

Children of Promise

Bible Studies

**Thomas & Elvice McAlpine
Rebecca Russell**







To the children who have taught World Vision how to serve, and allowed us to see Jesus in their lives.

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Foreword

Over the past two years, the World Vision Partnership engaged in a deeply spiritual process to envision our future and then describe it in a succinct, inspiring and Christ-centered vision statement. More than 6,000 staff members from over 70 offices joined in reflection, prayer and Scripture study to understand more fully what God wants for World Vision.

I was privileged to participate in the prayerful discussion in which members of the New Vision Steering Committee analyzed the results of this extensive exercise. We found ourselves returning again and again to the words of Jesus in John 10:10b (Good News Bible): “I have come that you might have life, life in all its fullness.”

We saw those words as applying particularly to children, who represent the heart of our ministry and our hope for the future. John 10:10 centers us in Christ and challenges us to embrace the fullness of life that God intends for all humankind.

Through the lens of John 10:10 the Holy Spirit led us to our new Partnership vision statement:

Our vision for every child, life in all its fullness;

Our prayer for every heart, the will to make it so.

As you contemplate these scriptural reflections on children, I encourage you to keep our vision statement in mind. Imagine, if you will, how World Vision can bring life in all its fullness to every child. And let your prayer help us to find the will and the way to make it so.

Dean R. Hirsch
President and Chief Executive Officer



Introduction

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” He called a child, whom he put among them, and said, “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 18:1–3)

Childhood is, in important ways, a relatively modern concept. And yet throughout history, certainly throughout our own Scriptures, people and nations have been judged according to the ways in which children are protected and raised to adulthood or are alienated, used and abused.

As an organization committed to the well-being of children and committed to serving children in imitation of Jesus, as modeled in Scripture, World Vision has much at stake in its responsibility for “getting it right” when it comes to nurturing children’s spirituality—in our own families and communities and ministries.

How do we integrate the gospel and child advocacy? Do we sentimentalize children, poverty, or Jesus’ concern for children? Children, in fact, can stand at the very center of both Old and New Testament narratives. In every generation, including ours, children are the front line where the future is decided: peace, mercy and justice or enmity, wars and perversion. At both family and international levels, children live out the consequences of the previous generations’ choices. We sing “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” But do we read the Bible as placing children at the center of God’s redemptive and salvation agenda?

The Bible takes children far more seriously than most adults do. If we are to learn what Jesus meant by instructing his disciples to become like children, if we really believe that our place in the kingdom of God depends upon our protection of children and our becoming like children, then we are compelled to pay more attention to children. As we do this, we may be surprised to discover that much more is going on in children’s early years than adults typically assume.

Thanks to serious research in recent years, much is being learned about spirituality as an innate human capacity, about the links between spirituality and behaviors both personal and civic, about how child devel-

opment patterns affect views of God. In World Vision's own work, a gathering synthesis of the Spiritual Enrichment Task Force, the Transformational Development framework and the recommendations of the Commission on the Church all lead to open opportunities and strategic challenges to deepen our reflection and action regarding the spirituality of children.

World Vision has worked "hands on" with almost two million children in more than 1,800 projects, plus hundreds of thousands of refugees and displaced peoples. This Bible study guide was developed to allow World Vision staff and others committed to ministering to children to look at Scripture anew, and allow God's Word to shape our lives and work more completely.

Increasingly, World Vision and other organizations that work alongside children are learning two things: (1) that children's relationship with God starts long before any adult initiates religious instruction; and (2) that nurturing children holistically requires us to pay attention to children's environment in their earliest years. The Scriptures we are about to study certainly challenge and discredit many of the world's existing models of how children are treated. And some ancient models in which children thrive have been forgotten.

Acknowledging that God invites and responds to children in many different ways, World Vision seeks to develop a model for nurturing and empowering children's relationship with God. One resource we use is the accumulating research and practices of Christian educators working in the tradition of Dr. Maria Montessori. The perspectives offered in these Bible studies owe much to her work. In the twentieth century Dr. Montessori was Italy's first woman medical doctor, and her work among children with special difficulties led to worldwide reforms in children's education. Based on her work, Dr. Sofia Cavalletti, an Italian Catholic educator and Hebrew scholar, developed a form of religious education known as Catechesis of the Good Shepherd.

Cavalletti's learnings, described in *The Religious Potential of the Child*, along with Jerome Berryman's adaptation of her work for Reformed Protestant traditions, called *Godly Play*, offer World Vision, our staff, and our families a treasure from which to draw and enrich children's spiritual lives. Cavalletti designed simple materials (for example, cloth backgrounds and wooden figures) to tell a biblical story or introduce

a theological or liturgical concept such as the Lord's Supper or baptism. Montessori-style guidelines (such as instructing adult teachers to speak quietly and slowly, use few words, ask "wondering" questions, and so on) help adults to draw children gently into hearing and experiencing Bible story activities. Emphasis is placed on giving children a peaceful, encouraging environment to work or "play," where they can explore and reflect on what they're learning, perhaps reenacting the spiritual lesson, or using clay or other craft materials. In a paper for World Vision, educator Holly Allen writes that Cavalletti also emphasizes embracing children into the larger community of faith—allowing them to experience God and worship with us, learning to walk with God by watching and imitating, rather than isolating children by age and relying on indoctrination to do the job. Cavalletti gives examples of children (even as young as three or four) grasping the symbolic meaning of light and darkness, death and resurrection, the bread and the wine. Montessori and Cavalletti believe that God initiates the relationship that grows between the child and God. The work of Christian educators is to nurture the child's relationship with God.

Of course, children's experiences of God through history are not limited to the theories and observations of these experts or any others. Jesus challenged the Pharisees by citing the psalmist: "Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself." Children themselves eloquently testify to their experiences of "conversion," recognizing and embracing God's love for them, realizing their individual need for a savior, demonstrating great capacity to respond with tenderness to God's presence and voice, turning away from sin. The authenticity of children's testimony can and should bring us all to our knees, reminding the entire community of faith of our deepest needs for change and growth into the likeness of Jesus. For these reasons we've attempted throughout these studies to integrate the witness of children.

At World Vision we seek to honor and support conversations already taking place between God and the children with whom we live and work, particularly those children in especially difficult circumstances. As Christians, we are without excuse if we allow conditions of poverty, humanitarian emergencies, or any other circumstances to rob this religious potential from the next generation of God's children.

At the same time, we recognize our own need to be transformed, to become like Jesus, who speaks so respectfully and protectively of “these little ones who believe in me” (Matt. 18:6). Many cultures see childhood as no more than a transitional stage on the way to full humanity in adulthood. The Bible’s perspective is that an essential part of healthy adulthood is preserving or recovering one’s identity as God’s child.

In terms of World Vision’s organizational pilgrimage, these studies seek to open space to explore how our spiritual enrichment can and should be shaped by our ministries with children—rather than isolating ministry with children and spiritual enrichment as two separate agendas.

Children teach us to live our lives by asking the big questions:

- If I’m good most of the time, will I still go to heaven?
- How can God always be forever and forever?
- Why did God let my baby sister die?
- Is Satan a person? Can I see him?
- Is Grandma in heaven?
- Why didn’t God make us so that we would choose good all of the time?

World Vision staff in field offices around the globe report examples of children raising profound questions and offering insights far beyond what adults might have been expecting. Others also document this capacity among children.

Because God initiates spiritual relationships with children the world over, it is not surprising that children reflect that relationship in their spiritual questions, their open praise, their trusting prayers, their simple confidence in their Creator. In her doctoral dissertation Kathleen O’Connell Chesto, a religious educator, tells this story about her daughter:

I remember coming across Elizabeth at two years of age, celebrating Eucharist in her room with a brass candlestick and a small white disk. Over and over again she repeated, “This is my Body.” When I asked her later if she had hoped to change

the disk into Jesus, she responded, “Oh, no. I change Wizbef into Jesus.” It only took a moment to realize how much better her theology was than mine. What does it matter if the bread and wine are changed if the people who celebrate with bread and wine are not transformed into Jesus? Six graduate credits in sacramental theology had failed to teach me what my child had grasped at two.

An Overview of the Bible studies

Three themes stand out in these studies:

1. **The physical and spiritual well-being of children is a measure of the health of a community.** Isaiah 65 and many of the Bible texts make this absolute. Healthy communities do not marginalize their children. Healthy communities honor children as gifts from God, for whom adults are accountable to God. To learn whether a community is healthy, there are few better ways than to look at how it treats its children.
2. **God is already at work in children’s lives. God pursues each of us from our beginning.** Just as God is at work in communities before World Vision arrives, so God is also at work in children’s lives. Psalm 139 is a joyous shout that even the smallest child is significant to the universe, that God knit each of us in the womb for God’s own purposes. Confidence comes from being able to celebrate God’s care from our earliest moments and through the hard work of discerning God’s presence in the dark periods of our lives. What we believe about the significance of our own history affects what we believe about the developing destinies of children with whom we interact. As we work with children, we can make their dialogue with God easier or harder, but it is God who initiates the dialogue.
3. **The child is a paradigm for our life before God.** Growth in faith means not only becoming a child again, but also guarding the wonder and sense of expectancy and the eagerness to love and learn that children demonstrate. What-

ever our physical or spiritual age, Scripture makes it clear that children have something to teach us.

Jesus' own experience of childhood model these themes. Like many children today, Jesus' life was touched by horrors, including the slaughter of the innocents and life as a refugee. But he also knew the enriching embrace of community, as a 12-year-old full of questions and ideas in the Temple. Jesus operated from a sure knowledge of God's character, and maintained a childlike trust and confidence in God in adulthood.

All of us are or have been children, and for the rest of our earthly lives we will be working through our childhood experiences. Further, God's call on Christians to be spiritual mothers and fathers is universal, regardless of whether we are raising biological offspring. In our homes, churches and communities, we make decisions that either welcome children into the center of our life or push them to the edges. May we have the courage to open ourselves to God's words and respond to our sacred responsibilities.

How to Use the Studies

You can use these studies in a number of ways, all designed to nurture your conversations with God, initiated in Scripture:

1. Use the study as written. Depending on participants' interaction, a particular study may take 15 to 45 minutes. Or you may decide to take two or three morning devotionals to read and pray through one study.
2. Prayerfully read through the study and add or omit segments as the Holy Spirit guides group discussion and prayer.
3. Occasionally you may want to highlight the biblical text and use the process of group *lectio* (described below) or another method of praying the Scriptures, such as the Lumko Institute's *Seven Steps*.

Whatever you choose, look for ways to remind yourselves as a group that to contemplate Scripture is to come to holy ground. You might take off your shoes, light a candle, or begin and end with a short time

of silence. Ask God to help your group discern how the Bible text might nurture your lives and work in the coming week.

Praying the Scriptures (Group)

Praying the Scriptures is not complicated. One simple and ancient format is called *lectio divina* (which means “sacred reading”). There are many books about lectio available, but the steps are basically these:

1. **Prepare** by becoming silent, breathing deeply, praying a favorite prayer silently, or using another method to open yourself to hear God’s Word.
2. As a member of the group reads the text aloud, listen closely to the Word of God.
3. **Reflect** about how this text speaks to your life.
4. **Reread** the biblical text.
5. **Pray** for one another, that all will be able to respond to God’s invitation in this text.





God's Agenda

**Redeeming the World
through Children**



Study I

The Kingdom of God Belongs to Children

Adults often try to “manage” children, to make them less demanding and less inconvenient. Some of us are even proud of how well we manage to keep our family life from interfering with our work or ministry commitments. Perhaps the disciples felt like this, because they didn’t seem to expect Jesus’ rebuke for trying to protect his time and focus. Then, as now, children were often excluded from important events in the life of a community or church. Sometimes we call this “maintaining appropriate boundaries.”

But Jesus recognized how easily children trust and love, and he considered this lack of self-protection and inhibition precious! He didn’t

Insight

In calling us to become like little children, Jesus was calling us to something far more serious and involved than merely trying to emulate a few of their easily observed characteristics. I believe he was calling us to a life-long journey of growth and transformation —of continually turning and changing and becoming always more like them, but I believe he was first calling us to look at them. In order to become like them, we must first come to know them. We must first find out who they are and, especially, what their relationship with God is like.

— Rebekah Rojcewicz

want to be protected from their noisy good spirits and joyfulness. Jesus declared that intrusive, affectionate, bothersome children are models for entering the reign of God. This says as much about God, about God’s reign, about Jesus, and about us, as it does about children.

If the kingdom of God belongs to children, how seriously must we take them? How important are the details of their daily lives? What is the price of our hurting them?

And how can we adults receive God's kingdom "as a little child"? What might being bothersome and intrusive with God do to our prayer life? Do we pull away from Jesus' embrace? Are we too preoccupied with our own future to experience Jesus' blessing now?

As we look closely at Jesus' hands-on care for children, may we see Jesus more clearly and understand who we ought to be.

Biblical Text

MARK 10:13–16

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.

Responses

1. People brought their little children to Jesus. What does that tell us about Jesus?
2. What do we imagine the disciples saying? What were their concerns?
3. What does "let the little children come to me" have to do with "receiving the kingdom as a little child"? Why was Jesus "indignant"?
4. In what ways do we (and/or adult systems) get between Jesus and the little children?
5. What can we learn from children about receiving and/or entering the kingdom of God? How does this affect our understanding of salvation?

Study 2

God Speaks Through Children

It is easy for our assumptions, or our experience, or even our training for the adult world to get in the way of our support of God's work in the life of a child. In the story of Samuel and Eli, God clearly expects children to participate actively in transforming the life of the community, even if this means honestly confronting adults' failures. Do we look at our children and truly expect God to do great things through them?

Samuel did not have an ideal childhood. He was given up by his parents, and his spiritual guidance may have left something to be desired (in light of Eli's difficulties with his own sons). But divine power was at work in Samuel's life nevertheless.

In the Pottuvil ADP (Area Development Program) in Sri Lanka, sponsored children have helped police destroy the illegal brewing of alcohol that was destroying their community. Men were especially abusive to spouses and children because of this drinking. The children organized a march in their community and then tipped off the police to more than 200 illegal brewing situations. The police now say that 95 percent of alcohol brewing in the community has disappeared, and this isolated fishing village has been freed in an extraordinary way. In one specific example, the children found a grandmother who was brewing illegal alcohol. When they challenged her, she said it was the only way she could care for her grandchild. The children responded, "We will find some land for you, clear it so that you can have a garden, and dig you a well for water." And they did. The children's actions were an example to the adults; now the adults are starting to work together to build a new environment in their community.

The Bible offers other examples of children who knew and acted on God's presence in their lives. At age seven Joash became king of Judah and "did what was right in the eyes of the Lord" (2 Kings 12:1–2). Like Samuel, Joash was helped by the spiritual guidance of a priest.

Another boy king, Josiah, was eight when he was crowned king of Judah; he too “did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, and walked in all the ways of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right or to the left” (2 Kings 22:1–2).

The God of the Bible frequently does important work through the weak, the vulnerable, the powerless. Through the ages this has surprised, even alarmed, both God’s followers and God’s enemies. In the story of Naaman’s servant girl (2 Kings 5:1–3), two kings and the commander of an army become aware of God when the girl urges her master to go to Elisha to seek healing of his leprosy. Joseph, David, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were probably teenagers when they demonstrated their great commitment to God, a commitment established in childhood.

These stories testify that children’s witness to their experiences with God can evangelize adults and transform lives. The youngest in her family, Lani was recommended for World Vision sponsorship in grade three. This was in 1992 in Mindanao, Philippines. She says being a sponsored child has been the best gift of her life, because this led to her *tatay* (father) Paterno joining God’s fold. Lani would ask her *tatay* to attend and join sponsored parents’ fellowships. Every time her *tatay* said no, she reminded him that she could be dropped from the sponsorship program if her parents didn’t cooperate and support the program. She told him how unhappy that would make her. In time, he went. And Lani saw a remarkable change in her *tatay*. From being a gambler and a drunkard, he turned into a man of faith. He proudly points out that before, he was the first to arrive at cockpit arenas, but now he gets prizes for being the first to arrive at Bible studies and fellowships. Lani’s faithfulness to her sponsorship obligations helped bring about a new way of life with God for her whole family.

Insight

When I told my mother I’d had a dream about God—that I was taken to see Him, and He was living in a cabin in the woods, and looked pretty poor and tired, and had rags on, but served me warm soup—she took me seriously. I was 13 or 14, I think, maybe younger.

—Dorothy Day

Of course, Eli offers a cautionary tale for adults and parents. John Chrysostom charged Eli with neglect of his sons, because Eli did not take enough personal responsibility for correcting his sons. We cannot just please our children. We must also do what is necessary to bring them up. Although God may choose to speak through children, this in no way allows adults to escape from our own responsibilities to our children (see also Matt. 18:6).

Biblical Text

1 SAMUEL 3:1–21

¹ Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli. The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.

² At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; ³ the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was. ⁴ Then the Lord called, “Samuel! Samuel!” and he said, “Here I am!” ⁵ and ran to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call; lie down again.” So he went and lay down. ⁶ The Lord called again, “Samuel!” Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” But he said, “I did not call, my son; lie down again.” ⁷ Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. ⁸ The Lord called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, “Here I am, for you called me.” Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy. ⁹ Therefore Eli said to Samuel, “Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, ‘Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

¹⁰ Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”

¹¹ Then the Lord said to Samuel, “See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears of it tingle. ¹² On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. ¹³ For I have told him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them. ¹⁴ Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli’s house shall not be expiated by sacrifice or offering forever.”

¹⁵ Samuel lay there until morning; then he opened the doors of the house of the Lord. Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. ¹⁶ But Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son." He said, "Here I am." ¹⁷ Eli said, "What was it that he told you? Do not hide it from me. May God do so to you and more also, if you hide anything from me of all that he told you." ¹⁸ So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. Then he said, "It is the Lord; let him do what seems good to him."

¹⁹ As Samuel grew up, the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. ²⁰ And all Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the Lord. ²¹ The Lord continued to appear at Shiloh, for the Lord revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the Lord.

Responses

1. Did you ever hear God's call during your childhood? If so, what did God reveal to you? How did the adults around you react? Did they help you or make it difficult to respond to the call?
2. Do we believe that God actively calls to children? Even to children who do not know the Lord? Have you ever heard a spiritual insight made by a child?
3. Why do you think the Lord spoke to the young boy and not to the old priest? How did Eli help Samuel recognize his call? What if Eli had been unresponsive or dismissive?
4. How had Eli failed with his own children? How do we fail our children? other children? What does God's judgment of Eli say to us?
5. How can we pay more attention to the witness of children? What can we do to support the conversation between God and children?

Study 3

Children Are Earth's Blessing

In *Walking with the Poor* Bryant Myers writes:

Too often they [children] are viewed as helpless, vulnerable, and in need of care. In a sense, we have a mental model that says that the poverty of children is complete; they are simply poor and have nothing to contribute. This makes them all the poorer. ... In a number of World Vision projects around the world, children have formed committees on issues that are important to them. Some help with the education of younger children through tutoring. Others work on children's rights, especially the right to be free from violence. ... Children sometimes say things adults cannot. In one case in the Philippines, a group of children stood up at a public meeting and told the local politicians, the honored guests of the meeting, that they needed to stop being corrupt.

The possibility of a fresh start—this is the inheritance God bestows on creation, embodied in children from generation to generation. The sign of God's blessing on the land is the presence of children. Children literally carry earth's blessing forward in their physical bodies. And God deeply cares that their future, and his creation's future, be protected. Still, the Bible documents story after story of attempts to prevent "children of promise" from fulfilling the redemptive roles that God assigned them (see Gen. 3:15; think of Joseph, Moses, and, of course, Jesus himself).

We know from the New Testament that Jesus' ultimate redemption was not thwarted. From Jesus' resurrection to today, children continue to ensure that God's blessing and salvation are carried forward from one generation into the next, until the whole Earth is redeemed. This despite grave danger, unconscionable neglect, many temptations, great suffering, and millions of tragic deaths. Tri Budiardjo, national director of Christian Children's Fund/Indonesia, says, "There is a fierce

spiritual battle going on today, and children are the primary target.”

Isaiah 65’s vision of a future in which children live rather than die comes as breathtaking news to large parts of the world. But God wants more than physical restoration. God’s preferred future includes emotional, social, and spiritual restoration as well. Work will become a joy, rewarding and full of dignity, rather than a burden or oppression. Most important, intimacy and communion with God will be restored. It is through children, blessed by the Lord and not born for calamity, that people will be reminded of God’s good intentions for the whole Earth.

Biblical Text

ISAIAH 65:17–25

- ¹⁷ For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth;
the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.
- ¹⁸ But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating;
for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people
as a delight.
- ¹⁹ I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people;
no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it,
or the cry of distress.
- ²⁰ No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days,

Insight

The prophets envisioned the people of the world as God wants them to live. . . . Isaiah speaks of zero infant and child mortality... Zechariah speaks of the new Jerusalem, a city whose streets are full of children playing. . . . Playing, according to child development specialists, is the best way for children to develop fine and gross motor skills, and emotional and social skills as well. The Convention on the Rights of the Child includes an article to ensure children’s right to play. God’s vision for children is certainly no less.

—Tri Budiardjo
Christian Children’s Fund/Indonesia

or an old person who does not live out a lifetime;
for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered
a youth,
and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.
²¹ They shall build houses and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
²² They shall not build and another inhabit;
they shall not plant and another eat;
for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.
²³ They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity;
for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord—
and their descendants as well.
²⁴ Before they call I will answer,
while they are yet speaking I will hear.
²⁵ The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,
the lion shall eat straw like the ox;
but the serpent—its food shall be dust!
They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain,
says the Lord.

Responses

1. What does God want to create?
2. In your environment or culture, what is different from what God desires to create?
3. What are some of the “calamities” that children face in your situation?
4. What can adults do to reduce the effect of calamities on children, and to give children a chance to be the blessing that God intends?

Study 4

Children's Capacity for God

What would happen if we viewed children as God views children? According to Scripture, God equips children to silence evil and to remind adults of our spiritual obligations. Children have a capacity for God that comes directly from God, knowledge of God and spiritual things that are unlearned.

From Psalm 8 we learn that babes and infants are already engaged in spiritual battle, and that there is spiritual power in children's songs and prayers.

Jesus points out that children know who he is. He challenges Jewish leaders to accept the reality that children may have more spiritual insight than they do, despite all their learning. Jesus says, "I thank you, Father ...because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to infants" (Matt. 11:25).

Both the psalmist and Jesus claim that children bear the image of God, not in part but fully, from the moment of their creation. They participate in the kingdom of God. Numerous testimonies of salvation and even miracles bear further witness to God's confidence in children as defenders (a "barricade") against evil. Divine power is at work in them, and God gives highest value to their praise and participation in the kingdom.

In one instance, a three-year-old girl had no religious influences in her life at all and had never gone to church. Sofia Cavalletti relates the girl's story. "One day she questioned her father about the origin of the world: 'Where does the world come from?' Her father replied, in a manner consistent with his ideas,

Insight

The tongues of real, nursing infants "even before they pronounce a single word, speak loudly and distinctly in commendation of God's liberality toward the human race."

—John Calvin

with a discourse that was materialistic in nature; then he added: 'However, there are those who say that all this comes from a very powerful being, and they call him God.' At this point the little girl began to run like a whirlwind around the room in a burst of joy, and exclaimed: 'I knew what you told me wasn't true; it is Him, it is Him!'" Cavalletti believes stories like these "are documents of a relationship with God that goes beyond the intellectual plane; it is founded on a deep, existential level."

Of course, children also carry within them great capacity for evil, what theologians call original sin. But this flawed heredity, common to all humans, makes God's attention to nurture and environment all the more imperative. What kind of parents and leaders must we be to invite God's grace to overcome original sin? What can we do to increase children's capacity for God? How can we minimize threats that decrease children's capacity for God? Our responsibility before God in these things is very great.

Biblical Text

PSALM 8:1–9

¹ To the leader: according to The Gittith. A Psalm of David.

O Lord, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens.

² Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a
bulwark because of your foes,
to silence the enemy and the avenger.

³ When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;

⁴ what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?

⁵ Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
and crowned them with glory and honor.

⁶ You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under their feet,

⁷ all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,

⁸ the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

⁹ O Lord, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Responses

1. John Calvin said this psalm shows infants “defending the glory of God.” Our religious backgrounds and adult beliefs influence our view of children. Do your views of children prompt you to see primarily potential for good and godliness or for evil and sin?
2. One point of entry into Psalm 8 is to notice that it presents not one but two puzzles or riddles: How is it that the mouths of babes and infants are a strong defense against “the enemy and the avenger?” How does the role of babes and infants help us understand the meaning of dominion, glory and honor?
3. According to Matthew, Jesus challenged the chief priests and scribes to understand children’s “hosannas” in terms of Psalm 8:2. Have you ever experienced children “reading” a situation better than some adults? How do you feel about the suggestion that children may see some things more clearly than you do?
4. Why does praise for God seem to come easier for children than for adults? Why might God reveal things to children that remain hidden from others?
5. What assumptions in your work or community make it difficult to take children this seriously?





God's Compelling Call

Serving Children



Study 5

To Be Great, Serve Children

From water wells to health clinics, World Vision designs area development programs to keep children at the center of community concerns, thereby bringing about long-term benefits for all members of communities and families. We've learned that while investments in adults may or may not transfer to children, community-wide investments on behalf of children are far more likely to translate into a better life for parents, siblings and the broader community, and even the next generation.

This efficiency of investment is one reason World Vision serves children, but it is not the only reason. Global population patterns show children in the majority. In some countries as much as 70 percent of the population is under the age of 15. Many of these children have

Insight

Statistically, children are the majority of the world's population. . . . Thus ministering to children is ministering to the largest segment of society. That is why ministering to children is very strategic, especially when millions of them are facing the worst treatment a very harsh world can offer. Furthermore, whatever goes wrong with society, its fullest, cruelest impact will be on children. Finally, children are the most open segment of society to the Gospel. Moody Press International once indicated that more than 80 percent of people who commit their lives to Christ do so between ages 4 and 14. Children are the most open "people group" to the Gospel, yet they are the most neglected in mission outreach.

—Tri Budiardjo
Christian Children's Fund/Indonesia

lost their parents to war or disease, and many are raising themselves as best they can in conditions of deprivation and abuse. The values they embrace—and the wounds they carry into adulthood—will in large part determine world conditions and conflicts throughout the next 50 years and beyond.

Most significant for World Vision, Jesus defines leadership and greatness in terms of serving children. He does so not because they are such a large global force, but because they belong to him. Jesus loves them and finds in their openness of heart and vulnerability the very image of God.

In organizations like World Vision, in churches, and in other ministries, to see whether priorities line up with Jesus' priorities, look at the budget for ministries to children. Often, even in Christian communities, children's programs are little more than an "add on" to adult ministries. And to the degree children are considered "the least," so are those who care for them. In professional terms, teachers, youth pastors, and child-care workers are rarely seen to be at the pinnacle of their careers. Yet Jesus turns these valuations upside-down.

We may be able to sharpen our hearing of and response to Jesus by thinking about how we interact with children in different circumstances. For example, when are we most likely to ignore children? Do we decide what to do and then manipulate children into agreeing with us? Do we use children ceremonially or in token ways? Do we invite children to participate in decision-making, in activities, in worship? Or do we keep children segregated by age whenever possible, because this is more convenient for adults to manage?

Biblical Text

MARK 9:33–37

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 about who was the greatest. ³⁵ He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be the 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.”

Responses

1. Why does Jesus emphasize welcoming?
2. What does Jesus tell the disciples they need to do to be “the greatest”? How did Jesus model this principle in his ministry? How do you model this principle in your life? How do we model it in World Vision? How could you, and World Vision, model it more effectively?
3. “Whoever welcomes one such child” welcomes God. What do Jesus’ words tell us about God’s character?
4. Jesus’ rebuke is to his 12 primary disciples. What is the relevance of this teaching for those in leadership?
5. Is there any opportunity in your community to redefine greatness in terms of welcoming and serving children? How might Jesus’ way of thinking change relationships or even evangelism strategies?

Study 6

To Be Righteous, Meet Children's Needs

While the phrase “children at risk” is modern, the condition is not. The Bible alludes to many such instances, often linking leadership or godliness in an adult with awareness of the needs of “children at risk.” The Scripture that follows is part of Job’s long self-cursing: If I’ve done (not done) this, may God indeed punish me! In this Old Testament passage Job’s witness is to more than minimum requirements. According to Job, taking personal responsibility for not only our own

Insight

All Christian agencies and churches have a responsibility to search for and implement tangible structures by which they can effectively minister to children at risk, both locally and globally.

We recommend that they:

- a. Make themselves aware of the crisis
- b. Make themselves aware of what other people and ministries are currently doing
- c. Set aside both financial and people resources in order to link with and participate in specific ministry programmes
- d. Regularly pray within the congregational worship service for children at risk
- e. Ensure that children at risk and their families are welcomed into the church community
- f. Encourage children to participate in worship and in ministry
- g. Provide a sense of significance, emotional acceptance and support for caregivers

—Oxford Statement on Children at Risk

children, but for all of God's children and their caregivers ("widows," in Job's terms), is an absolute measure of righteousness.

Earlier references, in Job 14, indicate that our accountability is great not because children are innocent or deserving in some sentimental way, but because they are under God's protection, because they belong to God, because of God's plans for their future. The prophets, such as Isaiah and Zechariah, speak of a coming kingdom in which children will not suffer. Job makes our personal accountability clear. We are either participants in announcing the values of that kingdom, or we are obstacles to the establishment of that kingdom.

As a humanitarian agency struggling to bring long-term benefits to children and their families—what we call sustainable transformation—we have the privilege of being eyewitnesses to what works and what does not work in communities afflicted by poverty and broken relationships. We can testify to the many reasons God might choose to give special protection to children at risk. While many people are skeptical of so-called trickle-down theories of development in fighting poverty, we see that "trickle up" seems to work. Children demonstrate amazing resiliency, flexibility, creativity and growing strength as agents of long-term change, bringing home hope and new ideas that result in direct intervention in the future. While God does not ask any of us to eliminate poverty and suffering single-handedly, when we increase the well-being of one child by ensuring access to a balanced diet, education, health care, protection from harm and abuse—that investment exponentially multiplies into the future, rippling through family, community and even future generations.

Let us look at what one network of Christian leaders believe God requires of the church today ("Insight" above). How does this statement compare with Job's description of what God requires of a godly man or woman?

Biblical Text

JOB 31:16–23

¹⁶ If I have withheld anything that the poor desired,
or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail,

¹⁷ or have eaten my morsel alone,

and the orphan has not eaten from it –
¹⁸ for from my youth I reared the orphan like a father,
and from my mother's womb I guided the widow –
¹⁹ if I have seen anyone perish for lack of clothing,
or a poor person without covering,
²⁰ whose loins have not blessed me,
and who was not warmed with the fleece of my sheep;
²¹ if I have raised my hand against the orphan,
because I saw I had supporters at the gate;
²² then let my shoulder blade fall from my shoulder,
and let my arm be broken from its socket.
²³ For I was in terror of calamity from God,
and I could not have faced his majesty.

Responses

1. What actions establish Job's identity as a just person?
2. What habits, character traits, or commitments do these actions require us to nurture?
3. What are the implications in this Scripture text for your community of faith? What should your community be doing for children at risk?
4. Much of Job is about cosmic spiritual conflict of which Job is unaware. In the "big picture" God is staking everything on Job's response. What are the stakes in our response to God and to children today?
5. What can we learn from Job's struggle and aspirations?

Study 7

The Greatest Commandment

Much of art and literature across cultures has to do with remembering. Remembering is an act of reflection that breaks us out of our automatic habits and routines. And the more senses that are recalled, the more tangible are the memories. God commands us over and over to remember God's care and love for us, to remember God.

In the religion of Israel, children were not just included but were absorbed into the whole community, with a deep sense of belonging. Feasts and celebrations included elaborate meals, dancing, instrumental music, singing, and sacrifices. All of Israel participated, from the youngest to the oldest. These festivals included Passover, the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of Booths, the Feast of Trumpets, and so on. The purpose of these festivals was to remind the Israelites of who they were, who God is, and what God had done for them in the past. As children and teens danced, sang, ate, listened to the stories, and asked questions, they came to know who they were and who they were to be. This Hebrew sense of knowing implies more than just information; it is a knowing by experiencing.

In the settings described for these festivals, God clearly expected the older generation to be available to the younger to answer questions and to explain. Exodus 12:26–27 (NIV) states: “And when your children ask you, ‘What

Insight

The question, therefore, *where shall wisdom be found?* is answered by the Psalmist: *the awe of God is the beginning of wisdom.* The Bible does not preach awe as a form of intellectual resignation; it does not say, *awe is the end of wisdom.* Its intention seems to be that awe is a way to wisdom. *The beginning of awe is wonder, and the beginning of wisdom is awe.*

— Abraham Heschel
Jewish theologian and author

does this ceremony mean to you?’ then tell them, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians.’” Even today children actively participate in the Passover feast, asking specific, scripted questions that are answered by the adults present. For example, “This night seems very different from our usual dinner. Why is this dinner so slow and long?” and “On all other nights we may eat any loaf of bread. Why on this night do we eat *matzah*—the bread without yeast?”

Other texts emphasize the importance of teaching the next generation. For example, Psalm 78:5–7 says:

He established a decree in Jacob,
and appointed a law in Israel,
which he commanded our ancestors
to teach to their children;
that the next generation might know them,
the children yet unborn,
and rise up and tell them to their children
so that they should set their hope in God,
and not forget the works of God
but keep his commandments.

Parents and grandparents can bear witness to the deepening of faith and maturity that comes from remembering as an act of legacy, from building their lives more deliberately around values that might help the next generation negotiate challenges to come.

Many communities are at risk today because of stories told and not told. What we do with our stories can determine our sense of identity, our mission or purpose in life, our ability to empathize or love. When we fail to tell the stories of God’s acts in our lives, we leave the next generation adrift, unaware of their rich inheritance. This kind of spiritual impoverishment—silence or inability to recall God’s rescue and deliverance—produces children who are cynical, frustrated, alienated, children who don’t own the power of their own histories. Many communities today are arguing over which stories to pass on to their children. Perhaps a particular version “scapegoats” another community—a sure sign that we have failed to tell the truth regarding either human frailty and sin or the immensity of God’s deliverance. Deuteronomy 6

(see the biblical text) challenges the ways we “own” and pass on our stories. Here God outlines what the greatest commandment looks like in daily life, and God’s focus is clearly on the next generation.

Biblical Text

DEUTERONOMY 6:1–9, 20–25

¹ Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the ordinances—that the Lord your God charged me to teach you to observe in the land that you are about to cross into and occupy, ² so that you and your children and your children’s children may fear the Lord your God all the days of your life, and keep all his decrees and his commandments that I am commanding you, so that your days may be long. ³ Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe them diligently, so that it may go well with you, and so that you may multiply greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, as the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has promised you.

⁴ Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. ⁵ You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. ⁶ Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. ⁷ 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. ⁸ Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, ⁹ and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

²⁰ When your children ask you in time to come, “What is the meaning of the decrees and the statutes and the ordinances that the Lord our God has commanded you?” ²¹ then you shall say to your children, “We were Pharaoh’s slaves in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. ²² The Lord displayed before our eyes great and awesome signs and wonders against Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his household. ²³ He brought us out from there in order to bring us in, to give us the land that he promised on oath to our ancestors. ²⁴ Then the Lord commanded us to observe all these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our lasting good, so as to keep us alive, as is now the case. ²⁵ If we diligently observe this entire commandment before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us, we will be in the right.”

Responses

1. List some of the action words commanded here (observe, love, hear, talk...). Notice how many senses are engaged. How are these actions related to the great command to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might”?
2. How were children included in the Old Testament Jewish feasts and celebrations? What did they receive that they might not have learned in a more formal way of education? As a child, were you ever invited to participate in a celebration with adults and children of various ages? What do you remember about it? What made it special?
3. How might we encourage children to ask “What is the meaning of...?” in our homes or communities? How do children of different ages ask this question in different ways?
4. In answer to the question “Why do we do this?” adults are to tell a story (vv. 20–25). How does the story treat those who cause their suffering? What role does God play in the story? What story might we tell children in our community if they were to ask “Why do you live this way?”

Study 8

Father of Orphans

From Adam and Eve's exit from the Garden in Genesis through to Revelation, the biblical narratives tell us that while we are on this earth, we are all pilgrims, "orphans of God," longing for our true home. And so we ought to have compassion for one another, as God has compassion on us all. In antiquity, like today, being orphaned could mean losing one's future, becoming vulnerable to preying adults, perhaps being cheated out of one's inheritance or earnings, even enslavement to the will of others.

The psalmist describes God: "Father of orphans and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation" (Ps. 68:5). As an expression of tenderness, Father of orphans is a title many of the ancient Near Eastern gods claim. So what is the uniqueness of Yahweh's claim to the title? No other god mirrors Yahweh's attempt to mold a people among whom care for the orphans and widows will be second nature. Jewish texts and legal requirements go further than any culture of its time in

protecting the interests of the powerless, particularly orphans and widows who have no protector.

Insight

In 1990 it was estimated that 20,000 children slept on New York's streets nightly. In Bogota, Colombia, 85 per cent of all street children die before they turn 15. A study of beggars on UK streets showed that half spent their childhoods in foster care and a quarter slept on the streets before they were 16.

—Patrick McDonald
Children at Risk

The New Testament extends this call, asking us to acknowledge that *all* God's children are our children: "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world" (James 1:27).

Today, Africa's children are a poignant and prophetic testa-

ment to the world of children themselves caring for the poorest of the poor in their community. They seem to understand that this is what God would want them to do. In *Children at Risk*, by Patrick McDonald, a street child named Kevin gave voice to this spiritual intuition:

His clothes were in rags, his hair was crawling with lice, and he stank.... As we chatted for some time it became obvious that Kevin was somewhere else, far away on a cloud of glue thinner. It occurred to me that rather than conduct mere small talk it would be better to ask him a direct question.... “Kevin, what is your innermost desire?” He paused, as though struck by something, and with a rare clarity of mind fixed his eyes on mine and answered, “To honor the Lord my God.” I reeled with the impact of his answer. As music blared from a nearby disco I tried to follow this new line of conversation. “Where do you want to start?” I asked him. He thought for a time and replied, “I must bring my family together. My brother is in a children’s home, my sister in another, my father is dead and I don’t know where my mother is.”



Biblical Text

DEUTERONOMY 10:17–22

¹⁷ For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, ¹⁸ who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. ¹⁹ You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. ²⁰ You shall fear the Lord your God; him alone you shall worship; to him you shall hold fast, and by his name you shall swear. ²¹ He is your praise; he is your God, who has done for you these great and awesome things that your own eyes have seen. ²² Your ancestors went down to Egypt seventy persons; and now the Lord your God has made you as numerous as the stars in heaven.

Responses

1. God is described as “mighty and awesome.” How has God shown these characteristics in the modern world? in your life?

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2. This text assumes we need to understand our past in order to know what to do in the present. How has your community's past shaped its actions now? How has it shaped your community's response to God?
 3. In what ways does the text describe God as impartial? as partial? How is God both impartial and partial? How and when are you both impartial and partial?
 4. Research among children about "growing up Christian" has found that those who "inherit" their parents' faith sometimes find it difficult to see themselves in desperate need of rescuing. How can we pass on accounts of our past and of God that make it easier for us and our children to respond in awe to God and with compassion to others?
 5. Are we allowing God to make care of the orphan second nature to us? How does your community treat the poor and society's outsiders? Who does it see as poor? as left out? Are these people included in your community? Or are they seen only as objects needing help from your community?

Study 9

Children, the Church, and the Global Economy

The United Nations Children's Fund has calculated that money spent by Western Europeans on cigarettes every six months (that is, US\$23.5 billion) would effectively control all childhood diseases, cut in half the rate of child malnutrition, bring clean water to all communities and provide most of the children of the world with a basic education.

It is one thing to say we are for children. It is another to allow the needs of "the least" in our communities to shape the community's economic decisions. In Nehemiah's time a large group of God's people, united by a common cause but otherwise socially and economically diverse, had to answer the question "Am I my brother's and sister's keeper?"

Nehemiah saw that his community's choices were causing great suffering and dishonoring God's name, not only at home, but also across international boundaries. Conditions were so bad, people were forced to sell their children into slavery. It might have been tempting for him to say, as we might be tempted to say, that the problem he faced was "endemic" or "systemic," and that one individual could do little in the face of the famine causing such poverty. Instead, Nehemiah spoke up and began an advocacy campaign. How the people of God responded, he argued, would determine how unbelievers would view and speak of God. In God's

Insight

In the factories I've seen children of nine years old, frail, rickety, bent, and already depraved. . . . Is that what a little child's heart needs? He needs sunshine, childish play, good examples all about him, and at least a little love. There must be no more of this, monks, no more torturing of children—rise up and preach that, make haste, make haste!

—Fyodor Dostoyevsky

economy, only one choice made financial sense—and that was to protect children.

Interesting parallels with the story of Nehemiah can be found in a story from World Vision India. Extreme poverty in a town called Gudiyatham in the southern state of Tamil Nadu was forcing parents to sell their children into bonded labor in the beedi (cigarettes) or match-making industries, for sums ranging from approximately US\$21.50 to US\$64.50. World Vision's India Child Labor Rehabilitation and Prevention (ICLRP) program works toward the release and rehabilitation of such bonded child laborers.

In 1998, 13-year-old Rajkumar's father, Panchacharam, hurt his foot on a nail and was unable to work for six months. To pay for both his medical expenses and the family's daily expenses, he bonded his son to the match-making industry. In return for approximately US\$43, Rajkumar's job was to fill boxes with matches. For every 144 boxes filled, he would earn about two cents. Rajkumar could only manage to fill about six boxes each day. Consequently, during the time he worked he was unable to pay off any of the original bond, and his dream of returning to school began to fade.

Work started at 6 a.m. for Rajkumar and finished at 5 p.m., with a 15-minute break at 1 p.m. for lunch. Sitting crossed-legged on a hard floor for nearly 11 hours, every day, took its toll on his health. Furthermore, to fill the boxes properly Rajkumar had to scoop up matches in one swift motion. The friction would set some alight and burn his finger tips, especially in summer. In March 1999 the community self-help group organized by World Vision paid the US\$43 and released Rajkumar. The group also provided the family with a cow. Since then the cow has had a calf, so the family now has two milk-producing animals. This brings the family a steady income and ensures its children won't slip back into a world of bondage and exploitation. After his release Rajkumar joined the transit school run by World Vision, which helped him to catch up on his studies. In 2000 he returned to grade 6 in the local government school, where he is at the top of his class.

Biblical Text

NEHEMIAH 5:1–13

¹ Now there was a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish kin. ² For there were those who said, “With our sons and our daughters, we are many; we must get grain, so that we may eat and stay alive.” ³ There were also those who said, “We are having to pledge our fields, our vineyards, and our houses in order to get grain during the famine.” ⁴ And there were those who said, “We are having to borrow money on our fields and vineyards to pay the king’s tax. ⁵ Now our flesh is the same as that of our kindred; our children are the same as their children; and yet we are forcing our sons and daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters have been ravished; we are powerless, and our fields and vineyards now belong to others.”

⁶ I was very angry when I heard their outcry and these complaints. ⁷ After thinking it over, I brought charges against the nobles and the officials; I said to them, “You are all taking interest from your own people.” And I called a great assembly to deal with them, ⁸ and said to them, “As far as we were able, we have bought back our Jewish kindred who had been sold to other nations; but now you are selling your own kin, who must then be bought back by us!” They were silent, and could not find a word to say. ⁹ So I said, “The thing that you are doing is not good. Should you not walk in the fear of our God, to prevent the taunts of the nations our enemies? ¹⁰ Moreover I and my brothers and my servants are lending them money and grain. Let us stop this taking of interest. ¹¹ Restore to them, this very day, their fields, their vineyards, their olive orchards, and their houses, and the interest on money, grain, wine, and oil that you have been exacting from them.” ¹² Then they said, “We will restore everything and demand nothing more from them. We will do as you say.” And I called the priests, and made them take an oath to do as they had promised. ¹³ I also shook out the fold of my garment and said, “So may God shake out everyone from house and from property who does not perform this promise. Thus may they be shaken out and emptied.” And all the assembly said, “Amen,” and praised the Lord. And the people did as they had promised.



Responses

1. Who are the actors in this text? What does each want?
2. How does Nehemiah define the situation? What actions does he advocate? What arguments does he use to support his proposal? What is at stake? Why is dealing with this more important than all the other issues at hand?
3. Can you think of parallels in your community or national office? in your personal experience or church ministry?
4. How might you be more like Nehemiah in calling attention to injustice and calling for solutions that bring glory to God?







Under Attack

Threats to Children



Study 10

Child Sacrifice

“Why did my father never give me what I needed? He had enough for his drinks, for his vices, for his women, but not for me, his daughter. Why did my mother have enough for her luxuries and for her son? Why did she never have it for me? Why did my brother have material things to give me but never the time to sit down and talk and tell me, ‘Listen, how are you doing at school? I am going to help you study and I am going to teach you adding and subtracting.’ But he did have time to beat me, to mistreat me, and to tell me that I was a stupid girl.” (Flor, 17 years old, Mexico).

In the ancient world of the Old Testament, God responds with particular horror to child sacrifice. While many questions remain unanswered about the practice (its frequency, to whom the sacrifices were offered, and so on), altars in the Mediterranean where archeologists report finding remains of children—one with more than 20,000 children—are testimony to the ways adult agendas put children at risk. It is easy to distance ourselves and our cultures as more enlightened, less primitive and less barbaric than such societies. But in truth, our world is too often guilty of sacrificing the God-given potential of children,

again in the name of economic and sexual gratification of adults. In every nation the greatest number of victims of poverty are children, the impact of HIV/AIDS is most crushing on children, the traumas of war are most likely to mutilate children’s lives, and exploitation of all kinds cripples children’s hope. We abandon children to these just as easily as other civilizations have, and perhaps in even greater number.

Insight

Child sacrifice has been taboo in the major world religions for over 3,000 years, but it goes on every day. We are practicing worldwide sacrifice of children on all fronts. Our most vulnerable citizens, children in poverty, have become the most disposable commodity.

—Wesley K. Stafford
Compassion International

Child sacrifice comes with many faces. It is often justified as an inevitable part of life or as a means of survival. In truth, the sacrificial destruction of children's lives is usually a result of thoughtless behavior driven by selfishness or repeated patterns of cultural practices—idols in our lives that come before obedience to God.

The difficult but liberating news of the prophet Jeremiah is this: God will judge societies that treat their children in unjust ways. Our world needs to hear from Jeremiah today.



Biblical Text

JEREMIAH 19:3–9

³ You shall say: Hear the word of the Lord, O kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem. Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: I am going to bring such disaster upon this place that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle. ⁴ Because the people have forsaken me, and have profaned this place by making offerings in it to other gods whom neither they nor their ancestors nor the kings of Judah have known; and because they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent, ⁵ and gone on building the high places of Baal to burn their children in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, which I did not command or decree, nor did it enter my mind. ⁶ Therefore the days are surely coming, says the Lord, when this place shall no more be called Topheth, or the valley of the son of Hinnom, but the valley of Slaughter. ⁷ And in this place I will make void the plans of Judah and Jerusalem, and will make them fall by the sword before their enemies, and by the hand of those who seek their life. I will give their dead bodies for food to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the earth. ⁸ And I will make this city a horror, a thing to be hissed at; everyone who passes by it will be horrified and will hiss because of all its disasters. ⁹ And I will make them eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters, and all shall eat the flesh of their neighbors in the siege, and in the distress with which their enemies and those who seek their life afflict them.

Responses

1. List the actions of the people that have upset God. What can we infer from this list about what God values?

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2. In what ways do contemporary societies sacrifice (literally and figuratively) their children?
 3. How should such treatment of children affect our child advocacy programs? What is at stake?
 4. If we keep silent about child sacrifice in our own generation, how might God respond to this silence? What price would we have to pay to be more like Jeremiah in our communities?

Study 11

Slaughter of the Innocents

To be human is to be vulnerable. Most of us do all we can to avoid the feeling of being completely powerless. In circumstances of violent conflict or government repression, children are particularly at risk. Often parents' primary concern in such times is to protect their children as best they can. In Jesus' time, as in our own, that is not easy.

God himself accepted vulnerability when God took on human flesh. Baby Jesus became a political refugee, caught up in adult conflicts and social chaos. Egypt became a shelter for Jesus and his family, as it was for Joseph in the Old Testament. But as in the Exodus story, when God is at work, things sometimes get worse before they get better.

Although God's people were expecting a messiah, the actual arrival of the God-child wasn't at all what they were hoping for. His birth brings more death than life, and things got horrifically worse for Herod's Jewish subjects. Many other children perish as Jesus is rescued. His birth brings on an ethnic bloodbath. As has been said, "What the Christmas pageants leave out is that the wise men come and all hell breaks loose."

When Xhyke Osdautaj watched her village burn to the ground during the ethnic cleansing of Kosovo, she was exhausted and eight-and-a-half months pregnant. She was scared for her life and for the life of her unborn child. "I was so scared, just so scared. There have been cases that the

Insight

Between 1985 and 1995, 2 million children were killed, 5 million were disabled or brain damaged and 12 million lost their homes as a result of war in their countries. In 35 lands, children were conscripted into the armed forces. . . . Many small weapons can easily be operated by children and these tools of war are responsible for up to 90 per cent of casualties in modern warfare.

—Patrick McDonald
Children at Risk

pregnant women have been..." she says, her voice trailing off before she can finish the sentence.

But Serbian soldiers took pity on her when they saw her standing by the road and brought her a chair. And when she started labor, they placed a police car's blue flashing light on the roof of her car to ensure a speedy crossing into Albania. Four hours after reaching the border town of Kukes, Xhyke gave birth to a healthy little girl. She named her Mergimtari, which means "refugee." World media regularly reported terrible stories of Serbian atrocities. But Xhyke unexpectedly experienced a touch of Serbian military kindness, and her family of 14 found safety and comfort with a World Vision host family in Vlore, in southern Albania.

As you read through the Scripture text, perhaps you will want to echo the voices of the church through the ages: "We remember today, O God, the slaughter of the holy innocents of Bethlehem by King Herod. Receive, we pray, into the arms of your mercy all innocent victims; and by your great might frustrate the designs of evil tyrants and establish your rule of justice, love, and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit; one God, for ever and ever. Amen."

Biblical Text

MATTHEW 2:1-18

¹ In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ² asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." ³ When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

⁶ 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel.'"

⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸ Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.” ⁹ When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹ On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

¹³ Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” ¹⁴ Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, ¹⁵ and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, “Out of Egypt I have called my son.”

¹⁶ When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. ¹⁷ Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

¹⁸ “A voice was heard in Ramah,
wailing and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children;
she refused to be consoled,
because they are no more.”

Responses

1. How many emotions are described in the story? What actions are caused by these emotions?
2. Jesus is spared; many others are not. At the beginning of Jesus’ life, things appear to get worse for others. Is this what we would expect to

happen with the birth of “the Savior, the only Son of God”? How does this make you feel about God?

3. “All Jerusalem” is frightened (v. 3). Herod slaughters the infants in Bethlehem. How have unscrupulous political leaders’ uncaring laws or other forces in your society had negative consequences for children? What has your community done on behalf of the children?

4. Adults are called to protect children. How is this done in your community? How do you answer this call as an individual?

Study 12

Fighting Adult Battles

“In the last 10 to 15 years in Africa, not a single rebel war has been fought without using children,” writes Lincoln Ndogoni, World Vision’s psychosocial programs researcher in Africa. He continues:

Evidently, for rebels and other fighting groups and governments, the stakes for not using child soldiers are high. The ready availability of small arms and light weapons clearly increases the likelihood of warring factions using children. But equally, the majority of child soldiers are emotionally and physically deprived children, who are easy and inexpensive to program and manipulate. In addition to deprivation, such children have carried unprocessed anger, confusion and need for revenge...emanating from mistreatment by care givers in the primary environment. We can certainly assert that unless civil conflicts and the accompanying shipment and stockpiling of small arms are put to a stop, children already frustrated by abuse and mistreatment at the primary environment will be psychologically prepared for recruitment by the warring factions.

Children often become proxies for adult conflicts. In our work, parties to conflict frequently try to exclude their enemies from the benefits of World Vision projects. When our staff’s own heritage is linked to these parties, the challenge can be internal as well as external.

Too often, children are knowingly or unknowingly treated as combatants by adults. In the familiar story of Isaac and Ishmael, we see how easily human perspective becomes skewed in forgetting others’ humanity. It is a profoundly troubling story, in which God’s agenda and the agenda of God’s people diverge. The problem isn’t Ishmael vs. Isaac, but Hagar vs. Sarah. When the crisis erupts, God apparently judges that it will be easier to make a home for Hagar out of Sarah’s reach. In light of the current Middle East crises, this story takes on even larger tragic connotations. The story of Sarah and Hagar calls on the descendants of both Ishmael and Isaac to recognize that God’s

Insight

*Oh Meme, Oh Baba
Tarasa l' siri Womakhpisah
O' makupisah Meme de Baba
Sigadono To Dau Dehe
Meme de Baba Torasa Isiri
Tomadunia Todagi-dagi Tosigari-gari
Karena Manena Jou Makuasa
Apa Boleh Buat So Katotarima.*

Oh Mommy, Oh Daddy
I feel so devastated now we're apart
We're parting, Mommy and Daddy
Mommy and Daddy, I feel so devastated
In this world I walk and cry
God Almighty, has this happened?
What can one do? I must bear it,
wholeheartedly.

—Song from Loloda region of Indonesia

horizons transcend theirs. And our text invites us to pay attention to the subtle and not-so-subtle ways in which children get caught up in and pay the price for adult conflicts.

In a women's shelter in Indonesia, the enchanting voice of 10-year-old Iksan halts several activities. Some find it hard to hold back their tears, while others stare at the floor as Iksan continues to sing a song of unbearable loss. The dull gray building where these internally displaced people take shelter is suddenly swept with waves of unspoken emotions. Iksan's father, sister, uncle, and two

cousins were murdered when an armed Christian group attacked their village in North Maluku, Indonesia, in early 2000. "It happened near the musala [Muslim prayer room]," Iksan says faintly. In the same whisper he recalls how their Christian neighbors helped him, his injured mother, Raihan, and his two sisters Farida and Firza to evacuate to a police station in the subdistrict. After a few days Iksan, his mother and sisters, and hundreds of Muslim residents were transferred to North Maluku's capital, Ternate, in police trucks. Now living in a shelter in Ternate, Iksan is attending school. His family receives World Vision hygiene kits and health education. Despite the religious violence, bonds between Muslim and Christian residents in most neighborhoods remain solid. Many survivors refer to the attackers as "outsiders" and "unfamiliar faces" who went on a rampage, killing those of different

faiths and threatening those of the same faith. But when Iksan is asked whether he is thinking of returning to his village, he quickly shakes his head. “I am too terrified to go back,” he replies. “Maybe one day, I’ll go back. Now, I am still scared.”

Biblical Text

GENESIS 21:1–21

¹ The Lord dealt with Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah as he had promised. ² Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him. ³ Abraham gave the name Isaac to his son whom Sarah bore him. ⁴ And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. ⁵ Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. ⁶ Now Sarah said, “God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me.” ⁷ And she said, “Who would ever have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.”

⁸ The child grew, and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. ⁹ But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac. ¹⁰ So she said to Abraham, “Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac.” ¹¹ The matter was very distressing to Abraham on account of his son. ¹² But God said to Abraham, “Do not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named for you. ¹³ As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring.” ¹⁴ So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed, and wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba.

¹⁵ When the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes. ¹⁶ Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot; for she said, “Do not let me look on the death of the child.” And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. ¹⁷ And God heard the voice of the boy; and the

angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, “What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is.”¹⁸ Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him.”¹⁹ Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the boy a drink.

²⁰ God was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness, and became an expert with the bow. ²¹ He lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

Responses

1. In what ways does God’s agenda merge with or transcend the agenda of Abraham, Hagar, and Sarah?
2. Do we believe that God seeks a relationship with all children everywhere? When Ishmael was near death, “God heard the voice of the lad” and rescued him and his mother. What does this say about God’s heart for children?
3. Sometimes the suffering of children is justified on religious or pragmatic grounds. Can you think of any examples? How do you think God views such justifications?
4. In our own communities or in the communities in which we work, do we ever encounter conflict over benefits going to children? Do these represent conflicts between adults? How can we do better than Sarah, Hagar, and Abraham?

Study 13

Prostituting Children for Adult Agendas

The tale of Herodias's daughter dancing to seduce Herod into giving her the head of John the Baptist is often told in literature, opera and art. A mother deliberately uses her teen-age daughter's sexuality to achieve her own goals. How willingly or unwillingly the daughter participated we are not told. In any case, her status as a princess did not protect her from being used as a sex object.

Simply avoiding the stigma of prostitution by legal definition does not mean we are not using our children for our own ends. In fact, child soldiers, child laborers, and many other examples of the exploitation of children could and should be considered prostitution by adults who are charged by God with protecting them. The Bible does not allow human beings, bearers of the image of God, to be treated as objects, to be made a means to an end. One can only imagine the

Insight

"When I went to fetch water, he forced me into the house and gave me 10 pesos [US\$1.20], He told me to undress and then he fondled me, covering my mouth so that nobody could hear me when I screamed; he took his pants off, he was touching my whole body and when I screamed he pressed me hard. I was very small, only 10 years old and could not defend myself against that man so big. I said nothing to my mother, but I always expected that she would ask me something when I felt sad, but she never said a thing. This made me feel worst, like trash. All the money I gave to my mother and she never asked me how I got it."

— Josefina, 12 years old
A Safe World for Children

cynicism and soul destruction experienced by a child used in the way Herodias's daughter was used.

Biblical Text

MARK 6:17–29

¹⁷ For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her. ¹⁸ For John had been telling Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." ¹⁹ And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, ²⁰ for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him. ²¹ But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. ²² When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it." ²³ And he solemnly swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom." ²⁴ She went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?" She replied, "The head of John the baptizer." ²⁵ Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." ²⁶ The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. ²⁷ Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, ²⁸ brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. ²⁹ When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

Responses

1. Herod, Herodias, Herodias's daughter, John the Baptist—what does each person want at the start of the story? To what degree has each gotten what he or she wanted by the end of the story? What, if anything, have they had to sacrifice?
2. In some cultures exploitation of children in some circumstances is perfectly acceptable or at least tolerated silently. What are some ap-

appropriate responses? When we confront the practices of another culture, how can we respond to charges that we are being intolerant or judgmental?

3. What points of similarity or difference do you see between the treatment of children in the time of Jesus and current exploitation of children?

4. To your own knowledge, in what situations do adults use children for their own ends? What is your community doing to protect such children?

Study 14

Intergenerational Guilt

Lincoln Ndogoni, World Vision's psychosocial programs researcher in Africa, writes:

“The existing poverty, competition for resources, suppression of women, loss of family support networks, and ethnic differences in rural and urban economies have led to a range of both physical and psychological abuses of children by their primary care givers or ‘protectors.’ Working with abused children in Central and East Africa has taught us that many of those seeking or needing psychosocial assistance have developed enormous anger, hatred, fear, guilt, hopelessness or confusion, and indeed feel very bad about their situation in the world. For example, thousands of street boys and girls in the cities and towns have developed a pattern of expecting pain or injury. There is also a clear pattern of older abused children, in their desire to keep the needed primary attachment, developing the confusing tendency to wanting to care for the abusive parents and/or guardians—engaging in activities that serve to meet those adults’ needs. Providing care for younger siblings within the family is also demonstrating secondary assistance to parents. However, for many such children it is only a matter of time before a breaking point is reached and they become ready recruits for crime or rebel groups—most of which are led by formerly abused children—and the cycle continues.”

Everything, ecologists, chaos-theory physicists and historians remind us, is connected to everything else. Children don’t escape the laws of cause and effect, getting pulled into multi-generational patterns again and again, long before they are able to understand the long-term stakes or to defend themselves. And where is God when all this is happening? Children everywhere end up paying for their parents’ and grandparents’ sins, with interest; they suffer consequences ranging from exile and refugee life, to conscription into armed schemes for vengeance,

to inheriting degraded land and depleted, polluted water and crushing burdens of international debt.

The Old Testament views such patterns of intergenerational guilt sometimes as proof of God's justice and sometimes as a threat to God's justice. But there is a way out, a way to stop the cycle of suffering: children can likewise inherit the fruits of their parents' virtuous choices. On at least one occasion Jesus attempted to change the terms of the conversation. He said that God allows us to face grave difficulties so that God might be honored and glorified in the redemption of the situation.

Thirteen-year-old Arafat Tumbaga was fully engrossed sketching faces in a workshop at Mindanao Children's Congress 2002 in Cagayan de Oro City, northwest of Mindanao (Philippines). Around Arafat, children from rival tribes completed the drawing by putting children holding hands around a miniature globe. Like many children around the world, Arafat and his companions are growing up amid conflicts previous generations have created. Arafat is from Sarangani province, which figured prominently in newspapers as the alleged entry point of the Abu Sayyaff Group in pursuing bombing sprees in nearby General Santos City. Mindanao is inhabited by 20 million "tri-people" comprising 13 Islamicized ethnic groups (Moro), 21 ethnic indigenous tribal groups (lumad), and at least 9 ethnic migrant groups from Luzon and the Visayas. This diverse culture has been aggravated by deep-rooted scars of prejudice and violence handed down from one generation to another. The Mindanao Children's Congress, sponsored by 14 area development programs of the World Vision Development Foundation, gathered more than 250 children representing 10 tribes. It focused on building a culture of peace among children of different tribes and faiths. Catholic and Protestant Christian and Muslim spiritual leaders attended. During a theater workshop the children were

Insight

The very nature of poverty has strong religio-spiritual dimensions, which has challenged the traditional "so-called neutral secular stance" of the development industry, calling for engagement at the spiritual level.

—WV Children in Ministry Working Group

able to articulate their understanding of their role in contributing to creating a peace culture. “Fight for peace,” urged April Rose Chiong. April Rose, a World Vision-sponsored child, was elected WV’s children’s sector representative for the National Anti-Poverty Commission at the 2002 general assembly in Cebu City. She urged her fellow children not to give up until peace is achieved in Mindanao. A peace covenant was signed at the end of the congress by religious officials and local government and national agencies.

Biblical Texts

Exodus 20:3–6

³ You shall have no other gods before me. ⁴ You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, ⁶ but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

EXODUS 34:6–7a

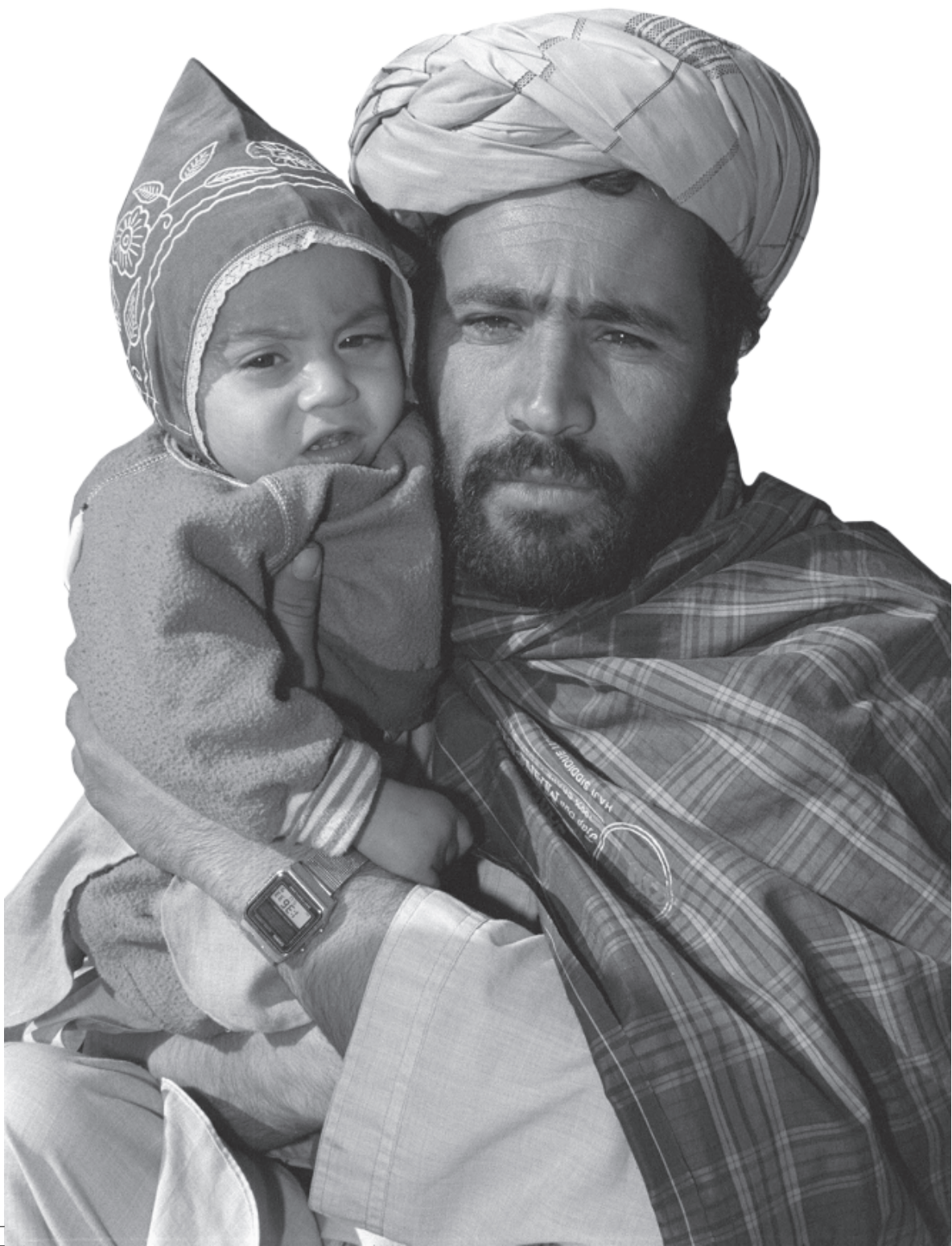
⁶ The Lord passed before him, and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷ keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.”

JOHN 9:1–5

¹ As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” ³ Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. ⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

Responses

1. In Exodus 20, what is the difference in impact on generations between rejecting God and loving God? What does this imply about God's character, about God's eagerness to forgive, about God's faithfulness in response to our love and obedience? Does knowing how long term the impact may be affect your choices?
2. In Exodus 34, what do intergenerational guilt and individual guilt have in common? Are the lives of children in our community and work generally affected negatively more by the guilty choices of their parents/extended community or by their own individual guilty choices?
3. Reflect on John 9:3-5. As we walk with our communities and their children toward wholeness, what does this text suggest? What do we expect, hope and/or fear from God?
4. It is often easy to identify "harmful traditional practices" in other cultures. But what harmful traditional practices threaten the well-being and lives of the children in your community?
5. Sometimes we call problems that are seemingly unfixable from generation to generation "systemic" or "endemic." Often, even experts despair of making lasting, "sustainable" change. According to the biblical texts above, how might God be honored or glorified in rescuing or redeeming a situation with multi-generational consequences? Can we do anything to invite or prepare for God's activity and redemption?





God's Embrace

**Nurturing Children,
Transforming the Future**



Study 15

Children Need God

Understanding who God is in relationship to my story gives significance and purpose to every detail of my life. It also helps me understand more about how God participates in other people's stories. Even Jesus learned to see his life and ministry in the context of his heavenly Father's identity and purposes.

Particularly in John's Gospel, Jesus is portrayed as the apprentice of his Father. In very broad terms, we can say that Jesus did what he'd seen his Father doing: works of creation/salvation. Jesus' actions and words mirror his heavenly Father's.

Likewise, all God's children are called to apprenticeship or discipleship. In the Old Testament, Yahweh challenges Israel to remember God's goodness and redeeming care and to imitate this. In Genesis, Adam and his family are given the mandate to imitate God in taking creative initiative to know, name and care for the Earth. Psalm 139 reminds us that God hand-knit each one of us just as he did Adam (see also Gen. 2 and Job 10:8–12), and that he has “numbered our days” so that we can participate in God's redemptive purposes.

Insight

The child needs an infinite, global love, such as no human being is able to give him. No child, I believe, has ever been loved to the degree that he wanted and needed. For the child, love is more necessary than food; it has been scientifically proved. In the contact with God the child experiences an unfailing love. And in the contact with God the child finds the nourishment his being requires, nourishment the child needs in order to grow in harmony. God—who is Love—and the child, who asks for love more than his mother's milk, thus meet one another.

—Sofia Cavalletti

In both the texts below, we see that our value, our dignity and our future are all wrapped up in our identity as beloved children of God. Our children need to know love that is this vast and this enduring. Such children are empowered, like Jesus, to go boldly and do likewise.

Biblical Texts

PSALM 139

- ¹ O Lord, you have searched me
and known me.
- ² You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from far away.
- ³ You search out my path and my lying down,
and are acquainted with all my ways.
- ⁴ Even before a word is on my tongue,
Lord, you know it completely.
- ⁵ You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.
- ⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is so high that I cannot attain it.
- ⁷ Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?
- ⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
- ⁹ If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
- ¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast.
- ¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light around me become night,"
- ¹² even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is as bright as the day,
for darkness is as light to you.
- ¹³ For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
- ¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.
- ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,

- intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
- ¹⁶ Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.
In your book were written all the days that were formed for me,
when none of them as yet existed.
- ¹⁷ How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!
How vast is the sum of them!
- ¹⁸ I try to count them—they are more than the sand;
I come to the end—I am still with you.
- ¹⁹ O that you would kill the wicked, O God,
and that the bloodthirsty would depart from me—
- ²⁰ those who speak of you maliciously,
and lift themselves up against you for evil!
- ²¹ Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord?
And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?
- ²² I hate them with perfect hatred;
I count them my enemies.
- ²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my thoughts.
- ²⁴ See if there is any wicked way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting.



JOHN 5:16–20

¹⁶ Therefore the Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the sabbath. ¹⁷ But Jesus answered them, “My Father is still working, and I also am working.” ¹⁸ For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the Sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God.

¹⁹ Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. ²⁰ The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing; and he will show him greater works than these, so that you will be astonished.

Responses

1. How do these verses speak to the nature/nurture question? genetics/environment? predisposition/choice? Are these distinctions relevant to our identity?

- 
- 
2. Which is easier, to believe God knows us intimately after we are born, or to believe God shaped our very being and gave us a future before we were born? In what ways do these verses confirm or challenge the way we tell our own life story? How might these verses enlarge the vision we have for our life and our future?
 3. How can we communicate the vastness of God's love for children, especially during times of hardship or difficult circumstances?
 4. Identify three or four virtues you desire to model for the children in your life.

Study 16

Children Need Parents Who Care

In *Emotional Intelligence* Psychologist Daniel Goleman discusses the views of psychiatrist Daniel Stern:

Stern is fascinated by the small, repeated exchanges that take place between parent and child; he believes that the most basic lessons of emotional life are laid down in these intimate moments. Of all such moments, the most critical are those that let the child know her emotions are met with empathy, accepted, and reciprocated, in a process Stern calls attunement. ... A baby squeals with delight, for example, and the mother affirms that delight by giving the baby a gentle shake, cooing, or matching the pitch of her voice to the baby's squeal.... Such small attunements give an infant the reassuring feeling of being emotionally connected, a message that Stern finds mothers send about once a minute when they interact with their babies.

In Kenya, little Julianne Nanzanya wants to be a nurse when she grows up, so she can help people with AIDS. In the meantime she has learned to be a model Ugandan housewife. The 10-year-old girl is a sponsored child in the remote village of Kakunyu, Masaka. Julianne already knows how to dig a garden, grow beans, wash clothes—and peel and cook the tough, savory bananas called matooke, a local staple. She has her mother to thank for this set of survival skills. But Regina Namaganda is not giving her daughter this intensive course for purely educational reasons. In 1994 her husband, Julianne's

Insight

It is quite certain therefore that parental authority is strictly limited; it does not extend to the point where it can wreak damage and destruction to the child, especially to its soul.

—Martin Luther

father, died of AIDS. Regina lives with the sobering thought that her time may come soon, and quietly and without fuss she is striving to make sure her children will cope. “Mama has been able to teach me everything she does,” says Julienne. “I like it that mama teaches me these things—I admire her so much, and I want to be like her when I am older.” For her, the housework and gardening are not chores, and she always races ahead of her siblings when it’s time to work on the banana plantation. “When I come home from school I especially like digging in the plots of beans, maize, cassava and potatoes with Mama, because we talk together then. I tell her my problems, because she is my best friend,” says Julienne.

Attentive and caring parenting is key to transforming children’s lives. Because transforming children’s lives transforms the future, Robert Chambers has commented in *Whose Reality Counts*: “It is odd that the treatment of children by their parents is not a matter of massive global public concern, analysis, critical learning and sharing; that [child-focused] organizations...so committed to children, do not make this more a priority.”

In the first-century church parents and children seemingly often found salvation together. Among other examples, in Acts 16:15 Lydia was baptized “with all her household,” and in Acts 16:33 the jailer was baptized “with his whole family.” Throughout church history, theologians have urged Christian parents to raise their children in such a way that they never know a time when they did not know Jesus as Savior and Lord.

Paul’s instructions to Ephesian Christians emphasize the mutual obligations of parents and children. In the full text there are three sets of instructions, addressing wives, children, and slaves as moral agents—no small thing in the context of a culture that assumed wives, children, and slaves did not make choices. And in this larger context, the purpose of mutually submitting to one another is to ensure that the gospel is passed from generation to generation.

This passage echoes the Ten Commandments, where we must wrestle with what honoring our parents does and doesn’t mean, especially in cases of neglect and abuse.

In Cambodia, a 17-year-old girl was abandoned by her father and sold

into prostitution by her sick mother in exchange for food. For several months she worked in a brothel, until she was rescued by district police. She spent several months in World Vision's Neavea Thmey Recovery Center.

"I was provided good care, meals, medicines and counseling," she says. "The project staff encouraged me and gave me a warm love that I had never had before in my life. I had an opportunity to learn new professional skills. Fortunately, I tested HIV negative.... The most exiting day in my life was my wedding—a young man who is 23 years old in the same village fell in love with me. We then got married." Project staff participated in her wedding ceremony.

This girl's story shows that God often provides second chances when birth parents make devastating choices. When biological parents can't seem to get it right, the Bible offers two beautiful perspectives of God's intentions for parenting: the familiar story of the Prodigal Son and the Old Testament account of Hosea, in which God suffers like any true parent when his love for Israel does not consistently elicit love on Israel's part. Let's take a closer look at God's instructions for parents.

Biblical Text

EPHESIANS 5:1,21; 6:1–4

¹Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ...

²¹ Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. ...

^{6:1} 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.

Responses

1. Parents and adults are called to be first of all "imitators of God." What can children learn about God from us?

2. What directions do Scripture give to parents? to children? What

does this text suggest might be an appropriate response to disobedience?

3. Have you had to wrestle with what “honor your father and mother” means? Under what circumstances might this command be rejected?

4. Are there situations in which adults should act as advocates for children with their parents? How might you go about doing this?

Study 17

Children Need Community

The Book of Acts implies children's presence in the first-century church during all aspects of church life, even during persecutions.

Holly Allen (see Appendix 4) writes:

On the one hand, our spirituality needs to be nurtured by more direct interaction with children than many of us are getting. On the other hand, it turns out that children's spirituality most naturally and fruitfully develops not when children are isolated by themselves, but when they are welcomed into the day-to-day life of our communities. Learners must be given access to the practices that they are expected to learn and genuine participation in the activities and concerns of the group. At first, learners are relatively peripheral in the activities of a community, but as they become more experienced and adept, their participation becomes more central. Their participation must be legitimate; that is, they must actually practice the activities themselves, not just observe, or receive instruction about them.... For this to happen, children, new believers, and even older Christians need to be participating in a relational Christian community doing "Christian" things with those further down the road. Scripture attests strongly to this type of learning/becoming relational, intergenerational community.

The story of the 12-year-old Jesus in the temple is a wonderful example of intergenerational learning. Yet healthy relationships among community, parents and children often mean more challenges—and perhaps more aggravation, not less, for everyone. In this scenario everyone grows—together! And of course, we can observe the surprising initiative that children take to learn more than we expect, to ask questions we don't expect them to ask.

One of the recurring issues in working with children is how to respond when parental autonomy, children's rights, and community interests come into conflict. Community needs sometimes override par-

ents' interests and intentions. And yet local cultures do not have the last word in Scripture either.

In Luke 2 we can see the tension between society's and adults' need for children to be compliant and God's intentions for children to develop as leaders needed for the next generation. We can also see community leaders choosing to be God's agent, especially in providing protection or opportunities parents may not be able or inclined to provide.

God's word declares good news: All our children are God's before they are ours. And when needed, God provides protectors and mentors in the context of community. Such "spiritual parenting" is a blessing in which we can all participate. Community at its best invites children's participation and prepares children for the future.

Biblical Text

LUKE 2:41–52

⁴¹ Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. ⁴² And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. ⁴³ When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. ⁴⁴ Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵ When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. ⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷ And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸ When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, "Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety."

Insight

Christians learning in intergenerational [adults and children together] community is a basic biblical assumption. In infinite wisdom, God directed people to worship together, learn together, celebrate together, and work together in cross-generational settings.

—Holly Allen

⁴⁹ He said to them, “Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” ⁵⁰ But they did not understand what he said to them. ⁵¹ Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart. ⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.

Responses

1. Jesus chose to stay in the temple with the teachers rather than return home. Jesus appears to be comfortable with this action and his motivations, but his parents are not. How would your community judge a child who acted as Jesus did? Does Jesus get to do this “because he’s God,” or is this something any child should be able to do? Do your family and faith communities leave room for children to make choices that discomfort their elders without abandoning obligations to discipline?
2. Jesus’ parents’ questions frame reality in one way (v. 48); Jesus’ questions suggest a different frame (v. 49); the parents do not understand the child’s frame (v. 50). How might this text help Christian adolescents begin to find their identity? How might it help parents understand their children’s movement to independence?
3. Luke affirms Jesus’ growth as a whole person—physical, intellectual, social (human favor) and spiritual (divine favor). How can family, church, and other segments of your community combine to nurture such growth in your children?

Study 18

Children Need Wisdom

Israel regularly sought knowledge of God and creation from three sources: the priests, the prophets, and the wise—and sought to introduce the next generation to these good sources.

The text below from Proverbs makes these points:

- Getting wisdom is a matter of life and death.
- Piety is no substitute for wisdom.
- Acquiring wisdom is not easy, but the rewards compensate the effort.

If maturity is learning what we don't know, then all generations need to know where to go for knowledge. If we can see only in part, then how do we get a glimpse of the “bigger picture”? In times past, and occasionally still in some non-Western cultures, the task of passing on wisdom to the next generation was given to elders, respected men and women of great experience. Today the task of passing wisdom to children is often neglected. This is a dangerous gamble, for their future and for ours.

Gaining wisdom is a participatory activity, not one easily acquired from books or lectures. When God invented education—the education of Adam—Adam discovered his identity as fully human in the context of his relationship with God and creation; it is in learning to name God's world that we learn who we are and what we must do. To know whether we are naming well requires going back to the Source, the Origin—and this is exactly what Proverbs tells us is the beginning of wisdom.

World Vision's director of transformational development, Jayakumar Christian, has written, “Years of intergenerational poverty seriously cramp the ability of the poor to even name their reality.” The powerful

Insight

Affirming God's action in history opens up the possibility for the powerless to imagine the future anew.

—Jayakumar Christian

define the terms by which children do or do not have access to education and literacy. This in turn defines which children are able to access God's revelation in God's written Word. Children and adults who cannot reread history with God as the point of reference become trapped in the distorted readings of reality defined by the false perspectives of the powerful. "This is more than stunting of their aspirations and awareness. It also affects the poor's ability to reflect critically and analyze their situation," Christian says. Real wisdom is the root of real transformation, and this begins by learning to find God in our personal history and in the long view of world history.

For all these reasons, wisdom is the beginning of hope for the future. If anyone is in need of such hope, it is the world's children.

Biblical Text

PROVERBS 8:1-3, 17-36

- ¹ Does not wisdom call,
and does not understanding raise her voice?
- ² On the heights, beside the way,
at the crossroads she takes her stand;
- ³ beside the gates in front of the town,
at the entrance of the portals she cries out:...
- ¹⁷ "I love those who love me,
and those who seek me diligently find me.
- ¹⁸ Riches and honor are with me,
enduring wealth and prosperity.
- ¹⁹ My fruit is better than gold, even fine gold,
and my yield than choice silver.
- ²⁰ I walk in the way of righteousness,
along the paths of justice,
- ²¹ endowing with wealth those who love me,
and filling their treasures.
- ²² The Lord created me at the beginning of his work,
the first of his acts of long ago.
- ²³ Ages ago I was set up,
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.
- ²⁴ When there were no depths I was brought forth,
when there were no springs abounding with water.

²⁵ Before the mountains had been shaped,
before the hills, I was brought forth—
²⁶ when he had not yet made earth and fields,
or the world's first bits of soil.
²⁷ When he established the heavens, I was there,
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,
²⁸ when he made firm the skies above,
when he established the fountains of the deep,
²⁹ when he assigned to the sea its limit,
so that the waters might not transgress his command,
when he marked out the foundations of the earth,
³⁰ then I was beside him, like a master worker;
and I was daily his delight,
rejoicing before him always,
³¹ rejoicing in his inhabited world
and delighting in the human race.
³² And now, my children, listen to me:
happy are those who keep my ways.
³³ Hear instruction and be wise,
and do not neglect it.
³⁴ Happy is the one who listens to me,
watching daily at my gates,
waiting beside my doors.
³⁵ For whoever finds me finds life
and obtains favor from the Lord;
³⁶ but those who miss me injure themselves;
all who hate me love death.”

Responses

1. What does Proverbs 8 say about the source of happiness in life? Do you think this applies to all cultures? Why or why not?
2. Does your culture pass on its wisdom? How can we help children acquire experience in wisdom, so that they can learn to seek and find it as they grow?
3. Proverbs identifies God as a source of wisdom. How do you experience and access God's wisdom?

4. How would you teach children to distinguish between God's wisdom and human claims that conflict with God's ways?

Study 19

Prodigals and Sibling Rivalry

Parents inevitably wrestle with how to respond to the bad choices their children make. The pain can be overwhelming, crashing waves that take us deeper and deeper where we cannot swim. We desperately need God's resources to parent in these times.

In the story of the Prodigal Son, Jesus tells us that God not only knows what such heartache feels like for a father or a mother, but also that God has an answer for us. Best of all, God's model offers profound hope. Here we see how God chose to parent, in relation to not one but two lost sons.

This family story is the third in a series of parables Jesus tells about things that are lost and found: sheep, coins, and—infininitely more difficult—sons. Anthropological research has helped us recognize how unusual the conduct of the father in this parable is. Two examples:

- Property was divided at the father's death. To ask that it be divided before is to say to the father, "I wish you were

Insight

By profession I am a soldier and take pride in that fact. But I am prouder—infininitely prouder—to be a father. A soldier destroys in order to build; the father only builds, never destroys. The one has the potentiality of death; the other embodies creation and life. And while the hordes of death are mighty, the battalions of life are mightier still. It is my hope that my son, when I am gone, will remember me not from the battle field but in the home repeating with him our simple daily prayer, "Our Father Who Art in Heaven."

—Douglas MacArthur

dead.” In Jesus’ parable, the father gives no rebuke for how profoundly he has been dishonored.

- A father’s honor would have meant waiting for the subordinate, in this case his son, to approach—never, never running to him.

In contrast to the loving father in Jesus’ parable, the image of a harsh or distant father is familiar in the modern world. An Internet site of quotations about fathers reports that King George V (1865–1936) of England allegedly said, “My father was frightened of his father, I was frightened of my father, and I am [...] well going to see to it that my children are frightened of me.”

Biblical Text

LUKE 15:11–32

¹¹Then Jesus said, “There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.’ So he divided his property between them. ¹³A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. ¹⁴When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. ¹⁶He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.”’ ²⁰So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹Then the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ ²²But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴for this son of mine was dead and

is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate.

²⁵ “Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. ²⁷ He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.’ ²⁸ Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. ²⁹ But he answered his father, ‘Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’ ³¹ Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.’”

Responses

1. In what ways does the younger son break his relationship with his father? What choices does the father make to keep open the possibility of restoring the relationship?
2. In what ways do even obedient children demonstrate prodigal hearts? How does the older son break his relationship with his father? What choices does the father make to keep open the possibility of restoring the relationship?
3. At different points in our journey we may find ourselves identifying with the younger son, the older son, or the father. With whom do you identify, and what challenges does this suggest?
4. What would you think of a father in your church or community who acted like this? Would people say he was being weak, not firm enough? We all need the gift of forgiveness and second chances. Is there anyone in your life who would welcome the gift of forgiveness from you?

Study 20

Don't Put David in Saul's Armor

Child participation is growing in importance in our work. Why? Because when children learn that they matter to their families, their communities, and God, they learn that they can play a role in transforming their own futures.

The striking story of David taking on a Goliath-sized problem on Israel's behalf is an opportunity to reflect on how children's response to God can lead to participation, if adults don't block them. One point to especially notice: On whose terms does David participate? David redefines the participation that Jesse, Eliab and Saul propose. Only by virtue of David taking initiative in participating and defining terms of the participation does Israel experience God's salvation.

Odillia, a young Mayan woman with long black hair, was one of a very few young women attending high school in the mountaintop village of San Juan Atitan in Guatemala. "The men spread rumors that I'm prostituting myself," she said. "But right now it's more important for me to be single and to study." Most girls marry at age 14 in her village. But Odillia was handpicked by her community to participate in a national network of girls ages 10–16 whose goal is to pave a different future.

Insight

Children can be highly effectual agents of change in their own families and communities. Because they own the future, children must be involved and listened to by parents, community leaders, government agencies, and humanitarian organizations.

—WV Children in Ministry Working Group

These girls—who call themselves Shalom promoters—leave their hamlets a few times a year to receive leadership training with assistance from the Kellogg Foundation and World Vision. They learn how

to vote for a board with a president and treasurer, and how to speak in public. Odillia was inspired by the biblical story of Esther, a young Jewish woman who saved her community from slaughter at the hands of a Persian king. Odillia decided she could speak for her community, even though this put her at risk. Violence against women is common in Guatemala, and women are very careful not to offend. Women in Odillia's community don't buy land, have no say over family affairs or budget, and are unlikely to vote. But in communities across Guatemala, the Shalom girls' clubs have promoted peace and greater access to community leadership roles, business opportunities and education. "My life is going to be different from my mother's," says Odillia. "God supports me, and my family is really happy for me."

Biblical Text

1 SAMUEL 17:17–23, 26, 28–51

¹⁷ Jesse said to his son David, "Take for your brothers an ephah of this parched grain and these ten loaves, and carry them quickly to the camp to your brothers; ¹⁸ also take these ten cheeses to the commander of their thousand. See how your brothers fare, and bring some token from them." ¹⁹ Now Saul, and they, and all the men of Israel, were in the valley of Elah, fighting with the Philistines. ²⁰ David rose early in the morning, left the sheep with a keeper, took the provisions, and went as Jesse had commanded him. He came to the encampment as the army was going forth to the battle line, shouting the war cry. ²¹ Israel and the Philistines drew up for battle, army against army. ²² David left the things in charge of the keeper of the baggage, ran to the ranks, and went and greeted his brothers. ²³ As he talked with them, the champion, the Philistine of Gath, Goliath by name, came up out of the ranks of the Philistines, and spoke the same words as before. And David heard him....

²⁶ David said to the men who stood by him, "What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine, and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?"...

²⁸ His eldest brother Eliab heard him talking to the men; and Eliab's anger was kindled against David. He said, "Why have you come down? With whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know

your presumption and the evil of your heart; for you have come down just to see the battle.” ²⁹ David said, “What have I done now? It was only a question.” ³⁰ He turned away from him toward another and spoke in the same way; and the people answered him again as before.

³¹ When the words that David spoke were heard, they repeated them before Saul; and he sent for him. ³² David said to Saul, “Let no one’s heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine.” ³³ Saul said to David, “You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him; for you are just a boy, and he has been a warrior from his youth.” ³⁴ But David said to Saul, “Your servant used to keep sheep for his father; and whenever a lion or a bear came, and took a lamb from the flock, ³⁵ I went after it and struck it down, rescuing the lamb from its mouth; and if it turned against me, I would catch it by the jaw, strike it down, and kill it. ³⁶ Your servant has killed both lions and bears; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, since he has defied the armies of the living God.” ³⁷ David said, “The Lord, who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from the hand of this Philistine.” So Saul said to David, “Go, and may the Lord be with you!”

³⁸ Saul clothed David with his armor; he put a bronze helmet on his head and clothed him with a coat of mail. ³⁹ David strapped Saul’s sword over the armor, and he tried in vain to walk, for he was not used to them. Then David said to Saul, “I cannot walk with these; for I am not used to them.” So David removed them. ⁴⁰ Then he took his staff in his hand, and chose five smooth stones from the wadi, and put them in his shepherd’s bag, in the pouch; his sling was in his hand, and he drew near to the Philistine.

⁴¹ The Philistine came on and drew near to David, with his shield-bearer in front of him. ⁴² When the Philistine looked and saw David, he disdained him, for he was only a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. ⁴³ The Philistine said to David, “Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?” And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. ⁴⁴ The Philistine said to David, “Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the field.” ⁴⁵ But David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with sword and spear and javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. ⁴⁶ This very day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down

and cut off your head; and I will give the dead bodies of the Philistine army this very day to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the earth, so that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel,⁴⁷ and that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not save by sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's and he will give you into our hand."

⁴⁸ When the Philistine drew nearer to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. ⁴⁹ David put his hand in his bag, took out a stone, slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead; the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground.

⁵⁰ So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, striking down the Philistine and killing him; there was no sword in David's hand. ⁵¹ Then David ran and stood over the Philistine; he grasped his sword, drew it out of its sheath, and killed him; then he cut off his head with it. When the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, they fled.

Responses

1. David's real strength is his bold, childlike faith in God. Describe the nature of David's faith. How does your faith compare to his?
2. What does David identify as the problem posed by the Philistine?
3. To address this significant problem, David has to deal with Eliab, Saul, and Goliath. In what respects are the perceptions of these three the same? different? Which poses the greatest challenge to David?
4. Saul offers David his own armor, an offer that in an honor-conscious culture would have been difficult, if not dangerous, to turn down. What does David do in response?
5. In what ways might your community be offering "Saul's armor" to the children with whom you live and work? How can we offer gifts so that children are free to accept or reject them?
6. Does verse 47 say anything about our own reliance on adult "armor," plans and assumptions, or methods? Is it possible to become so committed to our ways of doing things that we reject the wisdom of children? or new ways of doing things? Discuss.





Jesus' Invitation

To Be Like a Child



Study 21

Learning to Repent

“I have two sisters; there were five of us in the family, but now we are four. ...The other one was killed. She was the older. I was five years old when they killed her; they have never told me if the gang members killed her. Also my two brothers were killed; we are five brothers and five sisters; only one sister and two brothers are dead. ... I do not know either who killed my brothers; I only know that it was some 25 years ago when they were killed, before I was born. When I started in the gang, it was nice because I felt I had many friends, brothers, sisters. I told them everything. I felt happy, but when I saw that they raped a girl in my presence, I felt, I do not know. I felt like crying because it seemed that they were doing this to me. Two years ago I killed an old woman because in the gang they told me that I had to kill someone and this blood was the one I was going to sacrifice....I pushed her, and all of a sudden I realized she was not breathing. She was old, like 60 years old, and lived with her children. The children were members of the gang. I killed the grandmother of members of the gang. I felt a very deep pain because I felt I was killing my own grandmother.”

—Twelve-year-old Rosa from Guatemala

The Bible never romanticizes children. Even infants are not blank slates but spiritual beings, engaged in “spiritual battle” even before cognitive ability develops.

Since the days of the Fall, part of being human has included learning that evil is real and that even children are capable of it. The required prescription, for both children and adults, is repentance. God has compassion on and restores a broken and contrite heart, says the psalmist.

Insight

I ask you, my God, I ask,
Lord, where and when your
servant was innocent?

—St. Augustine

Because guilt and sin are so tragically common as part of fallen humanity, what is it we can learn from and with children about repentance? Perhaps we can imitate the humility and inability to bear a broken relationship with a beloved parent that causes a young child to run to the parent's arms and sob, "I did it. I'm sorry."

Biblical Text

PSALM 51

- ¹ Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
- ² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.
- ³ For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
- ⁴ Against you, you alone, have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence
and blameless when you pass judgment.
- ⁵ Indeed, I was born guilty,
a sinner when my mother conceived me.
- ⁶ You desire truth in the inward being;
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.
- ⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
- ⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.
- ⁹ Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.
- ¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
- ¹¹ Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
- ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.

- ¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.
- ¹⁴ Deliver me from bloodshed, O God,
O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.
- ¹⁵ O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
- ¹⁶ For you have no delight in sacrifice;
if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.
- ¹⁷ The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.
- ¹⁸ Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;
rebuild the walls of Jerusalem,
- ¹⁹ then you will delight in right sacrifices,
in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

Responses

1. What is the psalmist feeling?
2. In David's view, is God harsh and critical? or lenient and easily appeased? How do we know God accepts our repentance and restores our relationship?
3. Does your culture take sin seriously or not? Should we treat adult and children's sin differently? Why or why not?
4. Pray this verse from Psalm 51 often:
Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.

Study 22

Learning to Trust God's Faithfulness

A mother in Mexico describes her 7-year-old son:

There are two extremes of my Isaac. One day he is loving, plays a lot, invents things and loves to sing, but the next day he is quiet, cries and he only wants to rest; overall he is the bravest boy I have ever seen, and I love him.”

Isaac was born with multiple heart problems, causing frequent pneumonia and kidney problems, and keeping him from exercise. In the second grade, he is always a top student.

“When I grow up I want to be a fireman and a policeman and a doctor,” Isaac says.

He struggles to live every day. His mother fights tears. “Four months ago, a heart arrived for him, but we missed it. We did not get the message from the hospital on time, and the heart was given to another boy.”

Isaac replies, “God has a better heart for me, that is why I did not get that one,” and he keeps playing. “Mom, do you know why I have not gone to heaven? Because God wants you to be happy. I know that when I go to heaven, angels will come and guide me so I will not be afraid on the way. . . . Mom, please do not cry again, I am fine and God is with us.”

Isaac’s kind of serenity and trust in God’s care can only be experienced, by adults or children, as we learn to see our story from an eternal point of view. Some of Scripture’s most focused reflection on learning to trust

Insight

Wherefore also He [Jesus] passed through every stage of life, restoring to all communion with God.

—Irenaeus

God's faithfulness occurs as people in deep troubles or despair recall how God has been present in their past and so will continue to be present no matter what happens. We see God's loving and faithful hand clearly when we put our whole life in the context of eternity.

Biblical Text

PSALM 71

- ⁴ Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked,
from the grasp of the unjust and cruel.
- ⁵ For you, O Lord, are my hope,
my trust, O Lord, from my youth.
- ⁶ Upon you I have leaned from my birth;
it was you who took me from my mother's womb.
My praise is continually of you.
- ⁷ I have been like a portent to many,
but you are my strong refuge.
- ⁸ My mouth is filled with your praise,
and with your glory all day long.
- ⁹ Do not cast me off in the time of old age;
do not forsake me when my strength is spent.
- ¹⁰ For my enemies speak concerning me,
and those who watch for my life consult together.
- ¹¹ They say, "Pursue and seize that person
whom God has forsaken,
for there is no one to deliver."
- ¹² O God, do not be far from me;
O my God, make haste to help me!
- ¹³ Let my accusers be put to shame and consumed;
let those who seek to hurt me
be covered with scorn and disgrace.
- ¹⁴ But I will hope continually,
and will praise you yet more and more.
- ¹⁵ My mouth will tell of your righteous acts,
of your deeds of salvation all day long,
though their number is past my knowledge.
- ¹⁶ I will come praising the mighty deeds of the Lord God,
I will praise your righteousness, yours alone.

¹⁷ O God, from my youth you have taught me,
and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds.

¹⁸ So even to old age and gray hairs,
O God, do not forsake me,
until I proclaim your might
to all the generations to come.

Your power ¹⁹ and your righteousness, O God,
reach the high heavens.
You who have done great things,
O God, who is like you?

Responses

1. The psalmist has treasured childhood memories of God's presence in his life. In what ways is the psalmist's account of childhood before God similar to or different from our accounts? How does this affect who we are today? Do we act differently toward God today than we did in childhood?

2. What is the psalmist's greatest fear? What are the vulnerabilities of infancy and old age? How is dependency an issue in both?

3. How can your community better support children in order to nurture and express their confidence in God (as Isaac, the 7-year-old in Mexico, does)?

Study 23

The Lord's Prayer Is a Child's Prayer

Imagine the prayers uttered by millions of children and adults facing extreme hardship.

At a time when insects and lack of rain threatened food supplies in southern Chad, Tomas Merahonjul, father of five, watched his 7-year-old son, Desiré, struggle to tie up the family's two cattle, carefully avoiding their pointed horns. "We may have to sell one of our bulls soon," says Tomas.

He might get approximately US\$32 from the sale of one prize bull.

"We're eating wild leaves and roots," he explains. "Our bulls help us till the land before planting. But although we need them for farming, I'd rather sell them than see my children die of hunger. ...Right now, I've done all I can for my fields. Now I'm waiting for God to give us some good rains and to keep the insects away."

Tomas and Desiré's prayers were becoming desperate. As it turned out, with famine approaching, World Vision and the World Food Programme worked to provide emergency food for children like Desiré and his family, to make food available at a much-reduced price, and to find ways to reduce villagers' vulnerability to famine.

Jesus had something to say to those who need to talk to God. He tells us, simply, to talk to God as we would to a much-loved father. As the author of the Epistle to the Romans says, "When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:15b-16). This doesn't give us license to abuse or exploit God's generosity but rather raises the

Insight

If you follow Jesus' advice and pray to God constantly, then you will learn to pray well. God himself will teach you.

—John Paul II

standard for loving and being loved, for real and committed mutual intimacy. Only as we learn to see God as a good parent (a process that often takes a lifetime) will we consent to understand ourselves as God's children.

Biblical Text

MATTHEW 6:7–15 & 7:7–11

⁷ “When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

⁹ “Pray then in this way:
Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.

¹⁰ Your kingdom come.
Your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread.

¹² And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And do not bring us to the time of trial,
but rescue us from the evil one.

¹⁴ For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses....

^{7:7} “Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. ⁹ Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? ¹⁰ Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? ¹¹ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!”



Responses

1. Before teaching us how to pray, Jesus makes statements about how *not* to pray. What are your preferred patterns of prayer?
2. Part of the larger context for the Lord's Prayer (6:9–13) is Jesus' vision of God as Father. Are there factors in your history that make it hard for you to see God as a loving parent? Have you ever encountered negative images of God? Can you dare to believe that God is even better than the most loving human father?
3. Think about children you know. State their names and pray the Lord's Prayer on their behalf.

Study 24

Childlike, Not Childish

Childhood is meant to provide protected space in which one can grow into accountability. Jesus encourages us to stay in this space in our life before God. And yet Paul and other New Testament writers urge us not to stay children forever. Clearly there is a difference between being childlike and being childish.

In 1999, WV Canada president Dave Toycen spent Easter Sunday walking through refugee camps in Albania. There, he met a 10-year-old boy named Liridan, who had fled with his parents from the conflict in Kosovo. While boarding a farm wagon to escape the soldiers, Liridan was struck on the arm by a rifle butt. His arm was broken, and over the course of a three-day, harrowing journey, Liridan lost consciousness, but in the end he made it to freedom. Now, he, along with his family, was crowded into a broken-down gymnasium with scores of other families. There was little privacy, a shortage of water and filthy, overcrowded latrines. His mother wept as she described their ordeal, especially the fear that Liridan would be killed by the soldiers.

As the interview was coming to an end, Dave noticed a small package of foil in Liridan's good hand. Earlier one of the church groups had

Insight

Learn well, then, how important God considers obedience, since he so highly exalts it, so greatly delights in it, so richly rewards it, and besides is so strict about punishing those who transgress it.

—Martin Luther

distributed small Easter presents to the children. With a child's spontaneity this traumatized little boy opened his hand, and offered a piece of chocolate to Dave. Dave was touched by the incredible generosity of this little boy who shared in the midst of such loss.

The Bible presents core themes such as God as Father, new birth, and so on, that we often read without thinking of ourselves as children. And yet there are ways in which children are

precisely who we are called to be. We are invited on a pilgrimage together—adults and children on the same journey—to become the child of God we were born to be.

Biblical Texts

1 PETER 1:14–17

¹⁴ Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. ¹⁵ Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; ¹⁶ for it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

¹⁷ If you invoke as Father the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear during the time of your exile.

EPHESIANS 5:1

¹ Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.

1 CORINTHIANS 3:1–3

¹ And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. ² I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, ³ for you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations?

1 CORINTHIANS 14:20

²⁰ Brothers and sisters, do not be children in your thinking; rather, be infants in evil, but in thinking be adults.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:11–12

¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. ¹² For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.

EPHESIANS 4:14–16

¹⁴We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. ¹⁵But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

HEBREWS 5:11–14

¹¹About this we have much to say that is hard to explain, since you have become dull in understanding. ¹²For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic elements of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food; ¹³for everyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is unskilled in the word of righteousness. ¹⁴But solid food is for the mature, for those whose faculties have been trained by practice to distinguish good from evil.

Responses

1. Review the texts to identify “childish” patterns to avoid and “child-like” attitudes to retain.
2. Think of a time in your life when you “grew up” emotionally or spiritually. What helped you? What threatened to hinder you?
3. Christians use the language of God as Father, new birth, being children of God, and so forth. If we understand ourselves as children, what behaviors would these texts encourage us to pursue?
4. Read the texts again. How do you resolve the call to be “like little children” with the last four quotations from Scripture given above? What do these texts say to us about ourselves? about our relationships with children? with other Christians? with God?

Study 25

The Road to Humility

In Jesus' day rabbis paid little attention to children, especially to girls. Yet children are in the center of Matthew's Gospel. God's self-definition and self-revelation to humanity is as a child, a child in especially difficult circumstances, not as a prince, an intellectual, or a heroic figure. As an adult, Jesus tells his disciples that they will find him when they welcome and meet the needs of children. Like Jesus, children suffer at the hands of the powerful. Jesus makes it clear, speaking to men in church leadership in particular, that if we want to follow him, children must be at the center of our community. Further, Jesus says that how well we serve and protect children will be a matter of importance on Judgment Day, a measure of how much we lived like Christ.

What Jesus asks of his disciples—and of us—completely upends social norms and expectations. He elevates what is traditionally a woman's role to a sign of strength, a sign of God's favor. He defines the image of God, fully revealed, in a child. Jesus places high value on our becoming "like children." He doesn't ask us to acquire doctrinal knowledge or initiate large religious events. He doesn't ask us to "toughen up" or become more sophisticated. Apparently, Jesus wants our vulnerability, not our strength. The kingdom of heaven is for whoever is most dependent. Powerlessness is the sign of our need for God, for a Savior.

While this verse is a challenge—offensive, even, in a culture of ambition and striving for self-esteem and self-fulfillment—it is also a profound comfort. Jesus says we are loved not because of what we can do for God, but for ourselves. We can come to him frightened, overwhelmed, confused, in need of watching over. We can come to him eager to learn and grow.

If we are to become like children, we need to spend more time with them.

Insight

Indeed, for what purpose
do we older folks exist,
other than to care for,
instruct, and bring up the
young?

—Martin Luther

Holly Allen writes, “We need to . . . include them as we share our hearts about God. In order for these things to happen, the adults and children must spend large amounts of time together in small groups, working, playing, worshiping, talking, sharing, praying. There is no substitute for this time together.”

In the following text from Matthew, Jesus calls on his adult followers to embrace children and to become like them. It is only in being child-like that we find in God a father—our Father.

Biblical Text

MATTHEW 18:1–6

¹ 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.”

Responses

1. Rather than telling his disciples to “stop acting like children,” Jesus puts a child in their midst and says, “Become like that!” What do you think Jesus meant?
2. In what ways is a child humble? How does humility affect your response to God’s love? Have you known someone who seems truly humble? Do you think you are humble?
3. Is an adult or a child more likely to believe it’s possible to be given a kingdom, rather than having to earn or win it? Keep in mind that Jesus’ is speaking directly to men who are about to become church leaders.
4. While much of this text parallels Mark 9:33–37 and Luke 9:46–48,

verses 3 and 4 are unique to Matthew. What changes in our behavior do these verses invite?

5. What can we do to nurture and encourage the spiritual development of children in our care? Are there ways we can support and promote organizational, “big picture” transformation? What are we doing now to extend compassion and protection for all God’s children?







Appendices



Appendix I

Our Mission Statement

World Vision is an international partnership of Christians whose mission is to follow our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in working with the poor and oppressed to promote human transformation, seek justice, and bear witness to the good news of the kingdom of God.

We pursue this mission through integrated, holistic commitment to:

Transformational Development that is community-based and sustainable, focused especially on the needs of children.

Emergency Relief that assists people afflicted by conflict or disaster.

Promotion of Justice that seeks to change unjust structures affecting the poor among whom we work.

Strategic Initiatives that serve the church in the fulfillment of its mission.

Public Awareness that leads to informed understanding, giving, involvement, and prayer.

Witness to Jesus Christ by life, deed, word, and sign that encourages people to respond to the Gospel.

Appendix 2

Our Core Values

We are Christian.

We acknowledge one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In Jesus Christ the love, mercy, and grace of God are made known to us and all people. From this overflowing abundance of God's love, we find our call to ministry.

We proclaim together, "Jesus lived, died, and rose again. Jesus is Lord." We desire him to be central in our individual and corporate lives.

We seek to follow him—in his identification with the poor, the powerless, the afflicted, the oppressed, and the marginalized; in his special concern for children; in his respect for the dignity bestowed by God on women equally with men; in his challenge to unjust attitudes and systems; in his call to share resources with each other; in his love for all people without discrimination or conditions; in his offer of new life through faith in him. From him we derive our holistic understanding of the gospel of the Kingdom of God, which forms the basis of our response to human need.

We hear his call to servanthood and see the example of his life. We commit ourselves to a servant spirit permeating the organization. We know this means facing honestly our own pride, sin, and failure.

We bear witness to the redemption offered only through faith in Jesus Christ. The staff we engage are equipped by belief and practice to bear this witness. We will maintain our identity as Christian, while being sensitive to the diverse contexts in which we express that identity.

We are committed to the poor.

We are called to serve the neediest people of the earth; to relieve their suffering; and to promote the transformation of their condition of life.

We stand in solidarity in a common search for justice. We seek to understand the situation of the poor and work alongside them towards

fullness of life. We share our discovery of eternal hope in Jesus Christ.

We seek to facilitate an engagement between the poor and the affluent that opens both to transformation. We respect the poor as active participants, not passive recipients, in this relationship. They are people from whom others may learn and receive, as well as give. The need for transformation is common to all. Together we share a quest for justice, peace, reconciliation, and healing in a broken world.

We value people.

We regard all people as created and loved by God. We give priority to people before money, structure, systems and other institutional machinery. We act in ways that respect the dignity, uniqueness, and intrinsic worth of every person—the poor, the donors, our staff and their families, boards, and volunteers. We celebrate the richness of diversity in human personality, culture, and contribution.

We practice a participative, open, enabling style in working relationships. We encourage the professional, personal, and spiritual development of our staff.

We are stewards.

The resources at our disposal are not our own. They are a sacred trust from God through donors on behalf of the poor. We are faithful to the purpose for which those resources are given and manage them in a manner that brings maximum benefit to the poor.

We speak and act honestly. We are open and factual in our dealings with donor constituencies, project communities, governments, the public at large, and with each other. We endeavor to convey a public image conforming to reality. We strive for consistency between what we say and what we do.

We demand of ourselves high standards of professional competence and accept the need to be accountable through appropriate structures for achieving these standards. We share our experience and knowledge with others where it can assist them.

We are stewards of God's creation. We care for the earth and act in ways that will restore and protect the environment. We ensure that our development activities are ecologically sound.



We are partners.

We are members of an international World Vision Partnership that transcends legal, structural, and cultural boundaries. We accept the obligations of joint participation, shared goals, and mutual accountability that true partnership requires. We affirm our interdependence and our willingness to yield autonomy as necessary for the common good. We commit ourselves to know, understand, and love each other.

We are partners with the poor and with donors in a shared ministry. We affirm and promote unity in the Body of Christ. We pursue relationship with all churches and desire mutual participation in ministry. We seek to contribute to the holistic mission of the church.

We maintain a cooperative stance and a spirit of openness towards other humanitarian organizations. We are willing to receive and consider honest opinions from others about our work.

We are responsive.



We are responsive to life-threatening emergencies where our involvement is needed and appropriate. We are willing to take intelligent risks and act quickly. We do this from a foundation of experience and sensitivity to what the situation requires. We also recognize that even in the midst of crisis, the destitute have a contribution to make from their experience.

We are responsive in a different sense where deep-seated and often complex economic and social deprivation calls for sustainable, long-term development. We maintain the commitments necessary for this to occur.

We are responsive to new and unusual opportunities. We encourage innovation, creativity, and flexibility. We maintain an attitude of learning, reflection, and discovery in order to grow in understanding and skill.

Our commitment.

We recognize that values cannot be legislated; they must be lived. No document can substitute for the attitudes, decisions, and actions that make up the fabric of our life and work.



Therefore, we covenant with each other, before God, to do our utmost individually and as corporate entities within the World Vision Partnership to uphold these Core Values, to honor them in our decisions, to express them in our relationships, and to act consistently with them wherever World Vision is at work.

Appendix 3

Transformational Development and the Child

Jayakumar Christian



Transformational development is “community, families and children pursuing wholeness of life with justice, dignity, peace and hope.” (For more information, see the Transformational Development Frame—WV’s preferred model of development—and the revised policy on Transformational Development.)

World Vision partners with the poor in this journey toward transformational development. Transformational development seeks the well-being and the empowerment of the child within the context of the family and the community. Transformational development seeks to equip and empower the families and communities to

- Ensure the survival and growth of all girls and boys
- Enhance access to health and basic education
- Provide opportunities for spiritual and emotional nurture
- Enhance the capacity of children to earn a future livelihood
- Protect girls and boys from abuse and exploitation
- Empower and equip all girls and boys to participate in the development process in an age-appropriate manner, becoming agents of transformation in their families and communities, in the present and future.

By empowering children to be agents of transformation, we can build a future of transformed relationships, interdependent and empowered communities, and transformed systems and structures.

This focus on the well-being and empowerment of all girls and boys is based on the recognition that

- 
- 
1. girls and boys are the most vulnerable group in a community and are most affected by the consequences of poverty;
 2. both girls and boys have the potential to be agents of transformation in their families and communities, both now and in the future;
 3. we must invest in children as a means to fight to alleviate poverty within a framework of sustainability; and
 4. the well-being of children is a key indicator of sustainable community development.

The focus on children must include awareness and compliance with the rights of children to life, protection, provision and participation. This focus on children involves equipping and empowering families and communities.

World Vision recognizes that transformation is a continuous process of holistic change brought about by God, and that the journey toward wholeness of life with dignity, justice, peace, and hope must be informed by our understanding of the Bible. Our approach to transformational development is Christ-centered, child-focused, community-based, value-based, sustainable, and holistic. Finally, our model of transformational development seeks the continuing transformation of all partners, including World Vision staff, boards and donors as well as communities, churches, NGOs, businesses and governments.

Let us engage in transformational development with these mandates in mind. Let us pursue excellence even as we partner with communities, families and children in their pursuit of a life of justice, dignity, peace and hope for all girls and boys.

Appendix 4

Integrating Healthy Childhood Development with Spiritual Growth

Holly Allen

One of the most prominent researchers on early childhood development, Erik Erikson (1902–94) wrote about the stages of children's personal growth and maturity. His work can help us name and reflect on what we observe as we respond to the children with whom we work and live.

Erikson conducted years of clinical observations among children, including research with the Sioux and Yurok Native American tribes. His work at Harvard Medical School, Yale University, the University of California at Berkeley, as well as his training in Vienna and upbringing in Germany, led him to believe that individuals develop over their whole lifetime in developmental stages. Erikson's stages share much in common with the development of Christian attributes as faith matures—particularly hope and love.

In general, integrating Erikson's work with religious, spiritual insight yields the basic truism that healthy psychosocial growth and healthy spiritual growth are related. For example, children who consistently experience trustworthy parents in infancy tend to accept that God is trustworthy. Conversely, an infancy characterized by abuse from caretakers can create barriers to a life of trusting, growing faith. As teachers, parents and other caregivers guide children's growth, they should be aware of the need to help children develop trust, autonomy, initiative and industry. These will also foster the Christian qualities of hope, contrition, fortitude and humility; will build faith as trust, courage, and obedience; and will contribute to a healthy theological foundation.

W.W. Meissner lists spiritual qualities that emerge when people progress

in a healthy way through Erikson's stages. Thus, reading across Table A4–1, one might say that as an infant successfully negotiates the task of developing trust, the groundwork is laid for the healthy development of hope, and hope and trust are required for the most basic spiritual quality of faith. Working through the next row, one would surmise that as young children develop appropriate autonomy, not burdened with overwhelming shame, they also acquire an appropriate will, enabling them to take responsibility for good and bad; this, in turn, yields the appropriate spiritual response, contrition, when faced with guilt.

Table A4–1: Psychosocial and Spiritual Development

Stages of growth	Psychosocial crises ^a	Ego Strength ^a	Psycho-spiritual crises ^b
Infancy: Birth to age 2	Trust vs. mistrust	Hope	Faith, hope
Early childhood: Ages 2–3	Autonomy vs. shame or doubt	Will	Contrition, ability to take responsibility for good or bad
Play age: Ages 4–5	Initiative vs. guilt	Purpose	Penance, righting a wrong
School age: Ages 6–12	Industry vs. inferiority	Competence	Fortitude, ability to push through
Adolescence: Ages 13–19	Identity vs. role identity confusion	Fidelity	Humility, no need to promote self constantly
Young Adulthood: Ages 20–24	Intimacy vs. isolation	Love	Love of neighbor
Adulthood: Ages 25–64	Generativity vs. self-absorption	Care	Service, zeal, self-sacrifice
Maturity: Age 65 to death	Integrity vs. despair or self-contempt	Wisdom	Charity

^a Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, 2d ed. (New York: Norton, 1963).

^b W.W. Meissner, *Life and Faith: Psychological Perspectives on Religious Experience* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University, 1987).

Trust vs. Mistrust (Exodus 2)

A baby enters the world from the womb, a place that continually and consistently provided for the developing child's every need. Yet upon entry into the outer world, the baby's needs are met less consistently and certainly not continually. The child's parents and other caregivers meet most of those needs, usually consistently, but gaps occasionally occur. Basically, according to Erikson, the child, during the first two years of life, is resolving these questions: Is the world a safe place? Is it trustworthy? As basic needs are met (food, cleanliness, rest and touch), the child develops a fundamental sense of the trustworthiness of the world. Erikson explicitly ties the development of trust to hope—which Scripture links closely with faith (Heb. 11:1). C. Stonehouse in *Joining Children in the Spiritual Journey* also makes a direct connection: "The ability to trust is inseparably bound up with faith. Faith is reaching out to God in confidence that God will be there and will work for our good."

The early life of Moses as recorded in Exodus 2 gives an example of a child who was provided the opportunity to experience trust at a very young age despite precarious circumstances. Jochebed, Moses' mother, not only devised a means to save his life, but she orchestrated the opportunity for continued relationship with her son by having Miriam volunteer Jochebed's services to Pharaoh's daughter. Thus, despite uncertain times, Jochebed was able to give her young son a stable, trustworthy environment, providing crucial grounding for the life of astonishing faith and trust that Moses lived. Other events in Moses' life, his rejection of the ways of Egypt, his years of shepherding, God's speaking to him in the burning bush—all prepared him to lead the Israelites faithfully. But the basic trust nurtured in him from a young age gave him the foundational faith to reject the ways of Egypt, to believe in Yahweh and to follow God as he led the people.

When a child learns mistrust in these early months, the trust/mistrust task must be later negotiated and resolved, usually a difficult undertaking, in order for faith to grow. For the child to become a whole, healthy and mature adult, another person (or a community of people) must receive the child and love, accept and care for the child until a trusting relationship can be established. As Iris Cully writes in *Christian Child Development*, "Children will develop a basic trust in them-

selves, other people, and God through living with adults who trust themselves, other people, and God.”

Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt
(Colossians 3:21; Ephesians 6:4)

Between 18 and 24 months toddlers begin the long process of separating from their parents. They begin to establish their independence in surprising, exciting and sometimes frustrating ways. They learn to control their elimination processes; they acquire the concept of “No!”; they discover ownership: “Mine!” And they want to do many things “by myself.” They are practicing their autonomy, or self-will. They are beginning to negotiate Erikson’s second crisis, autonomy vs. shame or doubt.

Children need help to navigate the very difficult process of developing an appropriate balance between free choice and self-restraint. Parents need to provide boundaries for the newly mobile child, rules for “owning” and sharing toys, guidance for interacting with other children.

Parents themselves must find an appropriate combination of firmness and tolerance. If parents are overcontrolling at this stage—quelling any sign of independence, overriding every display of assertiveness, disallowing choice—children may begin to doubt their newfound strengths and abilities. On the other hand, if parents and other caregivers fail to provide boundaries, children may endanger themselves and others as well as inhibiting their growth toward healthy independence.

In attempting to corral their energetic, sometimes out-of-bounds preschoolers, parents may shame their children into behaving properly. Erikson warns that this strategy will ultimately fail. The child may for the moment behave, but the obedience will be outward, not inward. Children who are regularly demeaned, belittled and shamed eventually rebel, either secretly or openly. Children raised in shame-based homes come to feel that it is not their behavior that is unacceptable—rather, it is they themselves who are unworthy. Meissner connects Erikson’s second stage—autonomy vs. shame and doubt—to the spiritual concept of contrition.

Paul's directives for parenting reflect Erikson's recommendations. In Colossians 3:21 and Ephesians 6:4 Paul warns fathers not to provoke, embitter, or exasperate their children. Rather, they are to encourage, nurture and discipline them. Paul also wrote that he had cared for the Thessalonians "as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting, and urging" (1 Thess. 2:11–12).

Initiative vs. Guilt (Luke 19:1–10)

During the "play" stage (ages 4 and 5), children love to play dress-up and make-believe, emulating adult activities and roles as mommies and daddies, soldiers, schoolteachers, and so on. As they gain coordination of their bodies, learn to respect boundaries and acquire experience making choices—that is, as they develop a sense of autonomy—children begin to undertake, plan and create their own activities. This Erikson calls initiative.

However, the activities children initiate often overextend their physical or mental capabilities, or create relational difficulties among playmates, and adult intervention is required. As adults provide guidance, rules and direction for the initiated activities, children incorporate the voices of parents and other caregivers into their conscience, which begins to form at this period of life. As children inculcate the expected norms, directives and principles into their conscience, they become aware when they break a rule, and this leads to guilt.

Guilt can be quite positive, leading to sorrow and a desire to set things right. However, an overdeveloped conscience, with countless rules and regulations, rigid boundaries and little grace, results in excessive and unhealthy guilt, which can inhibit initiative and create a sense of inherent badness. This process is similar to the shame described earlier. Erikson differentiates the two by explaining that with shame, children feel judged by others and found to be bad; with excessive guilt children judge themselves according to a severe conscience and find themselves to be bad. In either case the results stymie psychosocial development, as well as spiritual development. According to Meissner, when children successfully navigate the autonomy vs. shame and initiative vs. guilt crises, they become able to respond with contrition and penance when they do wrong. They are able to accept responsibility for wrongdoing and seek ways to make amends. On the other hand, if the

psychosocial crises have not been resolved, shame and overriding guilt may rule, and children may hide, defend, or deny culpability.

As Meissner writes in *Life and Faith*, “Shame is the reaction of the guilty soul trying to hide its face from God, while true contrition is the reaction of the soul that turns to God in sorrow and seeks forgiveness.”

A biblical example that illustrates contrition and penance is Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–10). Zacchaeus, a wealthy tax collector in Jericho, was viewed as a sinner by the Jews of Jericho (v. 7). Luke says that Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus, and when Jesus saw Zacchaeus seeking him from a tree, Jesus invited himself to Zacchaeus’s house. Zacchaeus’s encounter with Jesus produces in him an understanding of his sinfulness, yet he is not so overcome with shame that he runs and hides. Rather, he announces that he will give half his possessions to the poor and will pay restitution to those whom he has cheated in collecting taxes. His example of contrition and penance illustrates the behaviors Meissner describes. On the other hand, Judas provides an example of one whose response to his sin is that of overwhelming guilt and shame. Rather than accepting responsibility for the wrong he has done and seeking forgiveness, Judas seeks the ultimate hiding place: death (Matt. 27:5).

Meissner says that the roots of these two responses to sin are formed in the preschool years as children negotiate the psychosocial crises of autonomy vs. shame and initiative vs. guilt. If these crises are successfully resolved the spiritual response to inevitable sin will be a contrite heart, one that is humble before God, accepting responsibility for the sin, receiving forgiveness, and making amends.

Industry versus Inferiority (Luke 2:40, 52)

Children around the world from ages 6 to 12 receive systematic instruction in the mores, norms, and basic skills needed of their culture. In these years Erikson says children are navigating the industry vs. inferiority crisis. They are learning the ways of their culture, the forms that are upheld, the tasks that are required of them. Even Jesus had to acquire the ways of Jewish first-century culture, and Luke 2:52 says that “Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favor.”

The ego strength that emerges with the resolution of this pre-adolescent crisis is competence, according to Erikson. Children should emerge from this stage feeling that they possess the basic skills and competencies required to move into adolescence. The spiritual attribute that emerges as this stage is resolved is fortitude, says Meissner. Children become able to endure, to persevere, to persist until a task or project is completed.

Children and youth in Scripture who were trusted to carry out tasks for which they had been prepared include Miriam (watching her brother, Moses), Samuel, David (tending his sheep), the young kings Joash and Josiah, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

Peter urges disciples of Christ to “support your faith with goodness, and goodness with knowledge, knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance...” (2 Pet. 1:5–6). Paul encourages Timothy to persevere (1 Tim. 4:16) and tells the Romans that he rejoices in his sufferings because they produce endurance, character and hope (Rom. 5:3–4).

It was Erikson’s contention that these years from 6 to 12 are crucial for developing industry, which leads to the ego strength of competence, which Meissner believes contributes to the spiritual quality of fortitude or perseverance. If children do not acquire basic cultural competencies, they begin to perceive themselves as inferior and incapable, an attitude that contributes to discouragement and failure to finish a task once begun. It is much more difficult to negotiate the industry vs. inferiority task as an adolescent or adult, though it can be done. Until it is successfully resolved, individuals will struggle to persevere in their jobs, in their marriages, and in their faith.

Identity vs. Role Confusion (1 Samuel 17)

According to Erikson and other developmental psychologists the important work that is going on during the adolescent years is that of developing one’s identity. Teenagers are attempting to navigate the identity/role confusion crisis. A strong biblical example of this developmental stage is the story of David’s choosing to fight Goliath (1 Samuel 17). David arrives at the Israelite camp to find the army cowering with fear. Yet David is confident of who he is and who God is. He illustrates in the psalms that he has moved successfully through

the earlier developmental stages, learning trust, autonomy, initiative, industry, developing faith as trust, courage, and obedience along the way. In his late adolescence David has come to know who he is in relationship to God as he has come to know God. He is convinced that God, who delivered him from the paw of the lion and the bear, will deliver him from Goliath also (1 Sam. 17:37).

For one who resolves the identity vs. role confusion crisis, the ego strength that emerges is fidelity, according to Erikson. David, though he failed in his moral life at one point, is faithful to God throughout his days, turning immediately to God even in his moral failure. The spiritual strength that emerges at this stage is humility, according to Meissner. The 1 Samuel passage clearly reflects David's understanding that it was God, not David himself, who would have the power to defeat Goliath. The psalms testify to the remarkable relationship David had with God, his love for God, his fear of God, his trust in God, his faithfulness to God. All of the spiritual qualities that Meissner says emerge with healthy psychosocial development are described by David:

- **Trust:** "Yet it was you who took me from the womb; you kept me safe on my mother's breast" (Ps. 22:9).
- **Contrition and penance:** "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me" (Ps. 51:10).
- **Fortitude:** "I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living" (Ps. 27:13).
- **Humility:** "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor" (Ps. 8:3–5).

Concluding Remarks Concerning Psychosocial and Spiritual Development

Most parents and caregivers want children in their sphere to develop healthily in all ways—in wisdom and in years and in divine and human favor. Nevertheless, most children encounter some developmental snags along the way. When the crises Erikson describes are not

successfully resolved in the usual time frame, children struggle emotionally, socially and spiritually.

However, God graciously provides later opportunities for learning trust, hope, faith, fortitude, humility and contrition. Throughout their lives children, adolescents and adults cycle back through the learning phases Erikson outlines. Attributes not yet attained can still be acquired, although the process is usually more difficult. But God is a gracious God, not willing that any should perish, and he continues to extend opportunities to those who seek him.

Awareness of the psychosocial crises children face at various stages can lead to insights for those who work with and care for children. Though parents are the most crucial factors, particularly in the early years, experiences children have in other settings can affect them all the days of their lives. In the early months the most important component caregivers can provide is a safe, loving environment. In toddlerhood and early childhood, appropriate and safe relational guidelines must be provided without resorting to the harmful practice of shaming. In the years from 6 to 12, basic practical and social skills should be taught incrementally to children, so that they can gradually and successfully acquire the basic competencies to negotiate the world they will enter as adolescents and adults. Adolescents need direction in establishing their identity—who they are in their family, their school, their religion, their world. They need guidance and mentoring as they address the foundational existential questions: Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going? As caregivers focus on aiding children negotiate the various tasks at the given stages, children develop the character strengths of hope, will, purpose, competence and fidelity, and consequently, according to Meissner, the caregivers will be nurturing the spiritual qualities of faith, hope, contrition, penance, fortitude and humility.

Appendix 5

Additional Resources

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