people. And Genesis 1:27 affirms that children are most certainly created in the image of God. Yet, they are often the most marginalized. Throughout history, they have had to fight for survival. They have endured neglect, slavery, abortion, infanticide, and exposure. They have been ignored by theologians and systematic theologies alike, and at times, the church. The field of psychology has often misunderstood them and attempted to just train them like "unruly lab animals" with motivations of rewards or avoiding punishment.¹⁵ Philosophy, psychology, and theology have at times only valued children for what they can become as adults, not who they are as people now.

There have been long debates in all these branches of thought about the nature of children and at times, they have been viewed very negatively. Some even today, whether they articulate a theology of childhood depravity or not, treat children as evil; a bad child that a parent must make good. These themes have shown up in "biblical" parenting literature. They advocate for authoritarianism and punishments to mold a righteous child. But parents are not the rightful author of who children are and who they are becoming; God is the author. God already designed a process called childhood, for the child to learn and grow in all ways. Parents are the warmth and nurturance to that process. They get to unlock the amazing personalities and temperaments and strengths that God already placed within children when they were fearfully and wonderfully made. What researchers

¹⁵ Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini, and Richard Lannon, *A General Theory of Love* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2000), 71. See p. 83 for previous discussion.

have found in the last three decades of neuroscience is nothing short of amazing. The brain is more intricate and detailed than previously understood.. It wires together, rewires, creates new neural pathways and processes information at speeds that are almost incalculable. Its development starts at the bottom and moves up, working from the back to the front, making connections and integrating its differentiated parts. Childhood is the brain’s period of “maximal growth.”¹⁶ Childhood is remarkably necessary to build the brain, body, mind and soul. It is a time of formation and a time for building lifelong foundations. It requires the right conditions be met that allow for those connections to be made, whether neurologically, biologically, relationally or spiritually. This precious time cannot be underestimated.

But childhood has struggled to be respected and children, themselves, continue to be neglected as people that are fully human with a full range of emotion and feeling. So much of what has been written or theorized about children whether in psychology or theology incorrectly put them in a passive role. The authors of *Children Matter* offer an insightful discussion on how metaphors often shape perspectives.¹⁷ They discuss that passive metaphors have included referring to children as “blank slate, empty cup, clay and wet cement.”¹⁸ This places parents and adults in the “expert, authority, or boss” role.¹⁹ Active metaphors, on the other hand, include “sheep, seed or plant, pilgrims,

¹⁶ Daniel Siegel, *The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2015), 112.

¹⁷ Scottie May et al., *Children Matter: Celebrating Their Place in the Church, Family, and Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2005).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

disciples, or children/people.”²⁰ This would put adults in more of a “shepherd, farmer or gardener, fellow pilgrim or guide” role.²¹ The authors, however, point out these active learning models are “less familiar, harder to evaluate, seem less efficient, and can be seen as more subjective” often making passive metaphors more popular.²² Behaviorism and passive roles for children tend to make learning and behavior more concrete and simplifies (in truth, it oversimplifies) teaching and parenting. But the authors rightly observe that “metaphors from Scripture tend to be active and intrinsically link learner and teacher.”²³

The behavioral methods and underlying theology in “biblical” parenting literature is concerning. Not only does the literature ignore the full Biblical witness, it also suggest that parenting should not be complicated. Gordon Neufeld rightly points out, “When our impotence becomes unbearable we reach for simplistic, authoritarian formulas consistent with the do-it-yourself/quick-fix ethos of our era.”²⁴ But, of course, parenting is complicated. It is raising human beings! Children have their own personalities, their own unique temperaments, their own little senses of humor, ways they like to be loved and to love back, and to top it all off, they have a brain system that has not been fully developed or integrated to work at its optimal level. They have limited life experience, as well as

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 8.

²⁴ Gordon Neufeld and Gabor Mate, *Hold on to Your Kids: Why Parents Need to Matter More than Peers*, updated ed. (New York, NY: Ballantine Books Trade Paperbacks, 2014), 5.

limitations in how they can see the feelings and perspectives of others. There may, in fact, be nothing more complicated than raising a child. There is no quick fix, no special formula, and no way to hurry it. There is no concrete behavioral system that will meet the goal of successful child rearing. But God, in God's infinite wisdom, did equip parents with intuition and the ability to attune to their little ones. And God equipped little ones with a natural bent to look up and to grab on. Children were meant to be held physically, emotionally, and spiritually in the context of a secure and unshakeable relationship. Children are hardwired to attach to their parents, cooperate with them, and engage in the natural process of God-designed development. God puts that system in place and utilizes the Spirit to lead and guide both parent and child. When parents rely on formulas, unreflective theology, or poor behavioral methods, instead of praying, looking to the witness of Scripture, and utilizing a community of faith that is actively listening to the Spirit, parents and children suffer, and ambivalent attachment is the result.

John Bowlby, Mary Ainsworth and others articulated an idea that God had already designed in creation. Attachment is woven into the fabric of the universe. Everything yearns for connection. What attachment researchers have found in the decades since attachment theory was articulated is compelling and overwhelming. Secure attachment mitigates emotional and even physical pain. It calms the brain and helps its parts integrate and grow. It shapes the consciousness of the child and it regulates their fragile systems to strong and secure ones. In times of trouble, securely attached children know their secure base is there and look toward their parents for help and comfort, knowing implicitly that their base is unshakeable. Despite this research, strong relationships are significantly lacking in this country. And what is striking is that

so many Christians who would undoubtedly say that Christianity is about a relationship fail to use relational methods with their children.

American children, in general, are struggling. Recall Dr. Greene's words, "Children do well if they can."²⁵ This opens up questions like have adults lived up to the Biblical witness, the words of Jesus, the commands of Deuteronomy in a way that has allowed children the opportunity to do well? Have parents created the conditions most conducive to growth and development? Sadly, the answer is a firm no. Children's spirituality is of the utmost importance; it addresses the whole of who children are, as in the unique creation God designed, and its care is lost in the shuffle of a hurried and often consumer driven life. Children do not sleep well, eat well, or interact well with others. Children are not talked to like people, they are not welcomed the way Jesus demanded, and they are often misunderstood and maligned for acting like children, who are sometimes developmentally incapable of what adults are asking of them. Childhood is a unique creation of God. In fact, childhood is a precious and sacred time. A time that parents and children can walk with the Lord God *together*; little hand in large hand.

Sadly, however, when a parent or professional offers an alternative to an authoritarian way of parenting, they are labeled permissive or overprotective or of feeding into the pathology of this entitled generation. They are accused of trying to keep children from experiencing failure or suffering. But the God way of life is not permissive and God's great Story certainly includes pain and hardship. Gretchen Wolff Pritchard says God's story is "a continuing pattern of exile and return, of loss, hope, and

²⁵ Ross Greene, *Raising Human Beings* (New York, NY: Scribner, 2016), 38. See p. 20-21 for previous discussion.

restoration...²⁶ Secure attachment is not about preventing all harm, but walking *with* children through it. A parent's presence and who they are to their children is much more important than anything else in attachment. Likewise, in spiritual attachment, God's presence is what heals, regulates, calibrates, secures, anchors, even in the most difficult moments.

God's call and lifelong interaction with Jeremiah illustrates this type of spiritual secure attachment. Recall the beautiful passage of Jeremiah's call to God's service, where he indicates God's presence in his life before he was even born. In their exchange, Jeremiah is told to "go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you, do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord."²⁷ God says emphatically and repeatedly, "*I am with you.*" As the verses go on, it is clear from the beginning that Jeremiah's task will be wrought with opposition and hardship. God says again at the end of their exchange, "They will fight against you; but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, says the Lord to deliver you."²⁸ Jeremiah could serve God because God walked with him. He could walk such a difficult road because he had an unwavering Secure Base. Jeremiah's resiliency is a result of God's presence in his life.

But the call of Jeremiah, and his difficult story, is not often in children's Bibles, nor is the story of the Exile readily recited by adults. Not having a children's Bible or

²⁶ Gretchen Wolff Pritchard, *Offering the Gospel to Children* (Lanham, MD: Roman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 43.

²⁷ Jer. 1:7-9.

²⁸ Jer. 1:19.

curriculum that represents the whole of the canon is detrimental to children and to the community of God (remember in Deuteronomy that reciting the full Story of God to children was a frequent, explicit command). Eva Jenny Korneck writes a compelling argument about the use of theodicy for children in her essay.²⁹ She makes a profound case that children should be exposed to difficult theology, such as theologies of suffering from an early age. “Children are not exempt when it comes to fear, joy, disappointment and loving care.”³⁰ She adds later, “Children are by no means more isolated than adults from the suffering that each life contains – but they are very often less protected, because they do not yet have many strategies to absorb and react to suffering.”³¹

As people, children experience suffering and the full range of human emotion. But adults often minimize their pain about things they do not think of as important, saying things like “Wait until you get into the real world.” That statement has always stunned this writer, as if children exist in an alternative reality that is devoid of hardship. Children are already in the real world and experience stress, pain, and confusion. Psychologist Robert Coles says from his study of children and their spirituality, “Children try to understand not only what is happening to them, but why; and in doing that, they call upon their religious life they have experienced, the spiritual values they have received, as well as other sources of potential explanation.”³² If their spirituality has

²⁹ Eva Jenny Korneck, “What Children and Adolescents Think about Theodicy and How the Book of Job Can Help: The Case for Using Job in Children's Bibles,” in *Understanding Children's Spirituality: Theology, Research, and Practice*, ed. Kevin Lawson (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 420.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 422.

³² Robert Coles, *The Spiritual Life of Children* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1990), 100.

gone unnurtured, children are left in a precarious world without the stabilizing force of the Spirit. And if they are only given the “happy” parts of God’s story, they lack a full identity with their faith heritage, as well as a firm and authentic foundation that grounds them in times of pain. Coles says, “Accidents, illnesses, bad luck – such moments of danger and pain prompt reflection in children as well as adults.”³³ Children feel things deeply and they need the Story with all its repetition and pattern of good times and challenging times. Their spiritual foundation must include joy and sorrow, for that is what their life already contains, even from the earliest of ages. Just as Bowlby found that attachment behavior was activated especially in moments of fear or pain, secure attachment in a spiritual sense should do the same. When difficulty arises, children need to be able to reach for God, just as their faith ancestors did; and they need the Story of God to teach them that, as well as the example of the devout believers around them.

In years of sitting across from children in a therapy room, this writer is acutely aware of how significant pain, joy and hope are felt by little ones. Their inner world is rich and deep. Korneck powerfully argues for the use of Scriptures that adults often omit in curriculums and children’s Bibles, and offers that Job, for example, is as necessary for children, as it is for adults. She says, “And in this story, Job does something very simple: he addresses his complaint to God. He finds a way of expression and an attachment figure. Right here a way is proposed how children can handle sorrow and doubt as well.”³⁴ She also affirms what so many writers have advocated within this dissertation

³³ Ibid., 109.

³⁴ Korneck, “Theodicy,” 431.

that “children are serious partners in theological dialogue.”³⁵ Children are people in urgent need of the full Story of God and their identity within it to “know who they are and whose they are.”³⁶ They need that firm foundation, not just “fun” activities that entertain them while adults do “real” church. Pritchard says,

We cannot afford to keep fooling around in Sunday school preaching a “kiddie gospel” to our children – a gospel that hides the bitter realities and glorious promises of Scripture behind the ranks of clean and happy children singing “Jesus Loves Me.” We must not give them a God who turns out to be just another grown-up – who says “There, there” without really listening to their fears of monsters under the bed, who cares only about whether or not they are being “good.” We must not keep exhorting our children to be good and kind and patient and grateful and glad and loving, without offering them the faith and hope to fuel that love.³⁷

Children are in urgent need of spiritual nurturing and soul care. A sole focus on their behaviors and moralism have left them adrift and with only an ambivalent attachment, when they are longing for a deep and unending connection to the One who made them. Reducing Bible stories or Sunday school lessons to piety does a disservice to children and their lifelong spiritual journey. It keeps them from their spiritual ancestors and the full Story of God’s redemptive work. It does not afford them a secure attachment to an all-powerful God that is deeply concerned with God’s children. Obedience is not the only thing God desires, but an authentic faith that journeys through blessings and hardships, glancing often at the Secure Base.

Secure attachment, whether relational or spiritual, builds in resiliency. Placing children into the Story of God builds in a protective quality. Leonard Sweet puts it best

³⁵ Ibid., 421.

³⁶ Miller, “That the Children May Know,” 51.

³⁷ Pritchard, *Offering the Gospel*, 6.

by using R-values as a metaphor, “Another way to think about the internalization of stories is as a means of building in good ‘R-values.’ An R-value is the measure of thermal resistance (resistance to heat flow) of insulation in a house or other building. The higher the R-value, the greater the insulating effectiveness.”³⁸ Parents build in insulation by immersing children into the Story of God; when their very identity is in the Lord. He adds, “It’s like having a built-in GPS (God Positioning System) calibrated to the heavens. With a heavenly GPS, we can explore any territory, even the darkest places, and always find our way home. We all lose our way at times, but good R-values protect us and a good GPS reorients us Eastward, and Easters us home.”³⁹

It’s not that a focus on behaviors and morals have no place, they are just poor starting points and much too small of a goal when the focus is on the Spirit shaping children into the “likeness of Christ for the sake of the world.”⁴⁰ And it too often ignores the true responsibilities that adults have to children; to know the Story themselves, to be impeccable role models, and to join children on the faith journey. As Horace Bushnell said so many years ago, “After all, there is no cheap way of making Christians of our children. Nothing but to practically live it makes it sure. To be Christians ourselves – ah! there is the difficulty.”⁴¹ Children are always watching. They internalize the values they see; not the ones they are simply told about. The authors of *Children Matter* add,

³⁸ Leonard Sweet, *The Well-Played Life: Why Pleasing God Doesn't Have to Be Such Hard Work* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2014), 114.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 114-115.

⁴⁰ Jeffrey Greenman and George Kalantzis, *Life in the Spirit: Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 24. See p. 30 for previous discussion.

⁴¹ Horace Bushnell, *Christian Nurture* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000), 89.

Children are deeply influenced by how the significant adults in their lives respond to unexpected events. When special blessings come our way, do we thank God and those who had a part in blessing us? In times of stress and grief, do our children see us turning to God and God's people for strength and guidance? Are we willing to process with the children the hard questions we have about where God is in our pain? In times of war and tragedy do they hear us pray for all those who suffer, including our enemies? Do they see a real faith being refined in the crucible of life?⁴²

As such, books that have a behavioral focus and represent authoritarian parenting are not helpful for Christian parents. In fact, any "biblical" parenting book that does not have a focus on spiritual formation for parent and child alike hardly fits the standard set forth by Scripture. But there are other Christian resources that can aid parents in ways to know their own children more deeply. Books that focus on relationships are much more efficient and can help parents recover their own intuition and attunement. For instance, books like *The Five Love Languages of Children* can be helpful to having a closer relationship with children.⁴³ Gary Chapman proposes that people give and receive love in diverse ways and knowing a child's "love language" can help parents understand their child and reach them more effectively. Further, it can help to restore parents' rightful place as experts on their own children. In addition, books about the Enneagram or Myers Briggs can be helpful to understanding different personality types and ways in which God has created people uniquely. Books like *The Enneagram of Parenting* are helpful in understanding personality traits, as well as strengths and weaknesses.⁴⁴ While this book is

⁴² May et al., *Children Matter*, 161.

⁴³ Gary Chapman and Ross Campbell, *The 5 Love Languages of Children: The Secret to Loving Children Effectively* (Chicago, IL: Northfield Publishing, 2016).

⁴⁴ Elizabeth Wagele, *The Enneagram of Parenting: The 9 Types of Children and How to Raise Them Successfully* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997).

more simplified and not written from a spiritual viewpoint, it provides a playful way for families to understand its members more fully and appreciate differences and similarities.⁴⁵ Further, books on childhood development may be helpful to parents to understand how their child is developing and age-appropriate behaviors. Books like *The Whole-Brain Child* by Daniel Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson give a comprehensive look at brain development and neurobiologically informed ways to work with that development. Further, developmental psychologists, such as Neufeld and Deborah MacNamara have written excellent resources, *Hold on to Your Kids* and *Rest, Play, Grow*, respectively, focusing on child development and attachment. It should be noted, however, that suggestions in any of these resources should not be used rigidly. They are educational and relational, but should never be used as formulas or in place of an attuned parent's intuition.

Also, because children's spirituality is essential, books and resources that help with spiritual disciplines and soul care can be helpful. While few, these resources help parents bring their focus back to spiritual formation as an essential goal of parenting. For instance, *Sleeping with Bread* can help parents lead their children in doing the Examen, an ancient spiritual practice that reflects on the highs and lows of a day.⁴⁶ It also is relationship building, as parents hear children's concerns, low points within the day, and the things for which children are most grateful. It is hoped that more resources for children's spiritual formation will continue to become available as this field grows.

⁴⁵ Parents unfamiliar with the Enneagram should read *The Wisdom of the Enneagram: The Complete Guide to Psychological and Spiritual Growth for the Nine Personality Types* by Don Riso and Russ Hudson to gain a better understanding of the Enneagram and its spiritual applications.

⁴⁶ Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn, and Matthew Linn, *Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives You Life* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1995).

Reading the Bible as a family should not be underestimated. Engaging in theological dialogue with children is helpful for the spiritual maturation of the child and the adult. Further, children's books with deeply theological themes, such as *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis or *A Wrinkle in Time* (and its subsequent series) by Madeleine L'Engle can be a fun way to read together and dialogue about spiritual truths in an imaginative and child-friendly manner.

Further, "biblical" parenting literature should be carefully weighed. If the stated goals are only on behaviors and compliance, parents should question if that is really the goal of parenting stated within Scripture. If a parent's goal is spiritual formation and relational nurture, and helping their child to live a life with God, a complete focus on behaviors will fall short. Also, if resources place all the responsibility on children and do not address serious adult responsibilities, they do not meet the standard set forth by Holy Scriptures. Any "biblical" parenting literature that does not cite Deuteronomy or the words of Jesus regarding the welcome of children is lacking in balance and reflection. Further, parenting literature that is disrespectful to little ones is simply not Biblical.

Childhood is a precious and sacred time. If children are ever to become their true selves, parents and churches must focus on the whole of who they really are; spiritual and relational beings in need of care and nurturing. The main task of parenting, then, is creating the conditions for that God-designed relational and spiritual development to unfold. And spiritual nurture is what Biblical parenting is all about. Even calls for obedience throughout Scripture are conditioned with "in the Lord." Parents may see childhood, then, as a time to whisper love, belonging, and goodness into the ears of their children, to tuck the Story of God into every fiber of their intricate neural pathways, and

to regulate all their delicate systems and rhythms to the Secure Base. Parents may rightly see parenting as their own *incarnational* ministry to their children; a time when they exhibit their own Christlikeness in entering their children's world and understanding it, and them, from the inside out. Parenting is a ministry of presence and the power in that presence cannot be underestimated. Ultimately, it helps to root children to the God who created the upside down inside out Kingdom that Jesus gave to children.

Cultivating secure relationships with children and the Lord is paramount.

Psychologist Urie Beonfenbrenner says, "In order to develop normally, a child requires progressively more complex joint activity with one or more adults, who have an irrational emotional relationship with the child. Somebody's got to be crazy about that kid. That's number one. First, last, and always."⁴⁷ Thankfully and unsurprisingly, that finding from attachment theory fits in nicely with Christian theology. Christians worship an all-powerful mighty God, who writes the names of God's children on the palms of God's hands.⁴⁸ A God who talks to little boys in the middle of the night, a God who feeds thousands from a little boy's lunchbox, a God whose love never fails.

Christian faith, spiritual formation, and secure attachment will not prevent all hardship, all mental illness, physical ailments, or life's tumult, but it provides the Way to interpret the world, get one's bearings, and grow in Christlikeness each day. And in desperate or dark moments, it compels a child to look up, not away. It keeps a child, like

⁴⁷ Urie Beonfenbrenner as quoted in Charlyn Brown, "The Strengthening Families Approach and Protective Factors Framework: Branching Out and Reaching Deeper," *Center for the Study of Social Policy*, September 2014, 38.

⁴⁸ Isaiah 49:16.

Katie, on the planet. She may be in pain, but her soul is tethered to the God of the universe and to her Godly parents.

Richard and Melissa left the counselor's office that day with very different opinions. As the initial shock wore off about Katie's suicidal ideation, Melissa came to the difficult realization that her own daughter had been slowly slipping away from her for some time. She spent hours in prayer. She took Katie out of her activities that conflicted with family dinners and significantly limited her own technology usage, as well as Katie's.

Richard, on the other hand, was angry. He was the authority and he was unwilling to change for a small child, whose main task was to obey him. One day, as he sat in the living room, stewing about a particularly nasty screaming match he and Katie had just engaged in, he overheard Katie shouting at her little sister. He began to react and then stopped. The words Katie was spewing were all too familiar; words that Richard often used to Katie; words that accused her of apathy and indifference, of making no effort and ruining their family; and worse still, of Katie's intentionality in wrong doing. Perhaps for the first time, Richard heard how harsh his words were; how damaging and unproductive.

He finally saw Katie as a human being; a human being that was deeply hurting. Richard began to think of all the times he had lost his temper with Katie; all the terrible things he had said to her in the last few months; his exasperation over her poor behavior. He thought of all the times, Katie had reached for him and he had been too busy; all the times she had sought to regulate her own emotions against his and found an out of control parent; all the times he had demanded her complete obedience without accepting his own responsibilities to her of loving God, living out his faith, and responding in a Christ-like

manner. What happened next, shocked their family system. Instead of bitterly praying that his wayward Katie would finally obey him, he found himself praying to God that Katie would forgive him. And for the first time in months, Katie saw her parents' fear, concern, and sadness, instead of their anger. And Richard saw Katie's pain, not her misbehavior.

Richard and Melissa spent hours together in prayer over the next weeks. They emerged with a renewed commitment to the Lord God and the ways God had instructed them to live. They stopped being so concerned about what Katie would be in the future and vowed to appreciate every moment left of her childhood. They threw away their parenting manuals and relied on the Spirit to guide them into the best decisions for their family. They spent time in prayer as a family, engaged in family Bible study, and began attending a small church with a focus on soul care. They prayed in the car in the morning, did the Examen on the way home at night, and ate dinner together each evening.

Richard and Melissa began to see the fruit of the Spirit not only in their own lives, but in the lives of their children, as well. Their house *felt* differently; as did all its members. Their house was no longer ruled by anger, but by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.⁴⁹ And they rediscovered the kind of unending love that “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things.”⁵⁰

Richard and Melissa found their own faith reignited in the small sound of their little children praying together and the deeply philosophical and theological discussions

⁴⁹ Gal. 5:22-23.

⁵⁰ 1 Cor. 13:7.

in the back seat of their car. They heard stories of David and Jonah, Abraham and Noah, Hannah and Samuel with fresh voices and new insights. They heard the passion in which their children spoke of Jesus and were grateful for their children's perceptive spiritual voices.

Almost a year later, Katie was discharged from counseling. No longer contemplating suicide, Katie had learned to look up, not away in times of trouble. Her parents had learned to be her secure base and the entire family completed significant work during their time in therapy. Katie will see her counselor a few times a year for the next few years for check-ups, and when Richard and Melissa are stumped by something, they do not hesitate to ask for help. They have started a support group for parents at their church, and Melissa has become very vocal with other parents about the dangers of things that interfere with natural childhood development, such as overexposure to technology, sleep deprivation, lack of play, and lack of nutritious food and exercise. Richard and Melissa have learned to appreciate the way their children see the world and the ways that children are different from adults. They have come to understand why Jesus told His followers to become like children.

The whole family, indeed, turned to the Lord with all their heart, soul, might, and mind. Katie and her sisters still misbehave, as all children do, but Melissa and Richard have regained their focus on teaching and being excellent role models. They depend on their carefully cultivated secure relationships, and when arguments and disagreements arise; they fix the ruptures instead of ignoring them. Life is no less complicated, but they rely on their God-given intuition. The family has anchored themselves in the Lord; they use God as the Secure Base from which to enter the world, exchanging glances often,

circling back when new or frightening situations present themselves, and calibrating their own systems to God and God's ways.

Five years later, other parents often approach Richard and Melissa and ask how they have such a close relationship with a teenager; how they get Katie to share so much of her life with them. In those moments, both reflect on the near catastrophe of almost losing their precious daughter and are proud of their long and hard-fought battle to bring her back to them. They are proud that they held on to her through the darkest time of their lives and determined that no matter what happened, now or in the future, – pain, loss, sorrow, joy, hope – that they, as a family, would walk through it *together*.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aigner, Jonathan. "Which One of These Churches Really Loves Kids?" Patheos, June 27, 2016. Accessed September 12, 2016. <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/ponderanew/2016/06/27/which-one-of-these-churches-really-loves-kids/>.
- Allen, Holly Catterton., ed. *Nurturing Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives and Best Practices*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008.
- Allen, Holly Catterton. "Theological Perspectives on Children in the Church: Anabaptist/Believers Church." Edited by Holly Catterton Allen. In *Nurturing Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives and Best Practices*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008.
- Anderson, Jenny. "Why Are Our Kids So Miserable." Editorial. *Quartz Media*, March 21, 2016. Accessed September 12, 2016. <https://qz.com/642351/is-the-way-we-parent-causing-a-mental-health-crisis-in-our-kids/>.
- Bakke, Odd Magne. *When Children Became People: The Birth of Childhood in Early Christianity*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005.
- Balthasar, Hans Urs Von. *Unless You Become like This Child*. Translated by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1988.
- Baron, Renee and Elizabeth Wagele. *The Enneagram Made Easy: Discover the 9 Types of People*. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994.
- Beckwith, Ivy. *Postmodern Children's Ministry: Ministry to Children in the 21st Century*. El Cajon, CA: Youth Specialties, 2004.
- Bendroth, Margaret. "Horace Bushnell's Christian Nurture." In *The Child in Christian Thought*, edited by Marcia J. Bunge. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2001.
- Benson, Peter. "The Science of Child and Adolescent Spiritual Development: Definitional, Theoretical, and Field-Building Challenges." In *The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006.
- Berryman, Jerome. "Children and Mature Spirituality." In *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications*, edited by Donald Ratcliff. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2004.
- Berryman, Jerome. *Godly Play: An Imaginative Approach to Religious Education*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1991.

- Berryman, Jerome. *The Spiritual Guidance of Children: Montessori, Godly Play, and the Future*. New York, NY: Morehouse Publishing, 2013.
- Berryman, Jerome. *Teaching Godly Play: How to Mentor the Spiritual Development of Children*. Denver, CO: Morehouse Pub., 2009.
- Bleish, Cat. "New Study: Children Who Spend More Time in Nature Are Healthier and Happier." *The Homestead Guru* (blog). Accessed January 27, 2017.
- Blevins, Dean G. "What "Has" Happened to Sin?" In *Understanding Children's Spirituality: Theology, Research, and Practice*, edited by Kevin E. Lawson. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012.
- Bowlby, John. *Attachment and Loss*. New York, NY: Basic Books, 1980.
- Bowlby, John. *Attachment*. New York, NY: Basic Books, 1969.
- Bowlby, John. *A Secure Base*. London, UK: Routledge, 1988.
- Bowlby, John. *Separation: Anxiety and Anger*. New York, NY: Basic Books, 1973.
- Boyatzis, Chris. "The Co-Construction of Spiritual Meaning in Parent-Child Communication." In *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications*, edited by Donald Ratcliff. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2004.
- Boyatzis, Chris J., David C. Dollahite, and Loren D. Marks. "The Family as a Context for Religious and Spiritual Development in Children and Youth." In *The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence*, edited by Eugene C. Roehlkepartain. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publ., 2006.
- Brekus, Catherine A. "Children of Wrath, Children of Grace." In *The Child in Christian Thought*, edited by Marcia J. Bunge. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2001.
- Brooks, David. *The Social Animal the Hidden Sources of Love, Character, and Achievement*. New York, NY: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2011.
- Brown, Carolyn C. *You Can Preach to the Kids, Too!: Designing Sermons for Adults and Children*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997.
- Brown, William P. "To Discipline without Destruction: The Multifaceted Profile of the Child in Proverbs." In *The Child in the Bible*, edited by Marcia J. Bunge. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2008.

- Bunge, Marcia. "Biblical and Theological Perspectives and Best Practices for Faith Formation." In *Understanding Children's Spirituality: Theology, Research, and Practice*, edited by Kevin E. Lawson. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012.
- Bunge, Marcia. "The Dignity and Complexity of Children." In *Nurturing Child and Adolescent Spirituality: Perspectives from the World's Religious Traditions*, edited by Karen-Marie Yust. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006.
- Bunge, Marcia. "Historical Perspectives on Children in the Church: Resources for Spiritual Formation and a Theology of Childhood Today." In *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications*, edited by Donald Ratcliff. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2004.
- Bunge, Marcia J., ed. *The Child in the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2008.
- Bushnell, Horace. *Christian Nurture*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000.
- Caldwell, Elizabeth F. "At Home with Faith and Family: A Protestant Christian Perspective." In *Nurturing Child and Adolescent Spirituality: Perspectives from the World's Religious Traditions*, edited by Karen-Marie Yust. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006.
- Callahan, Linda. "Turning Down the Noise." In *Nurturing Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives and Best Practices*, edited by Holly Catterton. Allen. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008.
- Campagnola, Shelley. "Unless You Become as One of These: Biblical Perspectives on Children's Spirituality." In *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications*, edited by Donald Ratcliff. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2004.
- Carroll, John. "'What Then Will This Child Become?'" Perspectives on Children in the Gospel of John." In *The Child in the Bible*, edited by Marcia J. Bunge. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2008.
- Castleman, Robbie. *Parenting in the Pew: Guiding Your Children into the Joy of Worship*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993.
- Cavalletti, Sofia. *The Religious Potential of the Child*. Translated by Patricia M. Coulter and Julie M. Coulter. New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1983.
- Chapman, Gary D., and Ross Campbell. *The 5 Love Languages of Children: The Secret to Loving Children Effectively*. Chicago, IL: Northfield Publishing, 2016.
- Chapman, Kathleen. *Teaching Kids Authentic Worship: How to Keep Them Close to God for Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003.

- childrenandmediaman. "New Research Shows That Parent-Child TV Viewing Changes Kids' Brain Body Connection." *Children and Media Man* (blog), November 28, 2016. Accessed November 28, 2016.
- Cline, Foster, and Jim Fay. *Parenting with Love and Logic: Teaching Children Responsibility*. Colorado Springs, CO: Pinion Press, 2006.
- Cloud, Henry, and John Sims Townsend. *Raising Great Kids: A Comprehensive Guide to Parenting with Grace and Truth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1999.
- Cohen, Lawrence J. *The opposite of Worry: The Playful Parenting Approach to Childhood Anxieties and Fears*. New York, NY: Ballantine Books Trade Paperbacks, 2013.
- Cohen, Lawrence J. *Playful Parenting: A Bold New Way to Nurture Close Connections, Solve Behavior Problems, and Encourage Children's Confidence*. New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 2001.
- Coles, Robert. *The Spiritual Life of Children*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1990.
- The Common Sense Census: Media Use by Tweens and Teens*. Report. www.common sense media.org, 2015.
- The Common Sense Census: Plugged-In Parents of Tweens and Teens 2016*. Report. www.common sense media.org, 2016.
- Crozier, Karen. "Reimagining the Spirit of Children: A Christian Pedagogical Vision." In *Nurturing Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives and Best Practices*, edited by Holly Catterton. Allen. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008.
- Dean, Kenda Creasy. *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church*. Oxford, UK: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010.
- Deis, Robert. "Spare the Rod, Spoil the Child Is Not in the Bible and May Not Mean What You Think." This Day in Quotes. November 5, 2014. Accessed September 6, 2015. <http://www.thisdayinquotes.com/2010/11/spare-rod-and-spoil-child-is-not-in.html>.
- Derhally, Lena. "Kids Don't Know How to Play on Their Own Anymore." *The Washington Post*, May 19, 2016. Accessed September 12, 2016.
- Dobson, James. "Why Spanking Isn't All It's Cracked Up to Be." The Dobson Library. Accessed March 15, 2017. <http://drjamesdobson.org/mobile-feeds/tools-to-be-a-great-father/mobile-feed-for-dads/2017/05/08/why-spanking-isn%27t-all-it%27s-cracked-up-to-be>.

- Eanes, Rebecca. "Punishing Children for Being Human." May 4, 2016. Accessed September 12, 2016. <http://www.creativechild.com/articles/view/punishing-children-for-being-human>.
- Elkind, David. *The Hurried Child: Growing up Too Fast Too Soon*. Boston, MA: Da Capo Press, 1981.
- Elkind, David. *The Power of Play: How Spontaneous, Imaginative Activities Lead to Happier, Healthier Children*. Boston, MA: Da Capo Lifelong, 2007.
- Erikson, Erik H. *Childhood and Society*. 3rd ed. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993.
- Estep, James Riley, Jr. "The Implications of Neo-Piagetian Theories of Cognitive Development for Understanding the Cognitive Dimension of Childhood Spiritual Formation." In *Understanding Children's Spirituality: Theology, Research, and Practice*, edited by Kevin E. Lawson. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012.
- Faber, Adele and Elaine Mazlish. *How to Talk so Kids Will Listen and Listen so Kids Will Talk*. New York, NY: Scribner, 1980.
- "Facts and TV Statistics." Parents Television Council. Accessed January 15, 2016. <http://w2.parentstv.org/main/>.
- Flanagan, Kelly and Rebecca Loveall. "Forgiveness, Peer Relations, and Children's Spirituality." In *Understanding Children's Spirituality: Theology, Research, and Practice*, edited by Kevin E. Lawson. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012.
- Fowler, James W. *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*. New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1981.
- Gillett, Tracy. "Simplifying Childhood May Protect Against Mental Health Issues." *Raised Good*, March 4, 2016. Accessed March 28, 2016. <http://raisedgood.com/extraordinary-things-happen-when-we-simplify-childhood/>.
- Gottman, John. *Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1997.
- Graham, Linda. "The Neuroscience of Attachment." *Resources for Recovering Resilience*, Fall 2008. <https://lindagraham-mft.net/the-neuroscience-of-attachment/>.
- Gray, Peter. "The Decline of Play and Rise in Children's Mental Disorders." *Psychology Today*, January 26, 2010. Accessed October 5, 2015.
- Greene, Ross W., PhD. *Raising Human Beings*. New York, NY: Scribner, 2016.

- Greenman, Jeffrey P., and George Kalantzis. *Life in the Spirit: Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010.
- Gundry, Judith M. "Children in the Gospel of Mark." In *The Child in the Bible*, edited by Marcia J. Bunge. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2008.
- Gundry-Volf, Judith M. "The Least and the Greatest." In *The Child in Christian Thought*, edited by Marcia J. Bunge. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2001.
- Guroian, Vigen. "The Ecclesial Family." In *The Child in Christian Thought*, edited by Marcia J. Bunge. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2001.
- Hadley, Leanne. *Blessed to Be a Blessing*. Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 2016.
- Hadley, Leanne. "L.E.A.D. Kids." Lecture, The Holston Conference of the United Methodist Church, www.leannehadley.com, August 15, 2015.
- Hadley, Leanne. *Spiritual Support*. PhD diss., Union Theological Seminary, 2007.
- Hart, Tobin. *The Secret Spiritual World of Children*. Novato, CA: New World Library, 2003.
- Hart, Tobin. "Spiritual Experiences and Capacities of Children and Youth." In *The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006.
- Haywood, Janice. *Enduring Connections: Creating a Preschool and Children's Ministry*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2006.
- Hill, Megan. "Let the Children Have a Turn to Pray." ChurchLeaders.com. April 5, 2016. Accessed September 12, 2016. <https://churchleaders.com/children/childrens-ministry-articles/276590-let-children-turn-pray.html>.
- Hobby, Kristen. *Nurturing a Gentle Heart: Exploring Spirituality with Pre-schoolers*. South Carolina, USA: Kristen Hobby, 2008.
- Hood, Ralph W., Peter C. Hill, and Bernard Spilka. *The Psychology of Religion*. 4th ed. New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2009.
- "How Compulsive Texting Affects Teens at School." *CBS News*, October 5, 2015. Accessed October 5, 2015.
- Issler, Klaus. "Biblical Perspectives on Developmental Grace." In *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications*, edited by Donald Ratcliff. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2004.

- James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience, a Study in Human Nature. Being the Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion Delivered at Edinburgh 1901-1902*. London, UK: Longmans, Green, 1952.
- Job, Rueben P. and Leanne Ciampa Hadley. *When You Pray as a Family*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2010.
- Johnson, Carl N. and Chris J. Boyatzis. "Cognitive-Cultural Foundations of Spiritual Development." In *The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence*, edited by Eugene C. Roehlkepartain. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publ., 2006.
- Kelley, Brien. "Spiritually Oriented Psychotherapy with Youth: A Child-Centered Approach." Edited by Eugene Roehlkepartain. In *The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence*, by Lisa Miller. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006.
- Klein, Helen Altman. "For Parents Particularly: Family Dinners." *Childhood Education* 77, no. 2 (2000): 102-03. Accessed January 11, 2016. doi:10.1080/00094056.2001.10521641.
- Knopf, Alison. "Cyberbullying Linked to Mental Health Problems in Teens; Protective Factor Seen in Family Dinners." *The Brown University Child and Adolescent Behavior Letter* 31, no. 1 (2014): 4-5. Accessed January 11, 2016. doi:10.1002/cbl.30012.
- Kohlenberger, John R. and James A. Swanson. *The Hebrew-English Concordance to the Old Testament: With the New International Version*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publ. House, 1998.
- Korneck, Eva Jenny. "What Children and Adolescents Think about Theodicy and How the Book of Job Can Help: The Case for Using Job in Children's Bibles." In *Understanding Children's Spirituality: Theology, Research, and Practice*, edited by Kevin Lawson. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012.
- Lawson, Kevin. "Baptismal Practices and the Spiritual Nurture of Children." In *Understanding Children's Spirituality: Theology, Research, and Practice*, edited by Kevin Lawson. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012.
- Lawson, Kevin Ethan, ed. *Understanding Children's Spirituality: Theology, Research, and Practice*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012.
- L'Engle, Madeleine. *A Wrinkle in Time*. New York, NY: Bantam Doubleday Dell Books for Young Readers, 1973.
- Lewis, C. S. *The Chronicles of Narnia*. London, UK: HarperCollins, 2005.
- Lewis, C. S. *The Four Loves*. New York, NY: Mariner Books, 1960.

- Lewis, Thomas, Fari Amini, and Richard Lannon. *A General Theory of Love*. New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2000.
- Linn, Dennis, Sheila Fabricant Linn, and Matthew Linn. *Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives You Life*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1995.
- Louv, Richard. *Last Child in the Woods*. Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books, 2008.
- Louv, Richard. *Vitamin N: The Essential Guide to a Nature-rich Life*. Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2016.
- MacBeth, Sybil. *Praying in Color Kids' Edition*. Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2009.
- MacNamara, Deborah. *Rest, Play, Grow: Making Sense of Preschoolers (or Anyone Who Acts like One)*. Vancouver, CA: Aona Books, 2016.
- MacNamara, Deborah. "Parenting in a Digital Age: United Nations Address for the Global Day of Parents." Address. Accessed January 27, 2017.
<http://macnamara.ca/portfolio/parenting-in-a-digital-age-united-nations-address-for-the-global-day-of-parents/>.
- Margalit, Liraz. "This Is What Screen Time Really Does to Kids' Brains." *Psychology Today*, April 17, 2016. Accessed September 12, 2016.
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/behind-online-behavior/201604/what-screen-time-can-really-do-kids-brains>.
- May, Scottie, Beth Posterski, Catherine Stonehouse, and Linda Cannell. *Children Matter: Celebrating Their Place in the Church, Family, and Community*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2005.
- May, Scottie, Katie Stemp, and Grant Burns. "Children's Place in the New Forms of Church." In *Understanding Children's Spirituality: Theology, Research, and Practice*, edited by Kevin E. Lawson. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012.
- McClurg, Lesley. "Kids Think Parents Are Hypocrites When It Comes to Rules on Screen Time, Study Says." *KQED Public Media*, March 11, 2016. Accessed March 12, 2016.
<https://ww2.kqed.org/futureofyou/2016/03/11/kids-think-parents-are-hypocrites-when-it-comes-to-rules-on-screen-time-study-says/>.
- Menn, Esther M. "Child Character in Biblical Narratives: The Young David (1 Samuel 16-17) and the Little Israelite Servant Girl (2 Kings 5:1-19)." In *The Child in the Bible*, edited by Marcia J. Bunge. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2008.
- Mercer, Joyce Ann. *Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2005.

- Miller, Patrick D. "That the Children May Know." In *The Child in the Bible*, edited by Marcia J. Bunge. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Pub., 2008.
- Morgenthaler, Shirley K., Jeffrey B. Keiser, and Mimi L. Larson. "Nurturing the Infant Soul: The Importance of Community and Memories in the Spiritual Formation of Young Children." *Christian Education Journal* 11, no. 2 (Fall 2014): 244-59. Accessed September 28, 2015.
- Nadworny, Elissa. "Middle School Suicides Reach an All-time High." NPR. November 4, 2016. Accessed November 4, 2016. <http://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2016/11/04/500659746/middle-school-suicides-reach-an-all-time-high>.
- Neufeld, Gordon and Gabor Mate. *Hold on to Your Kids: Why Parents Need to Matter More than Peers*. Updated ed. New York, NY: Ballantine Books Trade Paperbacks, 2014.
- Neufeld, Gordon. Facebook meme. Digital image. The Neufeld Institute Facebook. October 4, 2015. Accessed October 4, 2015.
- Neufeld, Gordon. "A Playful Approach to Discipline." Editorial. *The Neufeld Institute*, March 10, 2016. Accessed March 14, 2016. <http://neufeldinstitute.org/a-playful-approach-to-discipline/>.
- Neufeld, Gordon. "The Vital Connection." Lecture, The Power to Parent, The Neufeld Institute, October 15, 2015.
- "No Fuss Parenting - Teach Kids to Sit Still." *The Domestic Fringe* (blog), April 17, 2013. Accessed February 12, 2017. <http://thedomesticfringe.com/no-fuss-parenting-teach-kids-to-sit-still/>.
- Nouwen, Henri. *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming*. New York, NY: Image Books, 1994.
- Novotney, Amy. "Smart Phone = Not so Smart Parenting." *American Psychological Association* 47, no. 2 (February 2016). Accessed January 11, 2017. <http://www.apa.org/monitor/2016/02/smartphone.aspx>.
- Nye, Rebecca, "Christian Perspectives on Children's Spirituality: Social Science Contributions?" In *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications*, edited by Donald Ratcliff. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2004.
- Perry, Bruce Duncan and Maia Szalavitz. *Born for Love: Why Empathy Is Essential - and Endangered*. New York, NY: HarperPaperbacks, 2011.

- Perry, Bruce Duncan and Maia Szalavitz. *The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog: And Other Stories from a Child Psychiatrist's Notebook: What Traumatized Children Can Teach Us about Loss, Love, and Healing*. New York, NY: Basic Books, 2006.
- Perry, David. "The Impact of Pornography on Children." American College of Pediatricians. June 2016. Accessed July 15, 2017. <https://www.acped.org/the-college-speaks/position-statements/the-impact-of-pornography-on-children>.
- Peterson, Eugene H. *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2005.
- Piaget, Jean, Jerome Kagan, and Bairbel Inhelder. Foreword. In *The Psychology of the Child*. 2nd ed. New York, NY: Basic Books, 2000.
- Pinson, William M. *The Biblical View of the Family*. Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 1981.
- Pitkin, Barbara. "The Heritage of the Lord." In *The Child in Christian Thought*, edited by Marcia Bunge. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2001.
- Postman, Neil. *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Showbusiness*. New York, NY: Penguin, 1985.
- Postman, Neil. *The Disappearance of Childhood*. 2nd ed. New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1994.
- Postman, Neil. *Technopoly*. New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1992.
- Powell, Kara. *The Sticky Faith Guide for Your Family: Over 100 Practical and Tested Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Kids*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014.
- Pritchard, Gretchen Wolff. *Offering the Gospel to Children*. Lanham, MD: Roman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008.
- Ratcliff, Donald and Marcia G. McQuitty, eds. *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2004.
- Ratcliff, Donald, and Rebecca Nye. "Childhood Spirituality: Strengthening the Research Foundation." In *The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence*, edited by Eugene Roehlkepartain. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006.
- Ratcliff, Donald and Scottie May. "Identifying Children's Spirituality." In *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications*, edited by Donald Ratcliff. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2004.

- Ratcliff, Donald. "The Spirit of Children Past: A Century of Children's Spirituality Research." In *Nurturing Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives and Best Practices*, edited by Holly Catterton. Allen. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008.
- Riso, Don Richard and Russ Hudson. *The Wisdom of the Enneagram: The Complete Guide to Psychological and Spiritual Growth for the Nine Personality Types*. New York, NY: Bantam, 1999.
- Roberts, Rachel. "The Play Predicament." *Parks and Recreation* 44, no. 4 (April 2009): 21-24. Accessed February 1, 2016.
- Roehlkepartain, Eugene, ed. *The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006.
- Roehlkepartain, Eugene. "Exploring Scientific and Theological Perspectives on Children's Spirituality." In *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications*, edited by Donald Ratcliff. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2004.
- Roehlkepartain, Eugene. "Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence: Moving to the Scientific Mainstream." In *The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence*, edited by Eugene Roehlkepartain. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006.
- Rolheiser, Ronald. *The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality*. New York, NY: Image, 2014.
- Rosemond, John. "Home Page." Accessed March 15, 2017. www.johnrosemond.com.
- Rosemond, John. "ParentGuru.com Helping Parents Raise Responsible Adults." ParentGuru Helping Parents Raise Responsible Adults. Accessed March 15, 2017. <http://www.parentguru.com/>.
- Rosemond, John. *Parenting by the Book: Biblical Wisdom for Raising Your Child*. New York, NY: Howard Books, 2013.
- Ruppell, Linda. "Using Developmentally Appropriate Practice." In *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications*, edited by Donald Ratcliff. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2004.
- Sandell, Elizabeth J. *Including Children in Worship: A Planning Guide for Congregations*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1991.
- Santrock, John W. *Psychology*. 6th ed. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2000.
- Sax, Leonard. *The Collapse of Parenting: How We Hurt Our Kids When We Treat Them like Grown-ups*. New York, NY: Basic Books, 2016.

- Scarlett, W. George. "Toward a Developmental Analysis of Religious and Spiritual Development." Edited by Eugene Roehlkepartain. In *The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006.
- Schultz, Duane P. and Sydney Ellen Schultz. *A History of Modern Psychology*. 7th ed. Orlando, FL: Harcourt College Publishers, 2000.
- Schwartz, Howard. "Narrative and Imagination: The Role of Texts and Storytelling in Nurturing Spirituality in Judaism." In *Nurturing Child and Adolescent Spirituality: Perspectives from the World's Religious Traditions*, edited by Karen-Marie Yust. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006.
- Shigematsu, Ken. *God in My Everything: How an Ancient Rhythm Helps Busy People Enjoy God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013.
- Short, Sharon Warkentin. "The Story That Grew." In *Understanding Children's Spirituality: Theology, Research, and Practice*, edited by Kevin E. Lawson. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012.
- Siegel, Daniel and Tina Payne Bryson. *No-drama Discipline: The Whole-Brain Way to Calm the Chaos and Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind*. New York, NY: Bantam Books, 2016.
- Siegel, Daniel and Tina Payne Bryson. "The Whole-Brain Child Approach." Lecture, The Mindsight Approach to Childhood and Adolescence, PESI, January 15, 2017.
- Siegel, Daniel. "Brainstorm: A Clinician's Guide to the Changing and Challenging Adolescent Brain." Lecture, The Mindsight Approach to Childhood and Adolescence, PESI, January 15, 2017.
- Siegel, Daniel J. and Mary Hartzell. *Parenting from the inside Out: How a Deeper Self-understanding Can Help You Raise Children Who Thrive*. New York, NY: Penguin, 2004.
- Siegel, Daniel J. and Tina Payne Bryson. *The Whole-Brain Child: 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind*. New York, NY: Bantam Books Trade Paperbacks, 2012.
- Siegel, Daniel J. *Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain*. New York, NY: Penguin Group USA, 2015.
- Siegel, Daniel J. *The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are*. 2nd ed. New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2015.
- Siegel, Daniel J. *Mindsight: The New Science of Personal Transformation*. New York, NY: Bantam Books Trade Paperbacks, 2011.

- Siegel, Daniel. "Secure Attachment: Parenting from the Inside Out." *US News*, January 9, 2017. Accessed January 9, 2017. <https://health.usnews.com/wellness/for-parents/articles/2017-01-09/secure-attachment-parenting-from-the-inside-out>.
- Silberman, Shoshana. "Sanctifying Time: A Jewish Perspective on Prayer, Holy Days, and Blessings in the Life of Children." In *Nurturing Child and Adolescent Spirituality: Perspectives from the World's Religious Traditions*, edited by Karen-Marie Yust. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006.
- Smith, Christian and Melinda Lundquist Denton. *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Stewart, Sonja M. and Jerome Berryman. *Young Children and Worship*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989.
- Stewart, Sonja M. *Following Jesus: More about Young Children and Worship*. Louisville, KY: Geneva Press, 2000.
- Stonehouse, Catherine. "After a Child's First Dance with God: Accompanying Children on a Protestant Spiritual Journey." In *Nurturing Child and Adolescent Spirituality: Perspectives from the World's Religious Traditions*, edited by Karen-Marie Yust. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006.
- Stonehouse, Catherine. "Children in Wesleyan Thought." In *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications*, edited by Donald Ratcliff. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2004.
- Stonehouse, Catherine. *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey: Nurturing a Life of Faith*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998.
- Strauss, Valerie. "The Decline of Play in Preschoolers and the Rise in Sensory Issues." *The Washington Post*, September 1, 2015. Accessed September 12, 2016.
- Strawn, Brent. "Israel, My Child." In *The Child in the Bible*, edited by Marcia J. Bunge. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2008.
- Strohl, Jane E. "The Child in Luther's Theology." In *The Child in Christian Thought*, edited by Marcia J. Bunge. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2001.
- Strong, James. *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. McLean, VA: MacDonald.
- Sweet, Leonard I. *From Tablet to Table: Where Community Is Found and Identity Is Formed*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2014.

- Sweet, Leonard I. *The Well-Played Life: Why Pleasing God Doesn't Have to Be Such Hard Work*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2014.
- Tabb, Lisa. "The New Summer Camp Anxiety: Unplugging Angst." Screenagers. July 11, 2016. Accessed September 12, 2016. <https://www.screenagersmovie.com/tech-talk-tuesdays/the-new-summer-camp-anxiety-unplugging-angst>.
- Thompson, Marianne Meye. "Children in the Gospel of John." In *The Child in the Bible*, edited by Marcia J. Bunge. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2008.
- Tolbert, La Verne. "Orphans Among Us." In *Understanding Children's Spirituality: Theology, Research, and Practice*, edited by Kevin E. Lawson. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012.
- Tomczak, Larry. *God, the Rod, and Your Child's Bod: The Art of Loving Correction for Christian Parents*. Old Tappan, NJ: Power Books, 1982.
- Towner, W. Sibley. "Children and the Image of God." In *The Child in the Bible*, edited by Marcia J. Bunge. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2008.
- Turkle, Sherry. "Stop Googling. Let's Talk." *The New York Times*, September 26, 2015. Accessed March 28, 2016.
- Wagele, Elizabeth. *The Enneagram of Parenting: The 9 Types of Children and How to Raise Them Successfully*. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997.
- Watkins, T. Wyatt. "Unfettered Wonder: Rediscovering Prayer Through the Inspired Voices of Children." In *Nurturing Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives and Best Practices*, edited by Holly Catterton. Allen. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008.
- Westerhoff, John. "The Church's Contemporary Challenge: Assisting Adults to Mature Spiritually with Their Children." In *Nurturing Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives and Best Practices*, edited by Holly Catterton. Allen. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008.
- Westerhoff, John H. *Will Our Children Have Faith?* 3rd ed. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Pub., 2012.
- White, Keith J. "'He Placed a Little Child in the Midst': Jesus, the Kingdom, and Children." In *The Child in the Bible*, edited by Marcia J. Bunge. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2008.
- Willard, Dallas. *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*. New York, NY: HarperOne, 1997.
- Woodley, Randy S. *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012.

Wulff, David. *Psychology of Religion: Classic and Contemporary*. 2nd ed. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, 1997.

“Youth Suicide Statistics.” The Parent Resource Program. Accessed July 15, 2016.
<http://jasonfoundation.com/>.

Yust, Karen. “Being Faithful Together.” In *Understanding Children's Spirituality: Theology, Research, and Practice*, edited by Kevin E. Lawson. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012.

Yust, Karen-Marie, ed. *Nurturing Child and Adolescent Spirituality: Perspectives from the World's Religious Traditions*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006.

Yust, Karen-Marie. *Real Kids, Real Faith: Practices for Nurturing Children's Spiritual Lives*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004.

Zero to Eight: Children's Media Use in America. Report. www.common sense media.org, 2013.