

ASHLAND THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

CHILD OF WONDER: A RESOURCE FOR CHRISTIAN CAREGIVERS  
LEADING CHILDREN IN SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF  
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BY  
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To my husband and best friend. You have, more than anyone, shown me the love  
of Christ our Lord.

To my children. Your beauty, courage, and tenacity have made me brave.

To my Creator. Thank you. Thank you for it all; for every day, both simple and  
hard. I am grateful.

“The pursuit of truth and beauty is a sphere of activity in which we are permitted  
to remain children all our lives.”

~Albert Einstein

APPROVAL PAGE

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project was to create a resource for Christian Caregivers that would educate them concerning formative practices for children. A group of sixteen experts in the three fields of ministry, psychology, and education were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of the resource through the completion of a survey.

The response indicated that the resource was successful in educating Christian Caregivers concerning formative practices for children. The qualitative section of the survey also revealed that most respondents, though unfamiliar with the practices, were eager to implement them in their lives and the lives of those in their care.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION AND PROJECT OVERVIEW

Anthony Esolen wrote a thought-provoking book called *Ten Ways to Destroy the Imagination of Your Child* (2010). He speaks of Christ echoing the promise of the God of Moses, the I Am, who is with us. Esolen speculates that those who are bold enough, brave enough to live in the light of this reality “are set free . . . to stand erect beneath the star-powdered vault of heaven. They are free to wonder, and free to love. They will be, if but now and then, shingly human” (Esolen 2010, 216). One can hear the echo of Irenaeus’ famous quote in Esolen’s words, “The glory of God is a man alive, but the life of man is the vision of God” (Irenaeus 180, Letter 64).

This promise, this vision of God with us that brings us alive, that emboldens us to live as shining ones, is the heart of Christian spirituality. Emmanuel, God with us spans from the Old Testament “I Am,” to the Pentecostal provision of the Spirit of Jesus forever with us (Exodus 3:14; Acts 2:1-4). This is the promise we bring to our children; the reality we invite them to live into. Ours is not a faith of doctrines and dogmas. Ours is a faith forged in intimate relationship with the living God. It is to this end that I entered into this pursuit, I long to see a generation of children “free to wonder, free to love, shingly human . . . fully alive”(Esolen 2010, 216; Irenaeus 180, Letter 64).

#### **Purpose Statement and Research Question**

The purpose of this project was to create a resource for Christian Caregivers that would educate them concerning formative practices for children.

The research question was: In what ways will this resource educate Christian Caregivers concerning formative spiritual practices for children?

### **Overview**

The focus of the resource was to educate Christian caregivers concerning formative spiritual practices for children. The resource addressed the failure of current cognitive models of learning in leading children into authentic, experiential relationship with God, self, and others. It educated the Caregivers biblically, theologically, and historically concerning the spirituality of children. The specific focus of the resource was to equip the Caregiver with practices that are holistic, experiential, and empathic.

This resource was in book form. Part one presented biblical, theological, and historical models concerning the spirituality of childhood. It advocated moving away from models educating *about* God, towards models that create space for episodic encounters *with* God, self, and others. It educated the caregivers as to the role of sensory learning in children's spirituality in order to cultivate an awareness of the necessity for experience within the spiritual practice of children.

Part two presented practical models that nurtured wholistic spirituality through the promotion of the integration of the imaginative process into spiritual practices. These models were designed to position children for growth in intimacy, empathy, and awareness of God, self, and others. This resource was evaluated concerning relevance, soundness, and practice by experts in the fields of psychology, education, and Christian ministry.

## The Foundations

A little girl, whom I will call Lily, and her brother came to spend the day with me. Lily is six, she is vibrant. Her brown eyes sparkle with life and curiosity. Her brother, nine, looks down a lot: he interacts some but is much less engaged. They spent the day with me while their grandmother, who has custody of them, took out a warrant on their mother after committing Lily's oldest brother of 11 to the psychiatric ward for the second time in two months. He has suicidal ideations and self-harms. I wish this were a rarity, but it is becoming more and more frequent in children this young.

Lily does not know her father and her mother is a drug addict. Lily watched her mother stab herself in the stomach when she was four. She skipped as we walked to the pond that day, her brown curls piled on top of her head like a powder puff. I told her to go only waste deep but she "accidentally," kept going in deeper until she was fully submerged, swimming alongside my Labrador retrievers. When it was time to leave, she wanted to dry off. I told her we were close to home and she could get dry there. Her reply was so wonderful. "Well Ms. Keri if you were creative and intelligent like me you would know you can use some leaves." And with that she began to pick leaves and dry her face with them.

My heart leaped and sunk all at once. Lily still knows she is magnificent. Yet her brothers, just a few years older, have already forgotten. As I helped Lily bathe, she told me that her mommy had to go away again because she liked to fight too much but she was lucky she had her grandmother, or nobody would take care of her. As I washed her small brown feet, I told her that I was glad her

grandmother was there but that her grandmother was not the only one that would take care of her. I told her about God and how very much he loved her. I told her he would never leave her and always take care of her. I dried her off and gave her some of my granddaughter's old clothes to wear. She put them on looking at herself in the mirror and said, "Well they are a little big, but I look so beautiful." I looked away as my eyes brimmed with tears. Questions that were prayers swirled through my head. "How long before she forgets Lord?" "How will she remember herself as beautiful in all of this if she is not tethered to your story?"

#### Personal Foundation

Children, regardless of the demographics, are lacking identity. They have not been grafted into God's story. They are lost, left to re-discover, re-invent a purpose, a reason for life. Lacking tribal storytellers, they gather around their tiny lights, hypnotized by the empty allures of this flickering technological age, looking for a story in which to ground themselves where no story is found. Untethered to God's story, children are swept away by the tumultuous winds of stimulus that fill the air of this age with the roar of toxic sights and sounds.

What story are children telling themselves today amidst the roar of Covid-19? Schools are shut down. Parks are forbidden. Parents complain openly on social media platforms about being forced to school their own children. Is their story one of fear, of uncertainty, or is it a story of faith, of love? I met a family in our neighborhood during this crisis. Every day they write scripture in chalk at the end of their driveway. The eyes of these children are different from the eyes of so many I have encountered during these last months of shelter in place. They are

different from Lily's brother's eyes. Their eyes are alive. They shine. They are not dulled by pain. These are the faces of children planted within the story of God.

How is identity linked to story? How does being cradled by the arms of our forefathers empower us to live presently, while dreaming into tomorrow? Ours is the story of a God who creates each person with great care. Ours is the story of a people loved by God and joined in love to one another. Ours is a story of being taken by the hand and led back to Eden. It is a story of a life lived in, with and through God. It is a story of hope, of presence, of life.

Leanne Payne in *The Healing Presence* reminds us that "we are mythic beings: we live by and in our symbols" (Payne 1989, 140). Symbols come from story. Their purpose is to remind us, to call us back to who we are in ourselves, in relationship to one another, and in the grand scheme of life as we know it. Symbols tell us that we belong to a story that holds within itself purpose and meaning. Our Christian story tells us that this grand purpose is love.

The great tragedy that I have witnessed is that children do not place themselves within the love story of scripture. Unlike these vibrantly alive children in my neighborhood, for most it is not their story. It is Abraham's story, David's story, Peter, and Paul's story, even Jesus' story, but not their story. It is something to learn rather than a story into which we enter.

The pandemic has brought this issue to the forefront. People cannot gather in churches. The very place we ran for comfort and solace is now a place where we are in danger of contracting a life-threatening illness. I have seen the Christian identity of long practicing adults shaken in the midst of this. Our faith is

congregational of course, but the One who binds us together as a people does not live in a building comprised of stone. His home is built of living stones. He inhabits the hearts of his people. His whisper within us testifies that we are one.

The practices presented in this resource are very dear to me because I developed them for my own children while working on my master's degree in Spiritual Formation. My children were, like Lily, fatherless. I wanted to do more than teach them about their heavenly Father. I wanted them to know him as their father. It became apparent to me soon after beginning these practices with my girls that children are capable of deep, intimate relationship with God. I watched as both of them began to develop beliefs about God and personal ways of interacting with him that were uniquely theirs.

This relationship with God did not spare them struggle or pain but it did anchor them. My youngest, after fighting through depression and anorexia for years, told me recently, that the relationship she built with God through these models when she was a child is what sustained her in the darkest moments of her illness. My oldest knew by seven that God had created her to sculpt. She took walks with him while she was young, and he would speak to her heart. She is a third-year student pursuing her master's in fine arts, majoring in sculpting. Their relationships with God provided them with identity. It is my hope in developing this resource that more children, children like Lily and her brothers, will be invited in to such a life sustaining relationship with God.

#### Biblical Foundation

The key factors to consider within the biblical text that validated the



importance of the development of this resource are the way Jesus interacts with children and the continued presence of Jesus post-ascension mediated through the person of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the passages that this resource were rooted in are Mark 10:13-16 and John 14:15-31. These passages showed that Jesus welcomes children and is still welcoming children today.

Mark 10: 13-16

The scene presented in the Markan narrative is one of the most touching in all of the gospels. It openly portrays the passionate heart of Christ towards children. W.A. Strange states “Here Jesus took children into His arms, a...gesture which symbolizes . . . protection and care. Mark alone mentions that 'He put His arms round them'” (Strange 1996, 49). Judith Gundry identifies this, “Jesus' hug . . . as an adoptive embrace.” (Gundry 2008, 156).

Jesus functions in this pericope as the reigning patriarchal figure in God's family. According to James Bailey Jesus becomes indignant at the children being kept from him, he is “incensed,” angered by it (Bailey 1995, 61).

Duncan Derrett states “he embraced them [the children] as his kindred . . . and placed on them His hands . . . and thoroughly blessed them” (Derrett 1983, 12). He further states that the language Mark used indicates that the blessing was celebratory, carrying “overtones of congratulations” (Derrett 1983, 12).

Although Luke uses the term “babes,” indicating infants, Mark and Matthew use a more inclusive term, *paidion*, allowing for children up to around twelve years of age. This could be any child and therefore must be every child. According to Larry Eubanks, the focus need not be on “any inherent qualities that

children possess, but on their status as heirs” (Eubanks 1994, 401). All children can come and keep coming regardless of their attributes or nature.

The passage must be heard in freedom as God's response to children before being heard as a posture of discipleship. It indicates that allowing them to draw near to Jesus in order to receive his touch, blessing, and the affirmation of his promise to them as co-heirs in the kingdom of God takes precedent over even instruction. Gundry asserts, “He invited the children to come to Him *not* so that He might initiate them into the adult realm but so that they might receive what is *properly theirs*- the reign of God” (Gundry-Volf 2001, 60).

#### *John 14:15-31*

John 14:15-31 reveals a Triune God who is fully accessible. In this farewell discourse Jesus makes several promises: to send another who will remain forever (Jn. 14:16), to not orphan them (Jn. 14:18), to love and reveal himself to those who demonstrate love for him through obeying his command to love (Jn. 14:21), that he and the Father will come and make their home with them (Jn. 14:23), and that he is both going and coming (Jn. 14:28). In this passage Jesus is promising his continued presence, protection, and provision in this new age through the mediation of the new Advocate, the Holy Spirit.

Andreas Köstenberger suggests Jesus' promise to “be seen” by the disciples, does not refer to the pre-ascension sightings, but rather the Pentecostal experience, which will enable the disciples to enter into and fully “understand His [Jesus] union with the Father and their union with Jesus” (Köstenberger 2004, 439). Turner agrees, “this promise cannot refer to Jesus'

'Second Coming' . . . nor to resurrection appearances . . . the Paraclete will . . . reveal . . . the glorified Son" (Turner 1992, 349).

George Beasley-Murray insists "In John to 'receive,' 'see,' 'know' in relation to God are all faith terms, and imply receiving the revelation, seeing it embodied in Jesus, and entering into communion with God" (Beasley-Murray 2000, 257). Francis Maloney reveals the word that the author uses in verse 21 "*emphanizein* (to manifest, to reveal) appears only here in the New Testament . . . it is used [to speak] of theophanies" (Maloney 1989, 408). Jesus's presence will remain assessable through the Holy Spirit.

The understanding of the Paraclete's ability and desire to continue to reveal God to believers is paramount in a theology that enables children to come to Jesus presently. Maloney states "The experience of the absent one [Jesus] . . . undermines all the reactions that one might expect . . . In place of consternation and fear the Spirit-filled disciples . . . experience love, deepening belief, and joy" (Maloney 1989 412-413). This is the reality that this resource is built upon, the abiding reality of the mutual indwelling we now experience with God. Jesus, fully alive in the Father, made accessible through the Holy Spirit, still bids the children, "Come."

### Theological Foundation

Children are often approached as things to be changed, molded, formed rather than as human beings who fully bear the *imago Dei* in every stage of life. The image that humanity aborted through sin in the garden was replanted within humanity through the person of the Holy Spirit. A great mystery occurs within the

human soul; God receives us into himself while also inhabiting us with himself.

Children, just like any who follow the way, have embarked on a threefold journey of reconciliation to God, themselves, and all of creation. In creating spaces to be with children in the presence of God that are expressive, creative, and wrapped in story, we help them unlock the power of the imagination through which they can encounter, in meaningful ways, the living God.

### *Theology of Childhood*

Two extremes must be abandoned in forming a theology of childhood: Augustine's theology of original sin and romanticism which idealizes children. According to D.J. Konz, Augustinian belief teaches that "even a newborn child is not only infected with the sin of Adam, but liable for condemnation for it" (Konz 2014, 29). The problem with this understanding is not the potential for good and evil within every child, but that it conflicts greatly with the Jewish belief concerning the nature of children which Jesus emulated in the gospel narratives.

According to Gundry-Volf, "Children have a fundamentally positive significance and role in Old Testament-Jewish tradition. They are seen as a divine gift and sign of God's blessing, in accordance with the very blessing of the Creator upon humanity in primal history" (Gundry-Volf 2000, 470). The promise God made to bless Abraham and make him a great nation, was in effect a promise to bring forth many children (Gen. 12:2; 15:5; 17:2, 16; 22:17). Children were desired. M.D. Carroll asserts "Their birth was the cause of great celebration (Gen. 21:6-7)" (Carroll 2003, 620). Children were viewed as a blessing and proof of God's favor. Jesus illustrates this belief in his treatment of children in the

gospel narratives.

Jensen argues against romanticism stating, “Innocence alone is too simplistic a read on children’s lives . . . Children are capable of boundless openness to the world and others, just as they are capable of injuring others” (Jensen 2005, 7). The bullying epidemic in America is proof enough that children are not inherently good or bad. They are simply human beings capable of good and evil, loved nonetheless by God. This middle ground is the place we want to seek to understand and communicate to children from.

Children are, just like all of us, born into a broken world. They are capable of being vessels of beauty and destruction. The advantage that they have is that they are skilled in the one thing necessary to come to Jesus. They trust because they have to. They are incapable of meeting their own needs. They must depend upon others. Jesus was just as fully God and man in the manger as he was on the cross. He models the truth for us in his life. Children are capable of deep, intimate relationship with God.

### *Theology of Reconciliation*

Children, as all humans, are reconciled to God through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord. Scripture indicates that this reconciliation, in trifold. Through Christ we have been saved (Eph. 2:5), we are being saved (1st Peter 1 8:19), and we shall be saved (Col. 1:20; 2 Cor. 5:19). According to Henry Cloud and John Townsend, through the tri-fold nature of salvation, known as “the growth process, God is reconciling things, bringing them back to the way they should be” (Cloud and Townsend 2001, 27).

In the process of reconciliation God is not only reconciling us to himself, but to ourselves and all of creation. Through the ministry of reconciliation, Jesus re-gathers what was lost to the Father and restores to humanity the divine image that is our birthright in Christ (Luke 19:10, Matt. 18:11). (Genesis 1:27). Gregory of Nyssa believed “the fall did not eradicate the divine image but instead . . . covered it with dirt and rust” (Harrison, 2010, 33). This resource was designed to draw children near to the truth of the person of Christ whose living presence washes away the dirt and rust, revealing the true God-given image within.

This is the beauty of reconciliation, as we draw near to God, beholding him in the stories of scripture, in creation, in our senses, and in one another, we become more truly who we are. Christ lives not in a throne far removed, but by some great mystery we have become the place in which his beauty dwells (Psalm 27:4). Helping children recognize and connect to Christ's presence within awakens them to who they are, how God relates to them, as well as God's heart of reconciliation towards all of his creation.

### *Theology of the Imagination*

Jesus instructions to his disciples at the last supper were “remember me” (Matt. 26:26-28; Luke 22:19-20). He promises the disciples that the Holy Spirit would assist them in this remembering (John 14:26). Remembering is a process of imagining. It is the regrouping, re-collecting of sensory instantiations into a new image or thought. A child in Africa and a child in America imagine two very different things when imagining a cat.

We imagine from what we have experienced in a sensory manner. As

Jean-Paul Sartre states “Nothing exists in the intellect that was not first in sense, except for the intellect itself” (Sartre 1936, 33). In order to empower children to “come to Him” we must fill them with story comprised of sensory symbol in order that they can remember God, themselves, and others rightly.

According to Gary Moon “Authentic transformation requires a vision of the invisible” (Moon 2004, 35-36). We have to be able to see what cannot be seen. This is an internal seeing, the sight of the imagination. Garrett Green argues persuasively that we must consider the divine image in terms of a system of patterning rather than a substance as “sin removes nothing from the human 'substance' yet is able to destroy the image of God” (Green 1989, 90). Green's theory concludes that the damaging of our imagination is what hinders humanity from being able to rightly image God. As Anyabwile suggests, Jesus comes to humanity as “a window into the character of the Father” (Anyabwile 2014, 11). We are not left to guess, to have to image our own God. Jesus re-images the Father (John 14:9, 17:26).

N.T. Wright grieves, “our Christian tradition has not given us the means to cope with being creatures who live in a world achingly beautiful and awesomely ugly... You need imagination to cope with that” (Wright 2005, 1). Nonna Harrison explains “Sin dehumanizes us and the mind can no longer function in such a way as to enable our perception of God (Harrison 2010, 55). In this light, according to Green “the *imago Dei* texts [are read] as a Christian doctrine of the formation, deformity, and reformation of the religious imagination” (Green 1989, 99).

The promise of scripture is that we, can become, even post-ascension the

“one who was with Jesus,” as Paul Barnett states “representatively as one who saw the glory of God *not with his eyes* but 'in heart'” (Barnett 1997, 206).

The Apostle Paul experienced this. He entered into what Leanne Payne calls the “unseen real,” with his “true imagination” (Payne 1989, 26, 164). According to Payne, Paul's “intuition of the real” on the road to Damascus, Acts 9:3-9, would be classified as the “highest level [of] the truly imaginative experience (Payne 1989, 164). Genuine religious experiences occur through our sensory perception and are interpreted imaginatively.

Gregory of Nyssa, according to Thomas Oden, speaks of the cross as limbic space, a threshold place, through which things above and below are somehow conjoined. He affirms that it is precisely because of the nature of salvation through the cross “that we should not be brought to a knowledge of the Godhead by hearing alone; but that sight should be our teacher” (Oden 1992, 332). Gregory's birth, estimated by his death, is approximately 335 C.E. He was therefore not speaking of a literal seeing, but an internal seeing. This type of “seeing” comes natural to children as the eye of their heart is still wide open.

#### Historical Foundation

One of the historical foundations this resource was based on was the holistic spirituality of the Celtic Christians whose perception of God as immanent allowed for a lived theology. Their belief in God's inescapable presence created a people who knew how to find God in all things. Another historical foundation this resource was Ignatian Spirituality, which also focuses upon learning to perceive God in all things. While the Celts did this organically, Ignatian developed a



system of heightening sensory perception of God through imaginative practices.

### *Celtic Christianity*

The Celtic Christians demonstrated in their rhythms and traditions the heart of a reconciled life. A holistic spirituality must include focuses that are upward, as pertaining to God, inward, as pertaining to self, and outward as pertaining to others and the whole of creation. The Celtic tradition nurtured all three journeys, producing a deep sense of self, community, and connectivity.

The Celtic Christian communities embraced children and women, treating them as equal and important members. This receptivity and deference to one another regardless of age or gender is connected to the Celtic's understanding of God as Creator. Celtic Christianity is anchored in the Triune God who is both transcendent and intimately present.

According to Thomas Calhill, worship was demonstrated with a “sacramentality not limited to the symbolic actions of the church's liturgy but open to the whole created universe. All the world was holy, and so was all the body” (Calhill 1995, 135). Their stance was one of celebration as they believed that all creation was in Christ and therefore redeemed. So deep was this belief that according to Mary Earle, “in Welsh, the ordinary word for universe is *bydysawd*, which means *that which is baptized*” (Earle 2004, *Celtic Christianity*).

The dividing line between secular and holy did not exist in the world of the Celtic Christians. Life was communion with God. According to Maria Crabtree, it was precisely “this sense of the 'eternal now' [that] gave Celtic Christians a belief in the sacredness of all living things . . . one and everything was created with a

sacred purpose and understood as a purposeful and meaningful addition to this present life” (Crabtree 2007, 240). Due to this the Celtic Christian community related to children as valuable members of society in their own right.

Calhill explains, that every part of creation was understood as “theophanies of God himself, for God speaks in them and through them” (Calhill 1995, 209). This belief allowed children to be celebrated as they were. Jensen persuades that to understand children as “theophanies,” is “to understand children in God's image” (Jensen 2005, 43). We bear God's image as we are in every stage of life.

The inclusivity of the Celts created space for children to express themselves through prayer and participation. According to Crabtree, “Prayer shaped the lives of Celtic Christian children since they heard prayer and participated in prayer very often” (Crabtree 2007, 242). Prayer for the Celts was a way of life rather than a part of life. It permeated every aspect of being. Work was prayer. Creating was prayer. Prayer was life, and life was communion with God. These aspects of Christian life created a reality in which children, surrounded with images and whisperings of God's eternal presence, could respond to God.

### *Ignatian Spirituality*

A figure whose spirituality has historically provided a framework for a holistic spirituality both within and beyond the walls of the Catholic church is St. Ignatius of Loyola. The far-reaching impact that Ignatian spirituality has achieved, is due in part to the practical manner in which Ignatius documented and designed several spiritual practices. Ignatius recognized that all aspects of the human

experience must be included in one's spiritual practice. Ignatian spirituality allows an individual to engage God intellectually, emotionally, and imaginatively.

The heart of Ignatian spirituality has always been to come to a place where one lives as the Celts lived, in constant awareness and communion with God. According to Margaret Blackie, "Sadly, sometime between Ignatius' writing of the *Spiritual Exercise* in the mid-1500s, and the 1950s the purpose of the examen got somewhat warped" (Blackie 2013, 56). The focus was placed on the examination of conscience only, to basically list one's sins, rather than on the examination of consciousness.

This exercise looks back over the day searching not for fault, but for presence. Focusing on sin alone rather than God's inescapable presence removes our eyes from the provision of God all around us and fixes our eyes on the perceived lack we find within. It feeds the ravaging performance mentality of the Pelagian heresy that is actively devouring many within the walls of Christendom today. True Ignatian spirituality is rooted in the awareness of humanity as the recipients of God's unending mercy.

Ignatius taught prayer as an active time of communion with God. Communion occurred through the engaging of sensory perceptions through the imagination. This was true whether meditating upon the gospel narratives of Christ or reflecting upon one's day. Ignatius believed that reflecting in this way profited the soul greatly.

Children are still building a symbolic framework through which to interpret their story within the story of God. Blackie instructs that "Ignatian spirituality uses

images and lived experiences as a way into encounter with God . . . it allows us to begin to see Jesus less as a mythical figure, and more as a person” (Blackie 2013, 60-61). This allows children to engage with Christ personally and experientially. He is as he was in the gospel, approachable.

Ignatian spirituality is not about transcending the human condition as in eastern prayer models which promote “emptying”. These prayer models encourage the use of the imagination with all its instantiations in order to enter into ourselves, so as to find God there. Imagination is not primarily geared to help us escape from reality. On the contrary, according to Kevin Burke, “it orients us to reality” (Burke 2009, 99). It allows us to interpret life through the truths we have embedded through our internal experiences with God.

#### Contemporary Foundation

Rebecca Nye defines spirituality as it relates to children as “God's way of being with children and children's way of being with God. For Christians, this definition helps us to remember that children's spirituality starts with God- it is not something adults have to initiate” (Nye 2009, 5). Nye's speaks of physical space, emotional space, and auditory space. Children need space to be, to feel and perceive feeling, to listen and to be heard. Nye believes that one of the most basic problems in the children's spirituality is that the spaces set apart for children do not communicate God's presence. There is no sense of “sacred space” (Nye 2009, 42-45).

Scottie May tells of moving away from a highly active, camp style environment of play and excitement to a more contemplative model with children.

(May 2005, 73). May began to invite children through sacred space and story to be with God. Each week the staff would dim the lights and fill the room with symbols and toys relevant to the aspect of God they were focusing on in story. They provided both a communal space to engage God corporately, and individual space from which children were encouraged to engage with God independently.

Describing the children's participation May states "the attentiveness of the children to their work during this extended response time was remarkable. Occasionally younger children meeting at the church on the level above would run noisily overhead. The children never looked up" (May 2005, 77). These children were actively responding to God. This is a genuine demonstration of a child's natural inclination towards God when given space and freedom to engage and respond to him.

I could not state it any more clearly than Catherine Stonehouse.

A child's encounter with God is not in the control of parents or teachers . . . Their relationship with God will not be a cookie-cutter version of ours, because God initiates the experiences with children, and they process experience and respond uniquely. (Stonehouse 1998, 181)

We are teacher's assistant. Christ himself is present in the person of the Holy Spirit to teach, remind, and illuminate if room is made.

Children need a story that invites them into a life with God more than they will ever need instruction in godly behavior. Great stories, like the ones that Jesus told, like the ones that capture the attention of children globally, according to Vigen Guroian, "avoid didacticism and supply the imagination with important symbolic information about the shape of our world and appropriate responses to

its inhabitants” (Guroian 1998, 18).

Replacing the wonder of story with facts is one of the ten factors Anthony Esolen notes through which a child's imagination is destroyed. “Fairy and folk tales are for children and childlike people, not because they are little and inconsequential, but because they are as enormous as life itself” (Esolen 2010, 97). Sara Arthur indicates that the “facts,” of the Bible are far outweighed proportionately by the narrative components (Arthur 2010, 41). She states “To reduce the Bible story to nothing but a moral lesson limits the hearer's engagement with it on an imaginative level. It keeps them from stepping inside the story and walking around” (Arthur 2010, 43).

Part of transferring story is having conversations. Appropriate questions draw children into meaningful contextual conversation. This creates space for them to process life experience in context of the gospel narratives. Have they ever felt afraid like Peter walking on the waves? Have they ever felt bullied or ganged up on, or ashamed like the woman caught in the act of adultery? Have they ever felt special like the disciples when Jesus chose them? It must become personalized, integrated into their real lives. In creating space for children to encounter Jesus in the Gospels, connect their story to “the story” through attentive conversation, and allowing children to have personal time to respond creatively to God, we help them enter into a reality in which they can live in awareness and harmony with God, self and others.

## **Context**

The Covid-19 outbreak has shifted things. How this will affect children long-term is yet to be seen. My stepdaughter is in her last semester of nursing school. While homeschooling our seven-year-old granddaughter has been challenging for her on top of her own studies, she expressed that this time has allowed her and Olivia to bond again in a very meaningful way. This is not every child's story. The news reports that domestic violence is at an all-time high as families try to navigate close quarters and economic hardship (Andrew 2020, CNN). Parents, who had for the most part lost their influence in the lives of their children due to societal structure are once again in a place, all be it temporarily, of prime influence.

The title "Christian caregiver," may seem abstract as it fails to exclude beyond the parameter of Christian and care. This is intentional. In the early church, and even half of a century ago in this very nation, it was understood that spirituality was planted at home in the family unit and strengthened within the context of community. Prior to Covid-19 children were lucky if they spent two or three years at home before beginning eight-hour school days five days a week. Most began some sort of childcare program in order to accommodate their parents work schedule at just a few months old.

Caregivers benefit both personally and professionally from this resource. Professionally, in that children that are given room to create and explore God, themselves, and others. This challenges the status quo that according to Esolen "snuff out the fires of the imagination . . . Children, still partly independent of the

technocratic machine, remind us of a life with genuine sorrows and joys” (Esolen 2010, 65). This resource gives them tools that will inspire and empower them to help children engage with God in meaningful ways even as the children they care for remind them of the beauty and wonder of life in all its simplicity and complexity.

The caregivers will also benefit personally, in that there is no possible scenario in which we create space and invite God to encounter us that he fails to do just that. When we draw near to God he responds likewise (James 4:8). There is also no scenario in which we encounter God and are not changed (2 Cor. 3:18). This resource empowers the caregiver as well as the child to position themselves for transformative, episodic encounters with the Living God.

I have spoken to Christian caregivers in various lines of care. They all genuinely want the children they work with to encounter God. They also acknowledge that this is not what is happening. Children are learning about God, they are singing songs about God, they are memorizing scripture verses about God that they seem to have no context for. According to Nye, many people feel called to work with children but are disheartened that the children they work with “seem to grow out of faith rather than into it” (Nye 2011,13).

Our starting point must be to recognize children of all ages are perfectly equipped to have genuine relationship with God. “To proclaim the reign of God is to see the world through children's eyes” (Jensen 2005, 25). Have we forgotten the incredible amount of imagination that faith requires? This resource is based upon the potential of every child, indeed every person, to encounter God



creatively. It calls us back to the fatherly embrace of the Creator from whose arms we are compelled to embrace the world in empathy as his image bearers.

### **Project Goals**

The purpose of this project was to create a resource for Christian Caregivers that would educate them concerning formative spiritual practices for children. The research question was: In what ways will this resource educate Christian Caregivers concerning formative spiritual practices for children? The goals of this project were:

1. This resource will establish the biblical foundation for the use of imagination in Christian spirituality.
2. This resource will establish the imagination within the theological foundation of the *imago Dei*.
3. This resource will provide prayer models based upon historical forms of Christian spirituality.
4. This resource will integrate insights from neurobiology as relating to children.
5. This resource will introduce concepts concerning a child's capacity to grow in relational literacy.
6. This resource will instruct readers in the role of communal storytelling in the spirituality of children.
7. This resource will present a holistic view of spirituality in children.
8. This resource will provide practical ways to integrate the use of the imagination in spiritual practices for children.
9. This resource will provide spiritual models that create space for children to have episodic encounters with God.

### **Design, Procedure and Assessment**

The purpose of this project was to create a resource for Christian

Caregivers that would educate them concerning formative spiritual practices for children. The research question was: In what ways will this resource educate Christian Caregivers concerning formative spiritual practices for children? The panel of experts that evaluated this resource were from several caregiving fields within the Christian body.

The panel of sixteen was comprised of individuals in the field of Christian psychology, education, and ministry who worked on a volunteer basis. They were given two months in which to absorb and assess the resource. The assessment tool, based on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, was emailed to them with instructions to return to a ghost email account in order to protect anonymity. There were three questions per project goal randomized and three open-ended questions.

### **Personal Goals**

I came to know Jesus when my children were very small. I was in an abusive marriage with a drug addict who was not particularly happy with my decision to walk with Jesus. My only friends were my two little girls. They loved to take long walks and play make believe. I wanted to share Jesus with them.

One day as they were painting each other rather than the paper in front of them, I read in John that God would make his home in us. That night I had the girls close their eyes and using guided imagery I narrated them to the castle of their soul. They loved praying this way, so we continued the practice, going to different rooms and spending time with Jesus. They each experienced what Leanne Payne refers to as “the truly imaginative experience” (Payne 1989, 164).

They have both expressed how these episodic encounters help them find the light of joy time and again. They are women now, about to start their adult lives. For me, this resource is an altar of remembrance that I hope will draw me time and again into the creative awareness that I experienced while rearing my children. To this end my personal goals for this project are:

1. To implement these prayer models regularly into my own prayer life.
2. To focus daily upon becoming more “childlike” in openness, receptivity, and presence.
3. To dig deeply in order to grasp more fully Christ's admonition to “become like a child.”

### **Definition of Terms**

**Apophatic Prayer:** emptying the mind of words and ideas and simply resting in the presence of God (Manney 2009).

**Attunement:** refers to the ability to connect with the internal state of another person (Wardle 2015, Lecture).

**Kataphatic Prayer:** uses words, images, symbols, ideas (Manney 2009).

**Empathic Potential:** refers to the inherent ability within all children to develop empathy through forming and experiencing healthy attachment (Gordon 2005).

**Episodic Prayer Models:** refers to models of prayer that leave the individual with a sensory memory of personal interaction and engagement with God. Dr. Terry Wardle (Wardle 2015, Lecture).

**Instantiations:** are symbols, or abstract representations of concrete instances (Miriam-Webster). These are formed through sensory experience and recalled

imaginatively, during the process of memory or intentional visualization.

**Relational/Emotional Literacy:** refers to the ability to relate in healthy ways to self, others, and the world around us (Gordon 2005, 8 & 100).

**Tri-Fold Journey:** refers to the inward (relating to self), outward (relating to others) and upward (relating to God) journeys, promoting a holistic and balanced spirituality. These terms were originally coined by Henri Nouwen. (Fusco 2007).

Now that we have discussed the project briefly, we will continue in the following chapter to revisit the foundations of this project in greater detail. I will share why this project is important in the context of our current culture before revisiting the biblical, theological, and historical foundations of this project in their entirety.

## CHAPTER TWO

### BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Max DePree recounts a story told to him by Carl Frost. Frost was in Nigeria in the late 1960s when electricity first came to the remote village where he resided. Each family was given a single light that dangled from the roof of their hut. Before the dawning of electricity, nights were spent communally gathered around the fire listening to the elders tell the stories that bound them together as a people. Now each family rushed home at sunset to their own hut where they stared in silence at a dingy bulb. They lost their story, and in that, they also lost themselves (DePree 2004, 81-82).

I spent over a decade in children's ministry both in and beyond the walls of the Church. During this time, it became apparent that children, regardless of the demographics, were lacking identity. They were lost, left to re-invent a purpose for their lives. The children of this age have been left to gather around their tiny lights, hypnotized by the empty allures of this flickering technological age, looking for a story where none can be found. Summer days are no longer filled with the sounds of playing. The streets are void of the creative energy that once marked childhood. Children if not tethered to story, will be swept up by the tumultuous winds of hollow stimuli that fill the air of this age with the roar of toxic sights and sounds.

How is identity linked to story? How does being cradled in the arms of our forefathers empower us to live presently? One thing is clear. Story matters, particularly for the Christian. Ours is the story of a God who creates each person

with great care. It is the story of a people loved by God and joined in love to one another. It is the story of Jesus who takes us by the hand and leads us back to Eden where we live in, with and through God. The Christian identity is one of being gathered, held, and loved by each other and the One who created us.

Leanne Payne reminds us that “we are mythic beings: we live by and in our symbols . . . [they] bind up reality for us” (Payne 1989, 140). Symbols come from story. Our Christian symbols remind us that we exist in love, for love, and through love and are thus capable of extending and receiving love from and into our being. The tragedy befalling our children today is that they cannot interpret symbols for they do not place themselves within the love story of scripture. It is Abraham's story, Peter's story, even Jesus' story, but not their story. Scripture is something to learn rather than a fundamental reality that invites them to live, breathe and dream within its spacious borders.

Our children are floundering because they have no reference point beyond themselves. Payne says, without such a reference point one “languishes in the dark chains of introspection and narcissism, the worship of self” (Payne 1989, 154). Tragically, this describes the self-indulgent “YOLO,” generation. Scripture presented as a book about people to emulate, or even as a behavior modification tool, rather than a story to which we belong, reduces the Christian message. It is rendered powerless, void of the grace that promotes presence. Our Christian story becomes no different than any other story of good and evil.

There are moments if you listen closely with the eye of your heart you can hear the eternal cry of God, “Adam, where are you?” and the wail of the lost

children deaf to his groanings, “My God, My God why have you forsaken me?” (Gen. 3:9; Mark 15:34; Matt 27:46; Psalm 22:1)(Unless otherwise noted, all scripture references are taken from the NRSV- New Revised Standard Version). It is a sound of longing filled with the need to be touched, to be reconciled. The wonderful truth of the gospel is that they have touched. They do touch. They answer one another, embracing eternally in the life, death, and resurrected reign of Christ Jesus. God is alive and engaging. He still bids us “Come.” (Mark 10:14)

Luke Timothy Johnson asks, “Do we think he [Jesus] is dead or alive?” (Johnson 2000, 3-6). His point is the way we interact with the living and the dead is fundamentally different. Unfortunately, many of our teaching models point to a dead, rather than living God. We learn about the dead. We learn from the living. The story of the dead is complete. The story of the living continues to unfold. Children do not need more information. They are inundated with it. They thirst to encounter the embodiment of genuine love.

There was a running joke in the Lutheran church last year. The pastors and lay leaders carried a cartoon, laminated Jesus with them, posting photos with what came to be lovingly known as “flat Jesus.” The point of the exercise was that we carry Christ into the world. That image of flat Jesus haunts me. Is this what we are offering our children a flat, lifeless, imitation Jesus? There is a reason the Narnia series written by C.S. Lewis in the 1950s has retained its popularity. The human soul hungers for the unpredictable yet never changing God of scripture. We want to meet the Lion who, as Lewis puts it, may not be safe but is good and is king (Lewis 1950).

Larry Eubanks reports, “80% of Christians accept Jesus before turning 18” (Eubanks 1994, 404). They come while they can still imagine a Lion who is wildly untamed yet completely approachable. This should birth a sense of urgency in us to bring the children to Jesus. His story continues and the children we touch are a vital part of it. Children must be free to actively engage the Living God if their hearts are to find a home in his ongoing story. I agree with Anthony Balcomb, that for one’s own story to be “taken up in the metanarrative of God . . . imagination is key” (Balcomb 2012, 123).

As we continue to explore what form a holistic approach to children’s spirituality might take today, we will first consider the biblical text in order to discover how Jesus himself relates to children as well as what the text reveals about the accessibility of Jesus post-ascension. We will delve into some common pitfalls concerning a theological understanding of children as well as children’s capacity to fully bear within themselves the *imago Dei*. We will also discuss the trifold journey of reconciliation and the role, theologically speaking, that the imagination plays in this journey. Finally, we will consider where in the history of the church this understanding of children, and the imagination, has been an embraced and lived reality. Let us now turn our ears to the sacred text.

### **Biblical Foundation**

Although the Gospel narratives do not have a tremendous amount to report concerning Jesus’ interactions with children, the few that do present his stance towards children in a clear and irrefutable way. This resource will rest upon one such instance. The pericope is found in all three synoptic gospels:



Mark 10:13-16, Matthew 19:14, Luke 18:15-17. This resource will consider the Markan account for two reasons. There is strong scholarly support of Markan authority. While we believe and acknowledge the presence and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit with all the writers of scripture, neither of the other synoptic gospel accounts allows for the disciples, or Jesus to be so unashamedly human. This is precisely why historical critics believe Mark is the foundation of the synoptic gospels. Mark allows the disciples to behave in a way that Jesus does not agree with and for Jesus to express that displeasure clearly and demonstratively.

In order to claim biblical soundness, it is not enough to consider how Jesus interacted with children while he walked the earth. The Bible supports the idea of a living Jesus who is touchable through the person of the Holy Spirit in conjunction with our imaginative faculties today. Because the focus of this project is dependent upon the promise of the Holy Spirit as the mediator of continuing fellowship with Jesus, the resource stands upon John 14:15-31 concerning the presence of Jesus accessible in the here and now. Through the Markan and Johannine accounts we will see that Jesus welcomes children into his presence both then and now.

#### *Mark 10: 13-16*

The Markan narrative presents one of the most touching scenes in all the gospels. It openly portrays the passionate heart of Christ towards children. Only Mark captures the emotional reaction of Jesus. Matthew and Luke omit his irritation with the disciples. Matthew reports Jesus merely laying his hands on the children while Luke presents no evidence that Jesus interacted with the children

at all. According to W.A. Strange, Mark's gospel portrays a much different scenario. "Here Jesus took children into His arms . . . Mark alone mentions that 'He put his arms around them'" (Strange 1996, 49). Judith Gundry identifies "Jesus' hug . . . as an adoptive embrace, an assumption of a parental role" (Gundry 2008, 156). According to Stephen Barton, this "clearly affirms the legitimate place of children in the Christian fellowship" (Barton 1992, 103). Christ recognizes the worth of children.

It this pericope, Jesus blesses the children as the reigning patriarchal figure in God's family. According to James Edwards "such blessings tended to be . . . related particularly to the passing of one's name or property" (Edwards 2002, 308). Jesus not only blesses the children; he receives them as heirs to the kingdom. Duncan Derrett speculates that Jesus "embraced them as his kindred (and thus superior to the disciples!) and placed on them His hands (obviously on their heads) and thoroughly blessed them" (Derrett 1983, 12). Derrett's assumption here is off. There is no premise in the gospel accounts that elevate either before the other. The children are not being recognized as superior, but rather equal. As Clifton Black expounds, "Jesus address[es] his disciples as *tekna*. They are children, not unlike those they impeded from approaching" (Black 2011, 227) (Mark 10:24).

However, Derrett is correct in his assertion that Jesus embraces the children as family. Just as he called the disciples to himself, he calls and blesses the children simply because he is willing. It is not based upon merit, worth, or availability. He is building a family. According to Elizabeth Malbon "The Markan

Jesus does not set out on a solo mission and only at some later point involve others. The proclamation of God's in-breaking kingdom demands and creates community immediately" (Malbon 2009, 49-50). Jesus includes and chooses children to be with him in that community. This is a story of equality. The kingdom creates and cultivates an inclusive community from its onset.

Derrett insists that the language Mark uses indicates the blessing was celebratory, carrying, "overtones of congratulations" (Derrett 1983, 12). This interaction is authentic and passionate. William Lane is correct in asserting that "His (Jesus') genuine love of children...can only be properly appreciated within the context of that . . . attitudes towards children that . . . prevailed" (Lane 1974, 361). Although such horrific practices like death by exposure were not embraced within the Hebraic culture, children were still often treated as a commodity. A first-century Talmudic teaching instructing men to first try to marry the daughter of a scholar, then the daughter of an esteemed man, and if necessary, the daughter of a synagogue official, illustrates this mindset well (Yumachi 1992, 783). It is understandable then how Jesus' behavior would be startling.

While children were certainly not idealized as they often are today, Jesus' views of children were not entirely unique. Some rabbinic traditions believed children to be sinless. Others' believed God's presence followed them (Evans 2000, 94). Scripture supports this. Matthew continues after the parallel narrative, warning that anyone who causes a child to struggle would be better off to drown in the sea (Matt 18:6). He warns that we must be careful not to "detest," children because they have angels who are constantly before the Father (Matt 18: 10).

Jesus himself quotes the Psalmist saying, “Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise for yourself?” (Matt 21:16, Psalm 8:2). While this is factual, it was not a common perspective. More commonly, states Craig Evans “the child was not held in high regard” (Evans 2000, 94).

Jesus’ passion does not rest upon some presupposed, idealized understanding of children. He is impassioned because he is aligned with the will of the Father. His blessing of the children is not the only passionate language in this account. According to James Bailey, “In 10:14 the narrative describes Jesus as becoming indignant (or, as the Greek word suggests, 'becoming incensed at what is wrong')” (Bailey 1995, 61). Edwards states that it carries the connotation of “vent[ing] oneself in expressed displeasure” (Edwards 2002, 306). Jesus was not passive in any way concerning his desire for these children to have access to him, and through him to the Father. He expressed this clearly and emphatically.

Ignoring Markan priority allows for the argument that this narrative is solely about discipleship. Linking the pericope to Jesus' earlier teaching in which he settles an argument concerning greatness by introducing a child does not require the dismissal of Jesus' obvious affection for children (Matt. 18:1-5, Mark 9:33-37, Luke 9:46-48). This objectifies children diminishing them to nothing more than a convenient illustrative tool. Mark's use of passionate language does not allow for this restriction. Kent Bower states, “Clearly, the incident shows that children have a prime place within the people of God” (Bower 2012, 269). Their inclusion has nothing to do with their age or ability to understand, but rather Jesus offers the kingdom as a gift without strings or prerequisites (Bower 2012, 269).

He is not just making a point. Jesus wants these children to come. Black insists the “wording implies that it was no one-time occurrence” (Black 2011, 224). Jesus continues to bless children. Ben Witherington III suggests it is both demonstrative and factual; “what is meant is receiving the dominion in a like fashion to which one should receive a child-unconditionally and with open arms” (Witherington 2001, 278). The message concerning kingdom discipleship can be appropriated without negating the significance of children. This is precisely why Mark’s text is so crucial. Lamar Williamson instructs “Only Mark notes that Jesus did, in fact, bless the children . . . This warm human note is the climax of the unit’s literal meaning. Jesus likes and blesses children” (Williamson 1983, 179).

Although Luke uses the term “babes,” or *brephos*, indicating infants, Mark and Matthew use a more inclusive term, *paidion*, allowing for children up to around twelve years of age. According to Francis Maloney, this “indicates that these children are past infancy, but not yet assuming adult responsibility. They are still *dependent*” (Maloney 2002, 196-197). Haddon Willmer and Keith White are correct. We must remain “open to the child [within the text] and receive her [or him] without imposing preconditions on the encounter” (Willmer and White 2013, 21). This could be any child and therefore is every child. According to Eubanks, the focus is not on “any inherent qualities that children possess” (Eubanks 1994, 401). As Mark Strauss states, “Jesus’ ‘embracing’ or ‘hugging’ the children shows authentic care” (Strauss 2014, 434). All children can come and keep coming regardless of their age or attributes.

The passage must be heard as God's response to children. According to

Walter Wessel and Strauss, "Mark leaves off extraneous details to emphasize the words and actions of Jesus" (Wessel and Strauss 2010, 861). He wants our focus to be on Jesus' response to both the disciples and the children. The Markan model provokes us to oppose anything that keeps children from coming to Jesus. It indicates that allowing them to draw near in order to receive his touch, takes precedence over even instruction. Gundry insists, "He invited the children to come to Him *not* so that He might initiate them into the adult realm but so that they might receive what is *properly theirs*- the reign of God" (Gundry-Volf 2001, 60). It is not simply about teaching children but encouraging them to come to the Living God whose arms, as we will discover in our exploration of the Johannine gospel account, are still outstretched to gather and to bless.

*John 14:15-31*

While Mark makes Jesus' receptivity towards children apparent, John illuminates Jesus' accessibility today. Although this resource focuses on the latter half of John 14, it is interesting to note that in chapter 13 Jesus, as in the Markan narrative, refers to the disciples as "little children," (Jn. 13:33) (Mark 10:24). This parental stance continues in chapter 14 as Jesus promises to take them as his own (Jn. 14:4). According to Jo-Ann Brant, "This is the language used for taking a wife, adopting a child, or taking a partner or ally," (Brant 2011, 313). Jesus' posture here is clearly parental. This was common terminology between teacher and student (Keener 2003, 973) (Edwards 2004, 142). His later promise not to leave them orphaned solidifies this understanding. He is assuring his "little children," the ones he called and nurtured that he is not abandoning them.

This theme of being joined to Jesus continues in chapter 15. Here Jesus becomes the vine and the disciples the branches, receiving life from the vine that is being cared for by the Father who is the Vinedresser. This joining is the work of the Spirit. It is through the coming of the spirit of adoption (Romans 8:15), that the disciples become not only members of God's family, but the dwelling place of the Triune God. The promise of "Another *Paraclete*" is not replacement terminology (Jn. 14:16). According to Andreas Hoek, "The Spirit should be seen as the continuing presence of Jesus" (Hoek 2012, 27). Thomas Oden agrees the church understood the Spirit as Jesus' presence (Oden 1992, 58).

The promise not to be orphaned is reiterated through Jesus' assurance that he himself will come (Jn. 14:18). According to Ramsay Michaels, "At this point, the reader can only conclude that he is promising to come to them in the person of the 'advocate'" (Michaels 2010, 785). The Holy Spirit robs death of its sting in assuring constant communion with the resurrected Jesus. According to Keener, "That the community's continuing experience of Jesus was understood in terms of interpersonal communication is . . . suggested by many passages in the Fourth Gospel (esp. 10:3-4, 14-15, 15:15, 16:13-15)" (Keener 2010, 968).

In this era, an orphan was any child without a father. According to M.

Daniel Carroll, the loss of a Father

could result in the loss of legal and physical protection and diminished daily provision . . . In most cultures, the god of orphaned children and the king became the patrons of the vulnerable, and legislation was designed to guarantee long-term security by specifying the means of the transfer of the family inheritance. (Carroll 2003, 619)

Jesus is promising continued presence, protection, and provision, as well as

access to the family inheritance which belongs to the heir (Jesus) and joint heirs (those who believe) of the kingdom, through the mediation of the new Advocate (Romans 8:17). According to Oden, Thomas Aquinas believed through this adoption God “reinstates,” fallen humanity as heirs (Oden 1992, 195). This is the guarantee of the Spirit (Eph. 1:14).

Jesus makes several promises in his farewell discourse. I concur with Herman Ridderbos that all point to this end, “the restoration of human fellowship with God himself” (Ridderbos 1999, 508). The Spirit assures permanent adoption into the family of God. This is what Jesus brings into fruition through his death, resurrection, ascension, and ultimate residence within the believer through the Spirit. Jesus promises to send another Advocate that will remain forever (Jn. 14:16), to not leave the disciples as orphans (Jn. 14:18), to love and reveal himself to those who love for him (Jn. 14:21), to come with the Father and make their home in them (Jn. 14:23), and that he is both going and coming (Jn. 14:28). Ultimately, the giving of the Spirit is the realization of the power to become children of God (Jn. 1:12). It is the beginning of “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17-18).

Köstenberger does not believe Jesus’ promise “to be seen,” is referring to the pre-ascension sightings, but to the Pentecostal experience, which allows the disciples to fully “understand His [Jesus] union with the Father and their union with Jesus” (Köstenberger 2004, 439). M. M. B. Turner agrees, “this promise cannot refer to Jesus’ ‘Second Coming’ . . . nor to resurrection appearances” (Turner 1992, 349). According to Turner “the Paraclete will . . . reveal . . . the glorified Son” (Turner 1992, 349). The scope of Jesus’ appearance reaches far



past his resurrection. Donald Carson insists that “Jesus’ words in 14:21 refer not only to the resurrection appearances . . . but also to the . . . self-disclosures of Jesus to his disciples in later times” (Carson 1991, 503). This is the heart of the book of Acts.

The imagery of Father and Son making their home within the disciples is intimate. This is not only a God who is simply commissioning them. According to George Beasley-Murray, "In John to 'receive,' 'see,' 'know' in relation to God . . . imply receiving . . . revelation . . . and entering into . . . communion with God" (Beasley-Murray 2000, 257). Moloney states that the word used in verse 21 “*emphanizein* (to manifest, to reveal) appears only here in the New Testament . . . [and] is used [to speak] of theophanies” (Moloney 1989, 408). Jesus is not leaving but ushering in a new age in which the intimate indwelling of the Triune God is now assured. This promise appears exclusive to those who are obedient in love. However, according to Mark Edwards, “Augustine . . . insists . . . love and knowledge are bestowed by the Spirit (eg. *Homily 74.1*, citing Rom 5:5 quoted by Edwards 2002).” The Spirit fulfills the law of love in us.

The Paraclete as God’s continued presence is paramount in a theology that enables children to come to Jesus. According to Moloney, “The experience of the absent one [Jesus] during the in-between time . . . undermines all the reactions that one might expect . . . The Spirit-filled disciples will experience love, deepening belief, and joy” (Moloney 1989 412-413. The Apostle Paul says it best,

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit bears witness to our spirit that we are children of God; not only children but heirs to a kingdom beyond our comprehension. (Romans 8:14-15)

These are not the reactions or words of ones who are without Jesus, but ones who are now, through the Spirit, abiding in and with him eternally.

This is the promise of the Johannian gospel. According to D. Moody Smith, "Jesus is addressing disciples whom He has invited to live in, and out of, the resources of another age" (Smith 1999, 272). These "resources," are made accessible through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Jesus' departure does not lessen the disciples' ability to be with him, but rather as Andrew Lincoln describes it, Jesus ascension proves his intimate relationship with the Father and the continued presence of him with believers. Both are relationships of indwelling presence. Lincoln assures, "This is not confined to the few followers who saw Jesus . . . but involves the self-manifestation of Jesus for all who love him" (Lincoln 2005, 395). Raymond Brown qualifies that Jesus' "remarks imply permanency . . . he would do this by indwelling" (Brown 1970, 646-647).

This is one of many paradoxes within scripture. How can Jesus led by the Spirit now send the same Spirit, making himself present through it? James Dunn attests that while he was, "inspired and anointed by the Spirit . . . in his resurrection he is Lord of the Spirit . . . [who is] . . . known as the Spirit of Jesus" (Dunn 1989, 265) This is the mystery of the Trinity. It cannot be adequately explained but must simply be embraced. Jesus is not leaving but coming in a deeply intimate and permanent way. The presence of Jesus ministered to

believers through the person of the Holy Spirit, is not temporal. The indwelling of the Spirit of Jesus facilitates permanent adoption into the presence and family of God.

Paul Fiddes describes the relationship within the Godhead as the “perichoretic dance of the Trinity . . . the partners not only encircle each other . . . as in human dancing . . . [but] move in and through each other so that the pattern is all-inclusive” (Fiddes 2000, 72). This is the divine, intimate fellowship we are invited into, through which we are transformed (Fiddes 2000, 66). In the giving of the Son and subsequent sending of the Spirit, as Stephen Seamands states, God has made evident his “desire and intention to pour himself into us and draw us into himself” (Seamands 2005, 145).

Now, through the Spirit, the disciples become the habitation of God. According to Gerard Sloyan, “The totality of the Godhead is self-given as uncreated Gift to us from the Father . . . through Jesus Christ . . . we call the Gift *Creator Spiritus*” (Sloyan 1988, 188). Jesus gives us the Spirit and the Spirit gives us Jesus. The same God Spirit that hovered over the void in the Genesis event now infills every void and chaotic place with the person of Jesus. He brings order from our chaos, preserving us so that we “may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you [and I] shine like stars in the world” (Phil. 2:15).

It is into the abiding reality of the mutual indwelling we now experience with God that children are invited. Seamands insists “The Trinitarian circle where the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit indwell and are indwelt by one another is open,

not closed" (Seamands 2005, 145). Jesus, fully alive in the Father, made accessible through the Holy Spirit welcomes us into the fellowship of God. Hoeck shares "that the Paraclete will do for Christians what a mother does for her children . . . she bears and feeds . . . provides children with . . . life and means of living" (Hoeck 2012, 26). In an age where self-harm and addiction among youth are seemingly the norms, only Jesus, revealing himself through the Spirit will fill our children with the power necessary to rise above the calamity of this present age.

The biblical foundations are clear. Jesus loves and welcomes children into an intimate transformative relationship with him today. It is our job to make sure the invitation into this reality is extended in a way children can embrace. In the theological foundations, we will consider how false understandings of sin nature can cloud a child's imagination causing them to adopt a false image of self that hinders their "coming" to Jesus. We will assess how children, as all who believe, bear the image of God within their being and as such must be fully embraced as valued members of the body of Christ. Then we will embark on an exploration of the theological nature of the tri-fold journey of reconciliation and consider the role that the renewed imagination plays in that journey.

### **Theological Foundation**

There is a common pitfall within the body of Christ concerning children. They are approached as things to be changed rather than as human beings who despite their small stature, somehow mysteriously bear the *imago Dei*. Through the Spirit of God, a great miracle occurs within the human soul. He receives us

into his being while also inhabiting our being with his life. Children are full participants in the promise of scripture.

As we transition from the biblical foundations to the theological foundations, we will consider how this should impact our theological understanding of children. We will consider how children, just like any believer, have embarked on the theological journey of reconciliation with God, themselves, and all of creation. Finally, we will explore the integral role that the imaginative faculties play in aiding children not only to come to Jesus but to stay with him and engage with him in transformative ways.

### *Theology of Childhood*

This resource, while written for caregivers, is formed for the benefit of children, advocating for their treatment as full members of the body of Christ, capable of experiencing God and building up the body. Sandy Sasso shares of her journey with children, "Every child has a spiritual life, an innate religious curiosity. Unfortunately, we have not honored that life" (Sasso 2004, 65). The first step to establishing a genuine theology of childhood is acknowledging and honoring both the hunger and capability children have for a deep spiritual life.

In addition, these two extremes must be abandoned: Augustine's theology of original sin and romanticism as it pertains to children. Augustine's theology of original sin has become an assumption through which inherent evil is presupposed upon every child. According to D. J. Konz, this pervasive belief teaches "even a newborn child is not only infected with the sin of Adam but liable for condemnation for it" (Konz 2014, 29). The problem with this belief is not the

nature of original sin, nor our inherent potential for good and evil, but that it conflicts greatly with the Jewish belief concerning the nature of children in which our Lord was raised. According to William Hendriksen Jesus did not view children as “little heathen’ . . . living outside of the realm of salvation. He regarded them as ‘holy seed’” (Hendriksen 2007, 385). We must value children as he does.

According to Gundry- Volf “Children have a fundamentally positive significance and role in Old Testament-Jewish tradition. They are seen as a divine gift and sign of God's blessing, in accordance with the very blessing of the Creator upon humanity in primal history” (Gundry- Volf 2000, 470). The promise God made to bless Abraham and make him a great nation, was in effect a promise to bring forth many children (Gen. 12:2; 15:5; 17:2, 16; 22:17). Carroll insists, “Their birth was the cause of great celebration (Gen. 21:6-7)” (Carroll 2003, 620).

Gundry-Volf explains that unlike the Greco-Roman culture which viewed children as “fundamentally deficient and not yet human in the full sense . . . Jews distinguished themselves . . . by rejecting brutal practices towards children” (Gundry-Volf 2001, 32-35). The humanity of children was acknowledged, and their birth was considered favor with God as it assured the continuation of the family line. Therefore, Jesus' openness and receptivity toward children was not completely unique. Evans states “in later rabbinic literature there are some approximate parallels” (Evans 2000, 94).

David Jensen agrees that Augustinian belief can be destructive as it “teach[es] them [children] that corruption lies within . . . [therefore] we instruct

them to loathe themselves” (Jensen 2005, 7). However, the other slope of Romanticism can be just as destructive. It is the breeding ground of self-centered entitlement. Children must come to understand the difference between good and evil and that every human is capable of both if they are to develop their potential for empathy. Jensen addresses this stating that “Innocence alone is too simplistic a read-on children's lives . . . Children are capable of boundless openness to the world and others, just as they are capable of injuring others” (Jensen 2005, 7). The bullying epidemic is proof enough of this reality. Children, capable of good and evil, are nonetheless loved by God.

Estep and Kim believe that Christian formation is “the process of reimagining ourselves, according to the Creators image” (Estep and Kim 2010, 14). Our language and approach toward children should empower them to this end. Kärkkäinen implores us to remember that “the whole person is the *imago*” and therefore created and accepted by God (Kärkkäinen 2015, 276). It is our job to find ways for children to encounter themselves and others as such. Ultimately, if we are not filling their imagination with symbols, stories, and ideas of themselves as loved, reflective of and advocated for by their Creator, we are failing them.

In developing a theology of childhood, we must consider our opinion of God. According to Henry Cloud and John Townsend, “One of the biggest obstacles to growth is our view of God” (Cloud and Townsend 2001, 66). God is approachable and loves humanity. He gave himself to restore that which he created in his own image and likeness, to himself. Salvation is the experience of being loved and gathered by God. Scripture does not indicate that the ability to

reason draws us into this, rather scripture points to faith, trust in the person of God. Children are skilled in this. They are dependent and live every day by trusting in the provision and protection of others. They are equipped with faith.

D.E. Nineham suggests that Jesus' comparison of children and the kingdom of heaven is dependent upon "the fact that children are unselfconscious, receptive and content to be dependent upon other's care and bounty" (Nineham 1963, 268). Jesus models this perfectly in his incarnation, death, and resurrection. He embodied daily the trust of a child living dependently upon the Father thus, as Calvin Roetzel states "serving as both the medium and model of restored humanity" (Roetzel 1998, 131). Jesus, fathered by the Spirit, is forever identified as child. Eternally he is Son of the Father. The identity of Jesus as child demands that we reassess how we approach children and invite them into the journey of reconciliation.

### *Theology of Reconciliation*

Children, as all who come to the cross of Christ, are welcomed into the tri-fold journey of reconciliation. This is the mystery of transformation. Through Christ we have been saved (Eph. 2:5), are being saved (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1 8:19), and shall be saved (Col. 1:20; 2 Cor. 5:19). Cloud and Townsend remind that through the tri-fold journey known as "the growth process, God is reconciling things, bringing them back to the way they should be" (Cloud and Townsend 2001, 27). The *imago Dei* is both the original gift and destination (Kärkkäinen 2015, 278). This is God's work in humanity. As Jensen points out, we must then reject "attempts to mold children in *our* image" (Jensen 2005, 43). They are God's.



This resource presumes God's willingness to draw children into Christ's ministry of reconciliation. It is grounded in the belief that God loves them passionately. Stanley Porter insists that "Reconciliation is not [only] of God but from God and to God" (Porter 1993, 696). In other words, God's action of reconciliation does not just reach out to children but also gathers them to himself. According to Köstenberger, this is what Jesus was triumphantly proclaiming from the cross in "It is finished" (Köstenberger 2004, 551). Christ birthed a reconciled creation. Children are invited into this reality along with all who believe.

In the process of reconciliation, God is not only reconciling us to himself, but to ourselves and others. Children, as finite beings, according to William Kirwan, "need an infinite reference point outside of themselves in order to find themselves" (Kirwan 1984, 29). God is this reference point. Humanity is the "that which was lost," that Jesus came to find (Luke 19:10, Matt. 18:11). Through the ministry of reconciliation, he gathers that which was lost to the Father and unearths within humanity the divine image that is our birthright in Christ (Genesis 1:27). According to John Stott, "The beneficial purpose of his death focuses down on our reconciliation . . . [ushering us into] new or eternal life, or peace with God in the enjoyment of his favor and fellowship" (Stott 1986, 67).

Nonna Harrison explains that Athanasius, like Roetzel, believed Jesus accomplished this through functioning in both the role of God and man. The first through which he restored the divine image and the latter through which he modeled that same image in which humanity was originally created and ultimately to which it was restored through him (Harrison 2010, 40). Gregory of

Nyssa believed “the fall did not eradicate the divine image but instead . . . covered it with dirt and rust” (Harrison, 2010, 33). The Apostle Paul calls Jesus sacrificial death by which we are reconciled “the washing of water by the word” (Eph. 5:26). Terry Wardle refers to Christians in the caring profession as “gold miners” (Wardle 2015, Lecture).

This resource is designed to draw children near to the person of Christ, into this ministry of reconciliation. In his presence, the living waters flow, revealing the God-given image within. Identity is not discovered outside of self but in the story of the one who now calls our hearts his home. It is unearthed within. In essence reconciliation is about learning to imagine ourselves as new creatures held and loved by the arms of grace. In learning to imagine this, we are empowered to begin to live into this reality now.

This is the beauty of reconciliation, as we draw near to God, beholding him in the stories of scripture, in creation, in our senses and one another, we become more of who we are. C.S. Lewis stated, “your real, new self . . . will not come as long as you are looking for it. It comes when you are looking for him [God]” (Lewis 1960, 190). Moltmann agrees stating, “The pure, self-forgetting contemplation of God transforms him who contemplates into that which he contemplates and enable him to participate in God himself, making him divine through *mimesis* [imitating] and *methexis* [participating]” (Moltmann 1993, 68). In this, we are freed to become more fully who were created to be in him.

Children need a sense of themselves in relationship to God if they are to resist the temptation to self-actualize through other means. In walking children to

the foot of the cross we discover, as Thabiti Anyabwile states it, “something magnificent exists beyond the cross and gives it its glory” (Anyabwile 2014, 65). It is not Christ’s death that is glorious but rather what was accomplished through it. Heaven and earth collide eternally in the person of Jesus. He has become the threshold through which divine and human are conjoined once and for all.

Christ lives not in a throne far removed, but by some great mystery, we have become the place in which his beauty dwells (Psalm 27:4). Helping children recognize and connect to Christ's abiding presence within not only awakens them to their authentic identity, but to God's heart of reconciliation towards all the world. As they begin to pour out the love they receive constantly, eternally from God onto others and the world they become more genuinely themselves. They learn to experience self-actualization through the cyclical nature of love.

Love awakens the human heart to live fully as Jesus did. Irenaeus believed that “The glory of God is a human being fully alive and the life of a human being is the vision [or imagination] of God” (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.20.7). Now due to human nature, this is no one-time fix. We need countless moments with our Creator in order to remember and relate to ourselves and the world rightly. We need to experience the actualization of love so rich that, as Seamands says it “does not permit the lover to rest in himself . . . [but] draws him out of himself, so that he may be entirely in the beloved” (Seamands 2005, 163). It is in the beloved that we discover ourselves as loved. This is the journey of reconciliation. Children are qualified participants here and now. They participate in it, just as we do, through the partnership of God’s Spirit with the imagination.

## *Theology of the Imagination*

Ultimately, faith is an act of the imagination. We must imagine we were created by a loving God. We must imagine he gathers us to himself through Christ. The Spirit inspires our imaginations to envision the truth of God. Remembrance and imagination are closely linked. The theme of remembrance is woven throughout the scriptures. The Old Testament landscape is scattered with altars of remembrance (Genesis 13:4, 22:9, 35:7; Joshua 4:4-7). God instructed the people to bind his commandments to their hearts (Deut. 11:18). Jesus initiated a ritual of remembrance that still forms the heart of most liturgies on Sunday mornings (Matt. 26:26-28; Luke 22:19-20). One of the promises of the Holy Spirit is that he will assist in this remembering (John 14:26).

Science has proven that remembering is not a regurgitation of specific facts, but rather a process of re-imagining. It is the re-collecting of sensory instantiations into a new collective. A child in Africa when asked to envision a cat is likely to imagine a lion or tiger whereas my child would envision a domestic house pet. We imagine from experience. According to Jean-Paul Sartre, "Nothing exists in the intellect that was not first in sense, except for the intellect itself" (Sartre 2012, 33). In order to empower children, we must fill them with story comprised of experiences and symbols so that they can remember themselves, God, and the world as good and loved.

Scripture presents God first and foremost as Creator (Genesis 1). Moltmann settles Barth and Tillich's debate concerning resolve and emanation respectively stating that "through its resolve, the divine life becomes creative; and

in its creativity, it is wholly and entirely itself" (Moltmann 1993, 85). Creativity is then both the nature and the decision of God. The creative nature and choice of God permeate scripture. As Savior he creates a redemptive plan and purpose; as Healer he creates wellness and stability; as Provider, he creates provision through mercy. All that he is emanates from Creator. It is from this understanding that Samuel Coleridge stated, "The primary imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM" (Coleridge 1956, 279). The act of creating whether internally or externally awakens us to the reality that we come from God and that we somehow bear within ourselves his unique essence.

According to Gary Moon, "our true home is generally beyond the boundaries of our awareness . . . Authentic transformation requires a vision of the invisible...and a belief that we can live there, both here and now *and* then and later" (Moon 2004, 35-36). Garrett Green persuades that we must consider the divine image in terms of a system of patterning rather than a substance as "sin removes nothing from the human 'substance' yet is able to destroy the image of God" (Green 1989, 90). Green's theory concludes that the damaging of our imaginative capacity is what hinders humanity from being able to rightly imagine God and thus enter into him. Anyabwile rightly insists that Jesus comes to humanity as "a window into the character of the Father" (Anyabwile 2014, 11). We are not left to guess, to have to imagine our own God. Jesus re-images the Father to humanity (John 14:9, 17:26). Through story, symbol, and relational acceptance we empower children to imagine themselves within this reality.

This resource creates space for children to have episodic experiences that will awaken their imaginations to the glory of God in themselves and all creation. Jesus, through parable, pulled on familiar sensory instantiations, enabling a persecuted, oppressed people to envision a kingdom imperishable all around them. N.T. Wright grieves, “our Christian tradition has not given us the means to cope with being creatures who live in a world achingly beautiful and awesomely ugly... You need imagination to cope with that” (Wright 2005, 1).

Harrison and Green agree the loss of imagination is the fruit of the fall. “Sin dehumanizes us, and the mind can no longer function in such a way as to enable our perception of God (Harrison 2010, 55). Green insists “the *imago Dei* texts [are read] as a Christian doctrine of the formation, deformity, and reformation of the religious imagination” (Green 1989, 99). Reconciliation happens through the healing of our imagination. This awakening allows us to see again, to rightly image God, ourselves, and others. This is in essence, hope.

The religious imagination, awakening us to the reality of God and ourselves in relationship to him, compels us to reach beyond self. Ralph Martin insists, “The *imago Dei* . . . is restored to its full splendor in the freedom of God's children,” (Martin 1986, 203). Indeed, according to Mary Warnock, “Imagination is of its very nature free . . . It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate” (Warnock 1976, 133, 91). In this light, it can be said that God pulled creation from within the divine imagination. Imagination in this understanding does not equate with pretending, rather it is the labor through which creativity and life are first birthed and then re-birthed. As we are awakened to this, we become partakers in

the re-creation. We become creative vessels of God's love, birthing change through the outpouring of that love on others and all of creation.

Scripture is filled with instances of "seeing." There is some argument as to whether these "seeings," are physical or mental perceptions. Dunn points out that "religious experiences by their very nature are ambiguous" (Dunn 1975, 107). The important factor is did "seeings," such as the Apostle Paul's Damascus road "seeing," alter the way I perceive and imagine reality? The beauty of a renewed imagination is that it allows us to believe that we can become, even post-ascension, the "one who was with Jesus," not as Peter or John or even Paul were, but as Paul Barnett explains, "representatively as one who saw the glory of God *not with his eyes* but 'in heart' [or imagination]" (Barnett 1997, 206).

Regardless of whether Paul perceived with his physical eyes or not he undoubtedly encountered what Leanne Payne calls the "unseen real," with his "true imagination" (Payne 1989, 26, 164). According to Payne, Paul's "intuition of the real" on the road to Damascus, Acts 9:3-9, would be classified as the "highest level [of] the truly imaginative experience . . . the experience of receiving from God, whether by word or vision, or greatest of all an infilling of Himself" (Payne 1989, 164). Post-resurrection genuine religious experiences occur through our sensory perception and are interpreted imaginatively. Warnock insists, "The imagination is that which allows us to express and understand idea" (Warnock 1976, 72). As with the Apostle Paul, God communes with us symbolically. We interpret imaginatively through previous sensory instantiations. This forms our ideas.

Jürgen Moltmann attests that “dehumanized humanity is incapable of receiving true insight apart from Christ as the drive for self-glorification . . . is so strong that all things are viewed . . . according to the drive for self-promotion” (Moltmann 1991, 71). Reconciled humanity is empowered to move past self as it joyously imagines the fullness of its inheritance in the glorified Christ. His presence meets these imaginings, awakening our senses to his life in us, around us and beyond us. This is the nature of reconciliation.

Through Christ, we are reconciled to God. This is a gift. However, the reconciled life moves beyond relationship with God. It moves beyond self, reaching out to others. As stated by Cloud and Townsend earlier this is gradual, a growth process. Thomas Oden clarifies,

The benefits of Christ’s obedience . . . are accounted or reckoned to the believer, but this does not imply that the believer actually and immediately lives with perfect uprightness or acts precisely as Christ acted. The proximate participation of the believer in deeds that reflect the goodness of Christ requires a further work of the Spirit. (Oden 1992, 116-117)

As the Spirit remembers Jesus to us our imaginative faculties awaken more deeply to the benefits of our relationship with God. This compels us in love towards God and others. The Spirit helps us to remember ourselves within God’s love. We become more fully ourselves, capable of giving and receiving love.

Oden reports that Gregory of Nyssa speaks of the cross as limbic space, a threshold place, through which things above and below are somehow conjoined. He affirms that it is precisely because of the nature of salvation through the cross “that we should not be brought to a knowledge of the Godhead by hearing alone; but that sight should be our teacher” (Oden 1992, 332). Gregory's birth,



estimated by his death, is approximately 335 C.E. He was therefore not speaking of a literal seeing, but an internal seeing. These “seeings,” are often aided, or initiated by personal interchange, scripture narratives, icons, or creation itself.

Encounters with the divine through story, creation, and others form our ideas not only of God and self but also morality. According to Estep and Kim, “Scripture connects morality . . . to cognition, affect and action . . . Moral formation can be facilitated by the intentional use of religious imagery” (Estep and Kim 2010, 129, 140). In this way, the incorporation of story and symbol in children’s spirituality empowers their religious imagination, assisting them to more fully live into the trifold reality of reconciliation. Now that we have considered the biblical and theological foundations of children’s spirituality, we will look back through Christian history to see how holistic imaginative models have impacted children in the past that we might incorporate them properly in the future.

### **Historical Foundation**

The historical foundations that we will explore in conjunction with this resource are the holistic spirituality of the Celtic Christians and the imaginative principles of Ignatian spirituality. The Celts' perception of God as immanent allowed for a lived theology. Their belief in God's inescapable presence created a people who knew how to find God in all things. Ignatian spirituality also focuses on learning to perceive God in all things. While the Celts did this organically, Ignatius developed a system of heightening sensory perception through the integration of imaginative contemplative practices which he outlined in the

*Spiritual Exercise* (Fleming 2015, Ignatian Spirituality).

### *Celtic Christianity*

This creative expression of worship is not limited to the Celtic tradition. God in all things is a foundational aspect throughout much of Christian history, particularly in the lives of the Catholic saints. Historically speaking, holistic spirituality is not a new concept. This resource is rooted in the holistic spirituality of the Celtic Christian tradition. These believers demonstrated through the rhythms of their traditions the heart of a reconciled life.

They imagined a God who was intimately present when milking a cow or gazing at a sunset. In developing experiential prayer models, we invite children into the journey of reconciliation through nurturing their ability to imagine themselves active within the story of God in their normal everyday life. A holistic spirituality must include focuses that are upward, pertaining to God, inward, pertaining to self, and outward, pertaining to others and creation. The Celtic tradition nurtured all three journeys, producing a deep sense of self, community, and connectivity with God and creation.

The Celts embraced children and women, treating them as valued members of society. This inclusion regardless of age or gender flows from the Celtic's understanding of God as Creator. According to J. Philip Newell, "The life of God was viewed as being deep within creation as well as being distinct from it" (Newell 1997, 43). Celtic Christianity is distinctly Triune, worshipping God who is both transcendent and intimately present. Thomas Cahill insists that their "sacramentality [was] not limited to the symbolic actions of the church's liturgy but

open to the whole created universe. All the world was holy, and so was all the body” (Cahill 1995, 135). Their stance was one of celebration as they believed that the entire universe was in Christ. So deep was this belief that according to Mary Earle, “in Welsh, the ordinary word for universe is *bydysawd*, which means *that which is baptized*” (Earle 2004, *Celtic Christianity*).

Celtic author, George MacDonald’s works are said to have deeply impacted both C.S. Lewis and G.K. Chesterton. He grew up listening to the old Celtic legends. Unlike Roman spirituality, MacDonald did not feel the need to distance himself from his heritage but gathered them into his spirituality. This is not the paganization of Christian belief. It is the adopting of a truly Christian lens. He was now able, through the Spirit of Christ, to imagine all things through the lens of God’s redemptive love. Newell says of MacDonald that “his works of the imagination strove to recover the inner faculty of sight whereby God may be seen within us, among us and in all the things of creation” (Newell 1997, 61).

The dividing line between secular and holy did not exist in MacDonald’s world. Life was communion with God. According to Mary Crabtree, it was “this sense of the ‘eternal now’ [that] gave Celtic Christians a belief in the sacredness of all living things . . . everything was created with a sacred purpose and understood as . . . meaningful additions to . . . life” (Crabtree 2007, 240). This understanding allowed for a community that did not relate to children as “adults in training,” but as valuable members of society in their own right. These Christians carried the declaration of the Genesis account, “It is good . . . very good,” into their relationships with one another and creation. Children, like all

Celts, bore within themselves the image of God (Newell 1997, 69) (Genesis 1:1-31).

Cahill insists that children, along with all created beings, were understood as “theophanies of God himself, for God speaks in them and through them” (Cahill 1995, 209). This belief allowed children to be celebrated. It separated their spirituality from errors like that of Roman philosopher Cicero who taught that only the potential of children, not who they are in the moment, deserved praise (Gundry 2008, 163). To understand children as “theophanies,” according to Jensen is “to understand children in God's image, moreover, [it] is to reject the multiple attempts to mold children in *our* image” (Jensen 2005, 43). Children are bearers of God's image as they are in every stage of life, completely.

Crabtree asserts “Prayer shaped the lives of Celtic Christian children since they heard prayer and participated in prayer very often” (Crabtree 2007, 242). Prayer for the Celts was a way of life rather than a part of life. Work was prayer. Creating was prayer. Prayer was life, and life was communion with God. This was not some mystical spirituality, rather as Nathan Mitchell attests it “emphasized a fundamental trust in the objects of sensory perception-trust rather than fear” (Mitchell 2012, 456). This must be recaptured. We have so bent the idea of walking by faith rather than sight that we have divorced ourselves from the senses that God created within us which assists in forming us.

Celts were basically illiterate prior to the arrival of Christianity; therefore, they placed a great deal of importance upon sensory learning. According to Mitchell "They had faith in what they heard, saw, smelled, tasted, touched. They

believed in a 'solid world of light,' that reveals . . . the divine in the daily. For them, the 'mysteries of matter,' revealed the mysteries of the spirit" (Mitchell 2012, 460). This sensory culture is so deeply embedded in the Celtic tradition that even in modernity Donald Meek states that "people not only 'see' Celtic things; they 'feel' them: peace, tranquility in distant islands and . . . purity of environment; and indefinable loveliness in wind and seas and sky" (Meek 2000, 9). Literacy did not replace the book of creation, rather the Celts stunningly joined the two.

A twelfth-century Welsh traveler described his first "meeting" with the *Book of Kells*. Ester Waal reports of this traveler that the longer he gazed at those ornate pages where words and images dance as if kissed by God the more "he felt himself drawn into its depths and the more he came to see what was in it" (Waal 1991, 133). Mitchell suggests that in this way the Celts' relationship with scripture was akin to the Jewish interaction with Torah. Mitchell invites that the reading of the sacred text was "a meeting [between Creator and Creation], an invitation to respond and answer" (Mitchell 2012, 4645).

Literature, art, and creation still flow together seamlessly through these isles. The massive stone crosses proclaiming God's immanence in the circle that wraps them are but one example. Author Calvin Miller expresses being "dwarfed," at the foot of a cross that bore carvings of the gospel stories. He believes this to be an offering to God in which the artist offers back that which is most important; the reality of Jesus (Miller 2007, 51). They echo by their very being the words of St. Patrick, "Christ beside me, Christ in me, Christ behind me,

Christ within me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ within me" (St. Patrick's Breast-Plate, 1920 Meyer).

These aspects of Christian life created a reality in which children, surrounded by the symbols of scripture that whispered of God's eternal presence, could live with awakened imaginations into the story of God.

in darkness. Julian of Norwich experienced the grandeur of God in a hazelnut (Julian of Norwich 1978, 183). Theresa of Avila recognized the majesty of God in the castle of every soul (Teresa of Avila 1979). Terese' of Lisieux recognized the mercy of God in small acts of kindness (Téresè of Lisieux 1997). Brother Lawrence, probably the most recognized discovered the heart of worship in simply daily tasks (Brother Lawrence 2016).

### *Ignatian Spirituality*

A figure whose spirituality has historically provided a framework for holistic spirituality is Ignatius of Loyola. According to Doretha Epple, Ignatian contemplation rests in the idea that "God speaks to us through relationships with other people, daily experiences, desires, emotions and he can also speak to us through our imagination" (Epple 2011, Lecture). Historically, Ignatian spirituality is significant in that the practitioner engages scripture through the imagination. W.M. Meissner insists "the Exercises depend uniquely on the action of grace. They are meant to provide a place for encounter and communication between God and his creature" (Meissner 1999, 80-81). It is a sacramental spirituality.

Ignatius documented and designed several spiritual practices. Like the Celts, he recognized that all aspects of the human experience must be included

in one's spiritual practice. Rabbi Sasso tells a meaningful story that illustrates the importance of holistic spirituality. She describes her frustration in trying for years to communicate the personhood of God to her parishioners. One day she decided to share a children's story, "In God's Name" (Sasso 1994). In the story, each character has their own name for God based upon their experience. For the farmer he was Creator. For the lonely he was Friend. The people argued and could not agree as to God's name until finally, they came to realize all the names were true and together, they called "God One." This story engaged her congregants deeply. One by one they began to name God according to their present experience (Sasso 2004, 66).

Sasso thought it strange when a woman named God "old, warm bathrobe." A year later the woman told her how meaningful the experience was (Sasso 2004, 66). Her mom died and she would wrap herself in her mother's old, warm bathrobe. Each time she did, she felt wrapped in the presence of God (Sasso 2004, 66). Ignatian spirituality allows individuals to engage God in this way; intellectually, emotionally, and imaginatively. It allows for a sensory experience of God. It awakens us to experience God in all things, even an old, warm bathrobe.

Ultimately, the way we know, and can measure the validity of spiritual practice is by measuring its effects regionally or even globally. Did it produce change that is reflective of Christ? Were the participants transformed by intimate connection to God? Were they able to honestly embrace themselves and others? Were they compelled beyond themselves towards the good of all creation? In the

case of Ignatian spirituality, yes. The society formed through Ignatius called the Society of Jesus, commonly referred to as Jesuits, grew to be one of the largest missionary forces the world has ever seen (Gonzalez 1985, 117-118).

Ignatian spirituality has been producing fruit globally since the official papal approval of the Jesuit order in 1540 (Gonzalez 1985, 117). The Exercise is still transforming lives today. Dorothy Magis reports, star of *The Amazing Spiderman*, actor Andrew Garfield after participating in the *Spiritual Exercise* in preparation for the film *Silence*, exclaimed of the *Exercise*, “God! That was the most remarkable thing—falling in love, and how easy it was to fall in love with Jesus” (Magis 2017). This is the legacy of one whom God has built his home in. This is the power of embracing imaginative practices as an integral part of spirituality. Garfield could not spend all that time imagining Jesus without being compelled by the love of Jesus. This caused him in turn to return that love.

The heart of Ignatian spirituality is to bring one to a place where living in constant awareness and communion with God is possible. According to Margret Blackie, “Sadly, sometime between Ignatius' writing of the *Spiritual Exercise* in the mid-1500s, and the 1950s the purpose of the examen got somewhat warped” (Blackie 2013, 56). The focus was placed on the examination of conscience only rather than on the examination of consciousness. This exercise was meant to reflect upon one's day searching not for fault, but for presence. Focusing on sin alone rather than God's inescapable companionship removes our eyes from the provision of God's love all around us, focusing us instead on some perceived lack within ourselves. It feeds the performance mentality of the Pelagian heresy



which is still active within the walls of Christendom today. True Ignatian spirituality is rooted in the awareness of humanity as the recipients of God's unending mercy and grace through the Spirit of Jesus alive and active within the lives of believers today.

Ignatius believed prayer to be communion with God. Communion occurred when one engaged the divine with sensory perceptions through the power of the imagination. Consider the fifth contemplation of week two in the Spiritual

Exercise:

*The First Point.* By sight of my imagination, I will see the persons, by meditating and contemplating in detail on all the circumstances around them . . . *The Second Point.* By my hearing, I will listen to what they are saying or might be saying . . . *The Third Point.* I will smell the fragrances and taste sweetness and the charm of the Divinity, of the soul, of its virtues, and of everything there, appropriately for each person who is being contemplated . . . *The Fourth Point.* Using the sense of touch, I will, so to speak, embrace and kiss the places where the persons walk and sit. (Ignatius 1991, 151)

Ignatius goes on to explain that in reflecting in a sensory fashion through the imaginative faculties the soul with profit. This is loving God with all of one's being.

The historical significance of this type of sensory prayer for this particular resource is multifaceted. Children are busy building a symbolic framework through which to interpret life. This is done through daily experience and interpretation. We derive our God representation in part from the images of the significant authoritative figure in our lives. This can be seen clearly in Ignatius' spirituality. Meissner insists "The God-representation in the mind of Ignatius undoubtedly derives in large part from the images of his father and mother- perhaps more from his mother, as the source of effective acceptance and love"

(Meissner 1992, 389). As caregivers, we must remember that we help shape the perception of God in the minds of children. Let us strive then to emulate Christ.

It is important to remember not all children have minds filled with images of love and tenderness. This combined with their natural inclination towards exploration and wonder, makes kataphatic prayer models, like imagining themselves within the stories of Christ more appropriate than apophatic models, such as centering or breathe prayers. Children, whether coming from homes that are safe or chaotic need to be able to envision God as approachable and attentive to their hearts. Blackie attests, "Ignatian spirituality uses images and lived experiences as a way into encounter with God . . . it allows us to begin to see Jesus less as a mythical figure, and more as a person" (Blackie 2013, 60-61). This develops healthy neural pathways that help form the very dynamic of human personality. It invites children into a living relationship with a loving God that helps shape and define their thought processes, daily choices, and actions.

Ignatian spirituality is not about transcending the human condition as in eastern prayer models which promote "emptying". It encourages the use of the imagination to, as Kevin Burke states it, "enter 'the valley of the human' soul as to find God there. Imagination is not primarily geared to help us escape from reality. On the contrary, it orients us to reality" (Burke 2009, 99). It uses our symbol base to interpret life through the truths we have embedded in our being through our experiences with God, self, and others. Ted Ward explains that our physicality, emotionality, socialization, cognitive faculties, morality, and spirituality form together one "integrated system of development." "A holistic approach to spiritual

formation . . . cannot ignore any of these . . . aspects” (Ward 1995, 265).

Prayer models that engage the whole person have a natural byproduct. They tap into the empathy potential that is innate within each bearer of the *imago Dei*. Mary Gordon has proven through *Roots of Empathy*, that allowing children to identify with and express personal emotions in relation to the emotional response of others helps them to grow in empathy and self-awareness (Gordon 2005, 3-47). This is what transpires when children are given the opportunity to place themselves within the gospel narratives, relating to the characters' interactions with God and others. Ignatian practice provides a framework for emotional growth, enabling people to walk in loving relationship with God, self, and others.

We have now considered Jesus' stance towards children, his continued availability through the Spirit as well as what a healthy theology of childhood looks like considering the theology of reconciliation and the theological role of the imagination within it. We have also visited two historical models that incorporated a holistic understanding of spirituality that embrace children and the imagination. Now we will move from the past to the present. In chapter three we will listen to the voices of current scholars in the areas of children's spirituality, spiritual formation, psychology, and current applications of holistic models of prayer.

## CHAPTER THREE

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to consider what contemporary voices have to say about spiritual formation and more specifically spiritual formation as pertaining to children. We will look at the broad scope of spiritual formation; what it means, how the process affects identity and impacts others. We will hear from prominent voices in the field of children's spirituality and explore the role of wonder and story in children's spirituality as we consider different current models of practice within Christendom today.

The questions we will be seeking to answer are "What are the components of Christian formation?"; "How is the process of spiritual formation best facilitated in children's spirituality?"; and "What is the role of story in that?" This is challenging in that spiritual formation leads us in the way of a child. Bruce Damarest reminds us that Jesus himself identified childlikeness as "a key quality of spirituality." Damarest expresses these qualities that are readily apparent in children to be: delighting in being held and loved by a caregiver, the ability to trust a caregiver, spontaneity and lightheartedness, the ability to ask honest and profound questions, relative innocence and a lack of premeditation, the ability to enjoy simple things, and the possession of a fertile imagination (Damarest 2009, 138). Children, while naturally possessing these spiritual attributes, face what all humans face, the propensity of growing spiritually dull.

As Daniel Siegel explains, we start as children perceiving life fully, from the bottom-up, or outside in. When we are children, he explains, we see the rose.

A child "experiences" the flower. They drink in the deep red. They breathe the sweet scent in deeply. They caress the soft petals. They are not mixing this experience with their prior encounters with another rose. Children are present. As we grow our propensity shifts. "Prior learning sends related information down from the top layers of our six-neuron-deep column" (Seigel 2011, 201).

Memories of past roses mix with our new experience of this particular rose. As adults, the new experience travels about three neurons deep before colliding with the remembrances being sent down from our brains (Seigel 2011, 201). Spiritual formation for children then is somewhat paradoxical in that we are wanting to facilitate growth while helping children to retain that which makes them a model for our spiritual growth. As their brains develop and their ability to conceptualize becomes more sophisticated, we seek to help them retain that which makes them naturally positioned to receive the Kingdom. This must be at the forefront of our thoughts as we seek to define spiritual formation.

### **Spiritual Formation**

According to Larry Crabb "the deepest urge in every human heart is to be in a relationship with someone who absolutely delights in us" (Crab 1997, 44). Spiritual formation begins when the human heart turns to the One who delights in it eternally. According to Brent Curtis and John Eldridge, spiritual formation is a journey into communion with God. "The Christian life is a love affair of the heart . . . [not] a set of principles or ethics" (Curtis and Eldridge 1997, 8). These men believe that the journey of Christian formation answers the deepest question ruminating in the human heart "Who am I, really? The answer to that question is

found in the answer to another: What is God's heart towards me, or how do I affect him?" (Curtis and Eldridge 1997, 97-98). In this, we see that spiritual formation is related both to self-discovery and the discovery of God.

Our perception of God is of paramount importance in formation. Gregory Boyd insists that "when our picture of God is distorted, we can no longer trust God to be the source of our life. It is impossible to live in God's love if we don't believe God *is* love" (Boyd 2004, 126). Jeanette Bakke agrees. "We have assorted collections and memories, ideas and experiences. We have a mental picture of God and an interpretation of what we think God is like and how God feels about us" (Bakke 2000, 152). Bakke insists our propensity to remake God according to these is why the incarnation is paramount in spiritual formation (Bakke 2000, 152-153). It exposes our distortions by fully revealing God as unconditional, poured out love. It is into his image we are being formed. As Brennan Manning states "Jesus affirmed that he was the incarnation of all of the Father's feelings and attitudes towards humankind" (Manning 1994 109).

Jesus is the full expression of God's love. Geri Keller writes of this love that is God as encompassing many attributes. It is tender, gentle, kindhearted, indescribable, mysterious, meek, and devoted. It is a fragrance that can be inhaled deeply in creation and in those who walk intimately with him. It is also intense and passionate. His final point is that God as love is vulnerable and he displays this vulnerability through the person of Christ (Keller 2004, 137-142). The incarnation exposes to humanity the vulnerable heart of God.

Spiritual formation then begins with the human heart encountering the love of God as made evident in the person of Christ. According to Terry Wardle, love "involves desire," and births "contentment and confidence" (Wardle 2004, 39). It is out of this desire that humanity was created and through the experience of ourselves as the object of that desire our deepest self is made content and confident in its identity as a child of God (Wardle 2004, 63). We see this lived out in the life of Jesus into whose likeness we are being transformed. It is in the center of our being that we find him at home with his Father in the communion of the Holy Spirit. Spiritual formation is learning to live in this reality.

The destination of the Christian spiritual journey is love. God invites us to experience life lived in love. It is through this love that we are transformed by that love into that same love until it overflows. According to Gary Moon and David Benner, "The goal of spirituality . . . is to bring the . . . believer into the experience of sanctifying grace whereby inner sin is cleansed, the image of God restored, and the heart so filled with divine love that the believer can love God with all the heart, mind, soul and strength and the neighbor as one's self" (Moon and Benner 2004, 116). We see that the journey of spiritual formation is, as our God, triune. It is to God, to self, and others. It is the journey of reconciliation.

This is why Henri Nouwen reminds us that "spiritual formation requires taking an inward journey to the heart. Although the journey takes place in community and leads to service, the first task is to look within" (Nouwen 2010, xix). He implores us to remember that within is where we not only discover self, but also a deeply intimate God who "is greater than our minds and cannot be

caught within the boundaries of our finite concepts. Thus, spiritual formation leads . . . to an 'articulate not-knowing" (Nouwen 2010 4). Children understand mystery because they still believe in magic. They do not necessarily understand how stars come to be or what they are. They are comfortable to let them exist within the mystery of their nature. Whereas we as adults struggle with mystery, wanting to define it, Mystery as paramount to formation, is natural for children.

This inner journey where we begin to face ourselves and know the God who dwells with and in us opens us to experience ourselves as the objects of God's love. This knowledge of being surrounded and filled by the One who calls himself Love is what frees us from the fears that keep us from walking in the fullness of our identities as beloved children of God (Nouwen 2010, 79). For author David Benner, quoting James Olthuis, this is the journey of Christian formation. "Ever since Eden, the human struggle has been 'to escape from the grip of the spirit of fear and to be open to the embrace of love'" (Benner 2003, 36). It is in this embrace that we become who we truly are.

According to Gary Moon, God's love, the source of our transformation, is much more than an embrace. "We exist in the loving ocean of God's being" (Moon 2004, 48). For Moon, the movement of formation is the recognition that we are never apart from God's company, only unaware of it. Spiritual formation then is the process by which we are awakened to God's loving and continued presence with and in us (Moon 2004, 48). This awareness leads us to fall deeply "in love with God in a manner that can produce radical transformation" (Moon 2004, 41). He exhorts adults to remember that falling in love with God (Moon's



definition of transformation) requires that we learn to believe in fairy tales again as in God, “happily ever after . . . exists now, all around us” (Moon 2004, 41).

God's happily ever after begins as a personal experience that ultimately reaches beyond us, and often through us, encompassing all of creation. As Benner points out "Love aligns us with the basic design plan for the universe . . . Because God is love, and because human beings are made in God's image, love is who we are" (Benner 2003, 97). Robert Mulholland expresses this as the discovery of our true created self. For Mulholland and Benner, Christian formation is the rediscovery of this self. We “find our wholeness in the very being of God, to be restored to fullness in the image of God, to live in loving union with God” (Mulholland 2006, 74). This leads beyond self as love cannot contain itself.

Mulholland’s formal definition of Christian spiritual formation is “the process of being conformed into the image of Christ for the sake of others . . . [it] *is the primal reality of Christian existence*” (Mulholland 1985, 25). He believes that a life lived in awareness of God becomes a “kairotic existence . . . shaped by the will of God . . . [and] empowered by the indwelling presence of God” (Mulholland 1985, 77). He and Demarest agree. God nurtures us with his loving presence just “as a mother lovingly nurtures her newborn...God relentlessly pursues transformation of his children into the image of his Son that we might serve him well in this world” (Demarest 2009, 37).

Serving God in this world is the natural outflowing of a restored identity in Christ. God does not love us so we will serve him; we serve him because he loves us. When a human being discovers themselves in light of God’s

unconditional love we discover as Gerald May states that “we are selves . . . [that] are absolutely real, amazingly unique, indescribably beautiful, and wondrously precious” (May 1993, 133). This discovery of self as a mysterious and majestic image-bearer of Perfect Love compels us to live in that identity. We become bearers of love to the world. This is defined as service to God, but it is more correctly service from God.

Spiritual formation is the process by which we live into God’s dream of who we are, the beloved. It is out of this identity as “beloved,” that we respond to God, ourselves, and the world. Brennan Manning reminds us that if

I am not in touch with my own belovedness, then I cannot touch the sacredness of others. If I am estranged from myself, I am likewise a stranger to others . . . I connect best with others when I connect with the core of myself. (Manning 2002, 58)

Spiritual formation then begins with the true self-being revealed in light of the love of God. It is through this formational connection that we can relate to others from our core which is now God's love. This allows us to live in and treat others with the dignity due to God's good creation. The dignity bestowed upon us as Abba's children connects us to our truest sense of self (Manning 2002, 62).

Gerald May agrees with Manning. He believes we are here, on earth, to do one thing; bear the love of God. He goes on to explain that bear means three things; to endure, to carry and to bring forth” (May 1991, 1). This is the trifold journey of formation; to be loved, to host love and to give love away. Once awakened to this perception one enters into the contemplative life. The contemplative life is an older word for what contemporary authors call, spiritual formation. May indicates that there are three clear indicators of this life; they

experience a deeper sense of awareness, they respond to that which they become aware of, and they become intimately self-aware (May 1991, 74-75). Again, in May's understanding, we see the trifold nature of formation. We become aware of God, aware of others and creation and aware of self. This awareness is what leads to the response, i.e. charity.

Albert Haase believes that the spiritual life is in its essence communion. "At the very core of our being, whether we are conscious of it or not, there is a communion- a 'common union'-with God" (Haase 2008, 20). According to Bradley Holt communion differs from union in that union "means absorption, ultimately losing one's identity in God [whereas] communion . . . suggests a kind of loving relationship of two persons who remain distinct despite the unity of purpose, feeling, or knowledge" (Holt 2005, 70). Communion then as formation is the same rhythm of giving and receiving love. While we remain distinctly ourselves, we take on the nature of God which is love.

Holt's understanding is more in line with the contemporary understanding of spiritual formation. Whereas the ancients sought ultimate union, a losing of self in the person of God, we do not seek to lose self in God but rather to discover our most genuine self in God. This requires that we learn to look constantly for God while living in the reality that he is always present. As Stephen Seamands says, "Although Christ is always present, paradoxically, his presence must be *sought*" (Seamands 2016, 68). Gregory Boyd agrees that learning to remain "aware of God's presence is the single most important task in the life of every follower of Jesus" (Boyd 2010, 15).

It is out of the awareness of this constant communion that we learn to relate to ourselves and others as “sacraments,” vessel of grace in which God can be encountered or known. Haase, like Boyd, insists cultivating awareness is key. Marjorie Thompson agrees with them stating that the “one condition that precedes *every* kind of prayer [being, relating and communicating with God] is being present to God with conscious awareness” (Thompson 2005, 35). This awareness, which children live in naturally must be reawakened once lost. This awakening leads us to encounter God, ourselves, and others in such a way as to understand the sacredness of each. This attentiveness Haase refers to as “the sacrament of the present moment” (Haase 2008, 21).

Haase, as May, refers to this posture as a contemplative approach to life. He insists that this awareness is what ushers us into a life of grace. He insists that awareness is at the heart of a life being formed as it allows us to experience each moment as “pregnant with divine Presence . . . Whenever we are tempted to . . . go in search of something outside of ourselves . . . we can stop . . . [and] become present to the divine Presence that dwells within and in which we dwell” (Haase 2008, 84). For him it is the awareness of the promise we discussed in chapter 2 that Jesus and his Father will make their home in us (John 14:23).

Moon agrees. He insists our “first leap back home to Eden,” is an awareness that the kingdom of God in which we are invited to live is real and available here and now (Moon 1997, 68) Moon recognizes a formational life as a life that is journeying back home. Home, he insists is God's original intent in creating us to live with him and one another in harmony with creation. He

believes this is available to us here and now but an awareness of such must be entered into by faith and cultivated as a daily practice (Moon 1997, 68-69).

David Benner refers to the journey as "choosing life." He believes that the real challenge of humanity is more a matter of becoming than simply being. It is about drawing deeply from this innerspring of living water [Christ in us] that vitalizes and allows us to become fully human. It is about living in the present, fully awake and ready to engage with life, with the people around us and with the world. (Benner 2011, 36)

We are becoming Christ-like. While the journey of spiritual formation certainly opens us up to experience God's presence in creation we come to understand as Benner points out that God's presence is nowhere as vibrant and evident as it is in ourselves and others (Benner 2011, 119).

Leanne Payne agrees with Benner. She states that "in him, we become fully human . . . [and] begin to do his work" (Payne 1998, 213). Payne believes that as we learn to live in an awareness of God's constant presence and love "the real 'I' in each one of us as individuals is revealed (Payne 1998, 215). We see that that the correlation between self-knowledge and the knowledge of God is a common theme among these authors.

It is in allowing oneself to be in constant communion with God that our authentic self is revealed. As Payne insists "True personality is rooted in relationship: first of all, in God, the Uncreated, then with everything he has created" (Payne 1998, 219). This included self. Stephen Seamands believes cultivating this is crucial if we are to become who we really are stating, "we must be receptive and attentive, intentional and purposeful, about cultivating an

awareness of Christ's presence (Seamands 2016, 67). It is through awareness of God present with and in us that we are freed to become who we are, love.

This is not a one-time event. God is forever revealing himself. Through that revealing, we are changed. It is a lifelong journey. According to Robert Webber,

This *metanoia* is not a one-time act but a *continuous* turning away from the old life in union with Adam . . . [It] is a process [of] entering into the cross . . . so that . . . we may also continuously rise with him in the resurrection to new life. (Webber 2006, 148)

Dallas Willard calls this "living our lives from the reality of God" (2006, 51-52).

This life of *metanoia* lived out of the reality of God, results in a human becoming love. "Spiritual formation," according to Willard, "refers to the process of shaping our spirit and giving it a definite character. It means the formation of our spirit in conformity with the Spirit of Christ" (Willard 2006, 53).

We do not form our own spirit. According to Jonathan Morrow, spiritual formation is an act of grace. Jason Lanker argues that "we must move from seeing formation as something based upon external willpower and begin seeing it as a natural result of God's perfection moving out from the depths of our hearts" (Lanker 2013, 137). Willard agrees "Grace is not opposed to effort; it is opposed to earning. Earning is an attitude. Effort is an action" (Willard 2006, 61). It is a response to God's movement within. According to Adele Calhoun "from its beginning the church linked desire for more of God to intentional practices, relationships, and experiences that gave people space in their lives to 'keep company with Jesus'" (Calhoun 2005, 17). Therefore, while spiritual formation is

certainly the work of God in the human soul for the benefit of the soul and all of creation, it most certainly requires willing participation from that soul.

While there is so much diversity and discord in the body of Christ, the authors, from varying traditions, agree concerning the nature and motion of spiritual formation. It is an act of grace achieved by God in the heart of the believer. As we awaken to ourselves as the object of God's unquenchable love, we begin to experience a deep sense of self as the beloved child of God. This revealed identity compels us beyond self in acts of love towards others and creation. The compelling is twofold; we are compelled by love for God towards the objects of his devotion and we begin to experience God's loving presence in those vessels, whether they are human or another part of God's good creation. The single most important part of this journey is awakening to God's eternal presence everywhere, at all times, as did the author of Psalm 139.

#### Spiritual Formation in Children's Spirituality

How do we take these ideas concerning spiritual formation and apply them to children's spirituality, in light of the elements that come naturally to children, such as wonder, awareness and presence? As we discussed in length in chapter two as well as at the beginning of this chapter, children naturally possess many of the attributes that spiritual formation authors focus upon as paramount to Christian formation. Rabbi Sandy Sasso lends some insight into this.

She shares in the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition on her children's book *God's Paintbrush*, of a journalist asking her "Where are all the answers to the questions in your book-in the back? I [Sasso] responded, 'No, the answers are inside of

you” (Sasso 2004). Sasso shares of a grandmother telling her how much her grandson liked the book. When the grandmother asked what he liked, he replied t “It asked so many questions” (Sasso 2004). Heather Ingersol echoes Sasso’s concern for allowing children to wonder and question freely. She bemoans the inability of teachers to set aside agendas making room for "children's wonderings, questions or thoughts" (Ingersol 2014, 168).

Sasso states that “for children to give us a glimpse of what is deep inside of them is their greatest gift to us. For adults to give our children the language to talk about their spiritual lives is our greatest gift to them” (Sasso 2004). Sasso shares in a journal article

I have learned that every child has a spiritual life, an innate religious curiosity. Unfortunately, we have not honored that life. Instead, we have sought to tell our children what God’s voice is, assuming, of course, that we hear it, rather than allowing them to tell us of the voice of God they hear, and assuming, of course, that they do not. But the opposite is true. (Sasso 2004, 65)

Sasso continues to explain that according to researcher Gerard Pottebaum, “if we do not find a comfortable home in God as children we have a harder time finding God as adults- because there is no home to which to return” (Sasso 2004, 65). The home we are inviting children into is the home we discussed at length in chapter two- the home God built inside of their hearts (John 14:23).

Brent Webb-Mitchell, a chaplain for disabled children at Devereux Hospital in Melbourne, Florida share the stories of three children of varying ages that are under his spiritual care. He, like Sasso, finds each to be capable of genuine spirituality. One is severely developmentally delayed, one is emotionally shut down and deeply depressed, and the third has been hospitalized due to severe



parental abuse. He describes how these children were able to engage their religious imaginations and how the works of art each produced revealed that even children with disabilities, who have experienced horrible realities are capable of living in the awareness of God's presence as love and engaging with that presence creatively to create for themselves a metanarrative in which they are understood and loved (Webb-Mitchell 1993, 305-314). This is important in that it illustrates the inclusivity of the formational journey.

### The Environment of Holy Play

Therefore, we begin, when exploring spiritual formation in children's spirituality by first acknowledging that children, full of wonder and imagination, are capable of authentic spirituality. Robert Coles studied children all over the world to gauge their capability for spiritual life. He published his findings in *The Spiritual Life of Children*. He, as Sasso, bemoans that "so often our notions of what a child can understand are based on the capacity the child has displayed in a structured situation" (Coles 1990, 23). Many of the voices we will hear from emphasize the importance of environment upon children's spirituality.

Coles discusses his difficulty in connecting with the Hopi children when approaching them at school. It was not until a wise Hopi woman explained to him that if he wanted to connect with their hearts, he needed to visit them at home. The children viewed school as a place to learn not to engage wonder. For the Hopi, home is a deeply spiritual place. In these less structured settings, he found these children to be deeply spiritual (Coles 1990, 23-25). Setting matters.

Researcher Jane Healey echoes this belief that when dealing with children in any environment of learning, whether academic or spiritual, “that engages . . . interest and imagination, which sparks the desire to seek out an answer, or ponder a question, or create a response,” best stimulates a child’s mind (Healey 1990, 73). Children learn best in an environment which they can do what they naturally do, wonder deeply and creatively. Ingersol agrees that cultivating an environment in which "wondering, awe, questioning, and creativity," are celebrated is essential (Ingersol 2014, 168).

Environments like this cultivate a sense of safety because they are not based upon the ideas of rote learning. These spaces are about engaging. James Fowler warns that when children are in an environment where they begin to compare and measure themselves (an environment of right or wrong rather than wonder) they can begin to view themselves as inferior and inadequate. This may lead them to a sense of despair and imaginations of mediocrity rather than the desired sense of competence (Fowler 1981, 67). Environments that allow children to engage as children while acknowledging their capacity to connect with the divine build competency.

This sense of competency, trust of self, is imperative for spiritual development. Children develop their sense of competency through healthy play. Ravi Jayakaran explains that play affects learning and development, as well as physical, cognitive, and social development. Play also gives them the skills to begin to practice reorganizing, regrouping, rethinking, and restructuring information (Jayakaran 2011, 44). Play is not antithetical to worship. According

to Janet Walton, "Play is not a disregard for tradition...The building blocks of ritual, its symbols, presume holy play" (Walton 2001, 294). According to Anthony Esolen the very act of the heart seeking "something beyond itself . . . involves a great deal of what can best be called 'play'" (Esolen 2010, 225).

Scottie May, Beth Posterski, Catherine Stonehouse, and Linda Cannell agree that an environment that facilitates play engages the whole child. "Through play, children learn about cooperation and the early demands of friendship...they learn how to get along, how to share scarce resources, and how to deal with the anguish of hurts, both emotional and physical" (May, Posterski, Stonehouse and Cannell 2005, 79). This understanding of play as extremely formative has shaped such ideas as "God play," and "holy play."

A case study done at the Catholic University of Australia showed that holy play creates an environment that cultivated the four essential characteristics of spirituality "the felt presence, integrating awareness, weaving the threads of meaning [integrating their story into God's story], and spiritual questioning" (Hyde 2010, 515). Jerome Berryman quotes Catherine Garvey's work citing that play and pleasure go hand in hand as we experience a "sense of mastery and growth" (Garvey 1977, 13). Berryman explains that within the context of holy play this is experienced within

our human limits by means of our relationship with God, the Creator. This relationship helps us discover our deep identity as creatures who create. This discovery, in turn, helps us to cope by creating with and transcending the existential limits that both confine and help define us. (Berryman 1991, 13)

In other words, environments that cultivate wonder through holy play cultivate not only awareness of God, but awareness of self in relation to God.

#### Elements of Children's Formation

Spiritual formation, or the trifold journey of reconciliation, includes the whole child growing to love the Lord their God with all their heart, and with all their soul, and with all their strength, and with all their mind; and their neighbor as themselves (Luke 10:27). We will now begin to consider the elements within current contemporary models. Linda Cannell and Scottie May believe these six principles must be at the core of our curriculums if we are to guide children to this end. These are the same essential ingredients found within the idea of holy play:

- Experiencing encounters with God
- Gaining a sense of awe and wonder
- Knowing God's character and actions
- Owning an identity as part of the people of God
- Engaging in service and mission

For these authors, experiencing encounters with God is central. The other components flow from it with the understanding that encounter with God may originate from the others. Encounter is the heart of children's spirituality (May, Posterski, Stonehouse and Cannell 2005, 200-201). Fuller agrees with them, emphasizing the need for involvement and a sense of belonging, in order to assure the church is to become a primary force of influence (Fuller 2001, 159-160).

David Hay and Rebecca Nye identify three specific categories of spiritual sensitivity that should be considered when caring for the spirituality of children: awareness- sensing, mystery-sensing, and value-sensing. These are very similar to Cannell and May's first three points. Awareness-sensing encompasses children's ability to be present to sensation, to experience themselves growing and learning. Sometimes this includes a sense of oneness that reaches into the universe. Mystery-sensing includes wonder that children experience over everyday phenomena, like the flicker of a flame or a butterfly as well as their propensity to imagine into what they wonder. Value-sensing has to do with how children experience empathy, experience delight through their ability to trust and a child's inclination to search for identity in order to give meaning to the events of life (Hay and Nye 2006, 65-78).

Janet Marshall Eibner and Susan Graham Walker identify several parallel points that must be embraced if we are to truly lead our children in a formational spirituality. They are extremely similar to the two models explored above:

- Children are capable of meaningful religious experience.
- Children sense God's presence and respond to it.
- Children have deep relationships with God.
- Children should be active participants in the ministry of the church (Eibner and Walker 1996, 16).

These women also push for a worship style such as holy play that not only indoctrinates but is experiential. They are convinced that if we fill our time with only the telling of Bible stories and the introduction of words of liturgy without

allowing room for children to experience the rituals, symbols, and relationships of our faith our children will never be able to embody faith long term in this world.

Without an experiential faith, they warn that we raise a biblically literate generation of agnostics or even atheists. "Without the integration of meaningful experience and exploration of faith and spirituality...grounded in the stories and traditions of our faith that make up who we are" we fail to spiritually nourish the whole child whose devotion God seeks (Eibner and Walker 1996, 22). T. Wyatt Watkins agrees, bemoaning that while what we intellectually understand about God is important, one cannot dismiss "the simple awe and wonder in the face of the mysterious, ineffable quality of . . . 'the More' [God]" (Watkins 2005, 140).

Watkins speaks of Marcus Borg's ideas of the senses of faith. He identifies these as belief, trust in God, faithful attentiveness to God, and being able to see and embrace the world as God's gracious creation. He connects these characterizations to the faith that he is discovering by "sitting at the feet" of children (Watkins 2005, 140). Watkin's is not dismissing intellect but stating that it is not of predominant importance in spirituality. This is crucial as just yesterday, March 2, 2020, an eight-year-old autistic boy, Anthony LaCugna was refused the rite of first communion within the Catholic church. Because he is non-verbal, they question his ability to distinguish right from wrong (Griffith 2020, NBC). This exclusive spirituality is not the spirituality of Jesus who bids the children to come.

There is much outrage over this. People recognize that though this child is not capable of verbal communication he has learned the rituals of his faith and therefore has incorporated symbols into his internal vocabulary. Children can

interpret symbol long before they are equipped with words. Most importantly he is capable of trust and awareness. Watkins is correct that “these decidedly-*relational* approaches to faith, these ways of the heart, are more vital and crucial at our present moment than ever before” (Watkins 2008, 140). He shares that his journey with children into this relational spirituality has proved to be “fertile ground for expressions of self-love” (Watkins 2008, 141). This spirituality not only cultivated a sense of being loved by God but an ability to love and celebrate self.

Daniel Siegel and Tina Bryson explain physiologically how these environments do indeed cultivate not only a healthy sense of self but a deep ability to empathize with others. Siegel explains that one of the best ways to cultivate self-awareness in children is to ask questions while allowing room for them to explore those questions. He agrees with Fowler that this feeds a sense of competence and worth. It communicates that they have something to say, answers deep within themselves. This also affects how they see others. According to Siegel “the more your kids think about what is going on inside of themselves the more they will develop the ability to understand and respond to what's going on in the worlds within and around them” (Siegel 2011, 55).

Rebecca Nye has a beautifully simplistic definition of children’s spirituality. It is “God’s way of being with children and children’s way of being with God” (Nye 2011, 5). If neither is occurring in our children’s worship experience, then there is truly nothing spiritual about it. Henri Nouwen agrees as he believes “the spiritual life starts at the place where you can hear God’s voice” (Mulholland 2006, 119). Sasso implores us to believe that children do indeed hear God’s voice in ways

sometimes vastly different from the way we hear as they are children (Sasso 2004, 65). Nye echoes this imploring the caregiver to remember when we approach children's spirituality that it is by its very nature childlike.

Children's spirituality does not readily conform or fit neatly into traditional expressions. According to Nye it requires that we listen to hear what is being expressed if we are to help develop a shared language with the children in our care. It cannot be compartmentalized. It is by its nature like children, holistic. It ebbs and flows from intense to lighthearted. It often is meaningful to the child but perceived by the child not to be meaningful to the caregiver. And finally, it is tender and vulnerable. It can be bruised, wounded, and killed just as it can be nourished, empowered, and begin to thrive (Nye 2011, 6). Now that we have considered some key elements of children's spirituality, we will turn our attention to specific models of that spirituality.

### **Models**

We have considered the nature of spiritual formation and how it uniquely applies to children. We have also explored the role environment plays in the spiritual formation of children. We will now turn our attention to specific models of practice within contemporary children's spirituality before looking at some opposing models that are present within current culture.

The Power of Remembrance: Katheryn Copsey

Katheryn Copsey believes, like Nye and Sasso, that if we take the Genesis account seriously then we can have no question about a child's potential for spiritual development. Scripture, in describing humanity as formed in the



image and likeness of the Creator, implies that every human being has a spiritual capacity. She echoes Sasso and Cole stating

each child has an innate spirituality. It is not just when a child begins to take an interest and respond to Christian teaching that he or she suddenly develop spiritual qualities: they are within the child from the moment of conception. (Copsey 2005, 24)

Copsey believes that children naturally live as spiritual beings due to their propensity for openness and presence. From the moment they enter this world, I would add and sometimes before birth, "the image of God in the child becomes tarnished by the impact and influence of the surrounding world" (Copsey 2005, 65). Spiritual formation is the process by which this God-given image is polished allowing the child to experience themselves and God as they are, reconciled.

She believes the only way for a caregiver to facilitate this formation is to first examine and reframe one's theology of childhood by answering the question for ourselves "who are children to God and what is their place in his kingdom?" Next, we need to spend time remembering what it is like to be a child. While the culture of today's child is very different Copsey reminds us that the emotional experience of childhood is not. "The feelings engendered may be the same" (Copsey 2005, 87). Regardless of culture all children experience wonder, fear, moments of helplessness and moments in which they feel powerful.

Finally, Copsey believes for us to enter into a formative relationship with children we must learn to live in their world. She encourages the caregiver to play with children, watch children's programs with them, above all learn to relate to them on their level as human beings that bear God's awesome, unmistakable image (Copsey 2005, 67). Nye agrees, encouraging caregivers to begin by

remembering what they were like as a child and to “make an inventory of some of the lasting impressions from your own childhood experience” (Nye 2009, 23).

Both authors concur that this postures the caregiver to meet children where they are rather than trying to bring them to where we think they should be. It allows them to hold loosely to the “agenda,” so that children can enter into holy moments with God.

#### Spiritual Windows: Cheri Fuller

Cheri Fuller reminds us that every child's journey is different. Our job is to create space for moments of encounter. Fuller calls these "spiritual windows." She names “four primary big picture windows.” Fuller’s four windows encompass enjoying God, loving God, following God, and serving God (Fuller 2001, 18). We will see throughout the various models including Fuller’s that children flourish in environments where they are celebrated, permitted to wonder, and are included and valued as spiritual beings.

Fuller encourages the caregiver to help children enjoy God through experiences that cultivate wonder through their five senses (Fuller 2001, 38-43). What she describes is very similar to *visio divina* but can be done with each sense. She reminds us as Nye stated that children’s worship experiences may look drastically different. They may experience deep moments of worship while in communal gatherings or while riding their bike (Fuller 2001, 57).

Fuller believes we empower children to love God by helping them place their daily experiences within scripture (Fuller 2001, 93). According to Lynne Tirrell, both Alasdair MacIntyre and Martha Nussbaum agree to the importance of

this type of integration of story. "Stories don't just tell us who we are, or who we have been. Stories tell us what we are capable of, and so they tell us who we might be" (Tirrell 1990, 117). In helping children learn to process their daily lives through God's story we are teaching them to find themselves within that story. This facilitates both the love of God and personal identity as God's child.

Fuller reminds us that a child's posture towards God is based upon how the child believes God responds to them. This echoes the question Curtis and Eldredge place at the center of Christian formation "What is God's heart towards me, or, how do I affect him?" (Curtis and Eldridge 1997, 97-98). This answer begins to be formed through interactions with caregivers. Fuller quotes author Wes Haystead, "The child's underlying attitude towards God (and especially his love) is primarily formed in the process of interacting with adults" (Haystead 1983, 132; Fuller 2001, 67-68).

In context to following God, Fuller strongly emphasizes that this must be based upon the knowledge and experience of being loved by God not fear of the repercussions of failing. Fuller calls this "obedience from the heart" (Fuller 2001, 146). Children grow in their identity as children of God through having the opportunity to serve in the world as members of Christ's body. She believes that the premise "when you stop giving, you stop growing" needs to be instilled in children early in their journey with Christ (Fuller 2001, 172). Giving is a gift that gives back, reinforcing God's Genesis declaration that we are very good.

## A Seamless Life: Valerie Hess and Marti Garlett

Valerie Hess and Marti Watson Garlett agree with Fuller that “The most effective way we can teach our kids is in the context of our daily lives” (Hess and Garlett 2004, 16). They present twelve spiritual disciplines in age-appropriate models. These women encourage the caregiver to begin in prayer by journaling with the Holy Spirit concerning what they see and discern to be the needs of the children that they care for (Hess and Garlett 2004, 14).

Like Fuller, Nye, and Berryman they are intentional in incorporating sensory practices. For meditation, they suggest writing Jesus loves you on the wall of the bath and having the child soak in the bubbles while imagining that they are soaking in the love of God (Fuller and Garlett 2004, 28). They encourage an established rhythm of prayer to invite children into in which they can engage with God through reading, art, and journaling. For Hess and Garlett the point is to be intentional, teaching children that scheduling time to be with God in prayer is a priority in our lives (Hess and Garlett 2004, 41-44).

Hess and Garlett agree with Miles and Fuller, that service as members of the body of Christ to others is of primary importance in children’s spirituality. They quote Richard Foster’s idea of self-righteous service vs true service, feeling that children understanding this distinction is vital in learning to discern their hearts as members of God’s family and vessels of his love. Self-righteous service always seeks a reward whereas “true service springs from a heart of compassion and humility, a heart like Jesus” (Hess and Garlett 2004, 124-125).

I particularly resonate with Hess and Garlett's idea of worship concerning children's spirituality. They term it "a seamless life." "A seamless life is a life that makes no distinction between sacred things and secular things...cheering for our favorite team can be just as much an act of worship as sitting in a pew on Sunday" (Hess and Garlett 2004, 152). They echo Nye's exhortation to remember that children may find themselves in deep places of worship while simply living. This idea of worship is akin to Brother Lawrence's life of prayer without ceasing.

Intentionality is a theme that flows throughout Hess and Garlett's writing. Worship as with prayer is an act of intention. They lay out a rhythm of preparation for Sunday worship and compare it to a priest's preparation to enter the Holy of holies. For Hess and Garlett the incorporation of these small intentional acts lends weight to the ultimate experience of the divine as it focuses and builds anticipation of encounter with God (Hess and Garlett 2004, 157-158).

These models of children's spirituality while presented differently, take Jesus' admonition to "Let the children come," seriously. They approach children as individuals fully capable of engaging and responding to God. They bend to facilitate rather than quench a child's natural sense of wonder. They make room for a child's spiritual life to bleed into all aspects of the child's life rather than compartmentalizing. They are holistic and inclusive in that they allow children to engage with God as they are through all aspects of life.

## Opposing Views

There are however various opposing opinions within the contemporary literature. Greg Carlson, Tim Ellis, Trisha Graves, and Scottie May compare and contrast four models of children's spiritual formation in *Perspectives on Children's Formation: 4 Views*. Editor Michael Anthony opens by presenting a model of learning developed by David Kolb which is four-pronged: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Carlson, Ellis, Graves, and May 2006, 32). The four models of spiritual formation that follow are each heavily steeped in one quadrant or the other. They all interact with children through worship models that are highly engaging yet vastly different.

### Instructional-Analytical Models

The instructional-analytical model presented by Gregory Carlson and John Crupper is word centered. It focuses on formation through the intellectual appropriation of God's word as presented in scripture. It is very similar to the way multiplication tables or sight words are learned, repetition and reward. This model believes that the relational element, i.e. knowing and living in Christ can only be attained through the instructional element, i.e. the learning of scripture and appropriation of scriptural truths. The authors do acknowledge that formation requires knowledge of age-appropriate learning (Carlson, Ellis, Graves, and May 2006, 122). They emphasize that rote learning is not the ultimate objective but rather that children would begin to "learn by heart" integrating from mind to being.

### Pragmatic-Participatory Model

The third model presented is the pragmatic-participatory model which is explored by Trisha Graves. This formation model involves the body. Drama and dance are often incorporated. There is zero downtime. Every moment is filled with active learning. Scripture is approached in a way as to have practical application within the scope of daily life. They look to present biblical truths that are culturally relevant to children. "In the pragmatic-participatory model, knowing about God and knowing God is important; however the process in which children can learn about God is done in a way where children are able to experience God and who he is (or could be) in their lives" (Carlson, Ellis, Graves, and May 2006, 185).

### Active-Engagement Model

The fourth model introduced in this study is the media-driven active-engagement model shared by Greg Carpenter. This model is high octane energy. In this model, stories are not told. They are acted out. Everything is about engagement. These models are based upon the principle of fun. As such they use games, technology, and interactive music. Students learn choreography to songs. TV monitors are the norm. While the use of media is a hot topic with all the current data on addiction and children this approach believes that "the prevalence of media in the lives of our kids and its influence on their development isn't going to diminish in years ahead" (Carlson, Ellis, Graves, and May 2006, 243). This model uses media to introduce characters with the hope

that children will identify with them, empowering them to live as Christians within the context of modernity.

### Contemplative-Reflective Model

The first model introduced which we are looking at last is the contemplative-reflective model presented by Scottie May. It is akin to holy play. It is filled with quiet reflection, prayers of self-awareness and storytelling. It seeks to invite the children to step beyond self into a place that is sacred where they can experience themselves as washed by the love of God. This type of spiritual practice encourages reflection upon art, story, music, and nature. It focuses less upon informing about the Divine than the experience of the Divine. As with Berryman's model space and symbol is prioritized. May incorporates Montessori learning theory, created stations in which children can create or listen to music. May states that he "has seen the Contemplative-reflective model bring responses from children that no other form of children's ministry has in my forty years of working with children" (Carlson, Ellis, Graves, and May, 2006, 80). However, he does indicate that it is not successful as a form of outreach to unchurched youth (Carlson, Ellis, Graves, and May 2006, 81).

Each of these opposing models communicates something very different to children. The instructional-analytical approach communicates that we know God through learning about God, which is true. The pragmatic-participatory approach says we know God through engaging in activities with God's people, which is also true. The active-engagement approach infers that relationship with God is about excitement and fun, which again is true. However, only the contemplative-



reflective approach tells children a story of knowing God as intimately present now. According to Gerald May when given the opportunity “children develop a sense of the divine Person as friend very easily. Children readily associate the companionship of God with the best of human parenting” (May 1991, 171). It is to the importance of that story, that language, through which children learn to define God, themselves, and creation that we now turn.

### **The Role of Story in Contemporary Models**

Eugene Peterson bemoans the fact that we live in an age that sorely lacks story and storyteller (Peterson 1999, 8). Thomas Boomershine agrees to the importance of the integration of story as “story is the primary language of experience” (Boomershine 1988, 18). For children story begins with symbol as religious language. As Mulholland states, religious symbols are “so vital within the community of believers...drawing them into God's new order of being in Christ” (Mulholland 2000, 70). When we speak of religious language, we are speaking of everything that communicates the idea of God, self, and the world to children.

Catherine Stonehouse believes that through religious language children learn to define, themselves, God, and the world in which they live. She as Scottie May, relies heavily upon Berryman's model, *Godly Play*. According to Berryman and Stonehouse, all religious language flows out of the primary religious language of silence. It is in sacred silence that “the surprise of God’s breaking in causes us to catch our breath” (Stonehouse 1998, 170). Stonehouse shares a boy’s experience of watching ants and recognizing in the “silence” that all of life,

including himself, had a purpose (Stonehouse 1998, 172). Wonder then is intricately tied to the language of sacred silence.

The biblical story is of utmost importance in religious language. It is in the story of God that children find the story of themselves and the world in light of God's love. Stonehouse implores adults to recognize that when children are too young to tell the story in words they can "tell" the story through symbols.

"Children who are way too young to accurately reconstruct the story in words can reconstruct it with the materials [visual aids] and meet God again" (Stonehouse 1998, 173). Children from a very young age can learn to tell themselves the stories of God that form the foundation of their identity. Nye agrees that children are fully capable of engaging and hearing the heart of the story (Nye 2009, 69). The failure to understand the nature of this religious language is what caused the young autistic boy Anthony LaCugna to be denied access to the wedding table of the Lamb.

### Godly Play

I have mentioned Godly Play several times. Stonehouse, a prescriber of this model, describes her faith community's worship experience for children, beginning in the sanctuary. After talking with the pastor, the children are escorted to their worship area. They pause outside to recognize it as sacred before entering. They engage in the language of silence. Stonehouse is already inside, seated on the floor. She welcomes each child by name, communicating value, as they enter and sit down in their worship circle. After helping the children cultivate a sense of sacredness with her words and behaviors, she encourages them to

use their imaginations to see Jesus among them. Their worship experience continues and incorporates story and visual tactical aids, but it begins and ends with the children understanding God is present with them in their worship (Stonehouse 1998, 176-177).

Stonehouse's model is based upon the work of Sonja Steward and Jerome Berryman. Their work, however, as Stonehouse explains was birthed out of Italian educator and Hebrew scholar Sofia Cavelletti (Stonehouse 1998, 181). Cavelletti's core belief was that children are by their very nature spiritual beings who "with ease...grasp the reality of the transcendental and are even more open to God than many adults" (Stonehouse 1998, 181). As caregivers "we have the privilege of becoming partners with God by assisting children in finding what they long for-experience with God" (Stonehouse 1998, 181).

Stonehouse agrees with Cavelletti's conclusion that children's spirituality should not be focused upon taught morality. "To introduce moral education too early may actually distort a child's morality" (Stonehouse 1998, 183). Nye and Ingersoll agree this has the potential to stifle a child's innate spiritual capability (Ingersoll 2014, 168) (Nye 2004, 99). Children's spirituality should focus on what all children need, and know they cannot provide for themselves, God's loving care. "Childhood is a time for being loved and protected by God, for enjoying God's love and responding to it" (Stonehouse 1998, 183). We see that while Fuller, Hess and Garlett, and Stonehouse all develop different models of children's spirituality, they agree that religious language that cultivates awareness, intentionality and focus upon love and being loved is foundational.

A closer look at Berryman's model of children's spirituality identifies six factors that when incorporated into an environment of wonder allow religious language to be absorbed by children. Through this internalization, the children have the opportunity to discover their "deep identity," as the beloved of God. For Berryman, it is the emergence of the "deep identity," the image of the Creator that we as caregivers lead children to through empowering them with religious language (Berryman 1991, 62).

The six factors Berryman identifies are creativity, Eucharist, community, wonder, existential limit, and of course religious language. The caregiver in Berryman's model assumes the role of a tribal storyteller. In order to serve this role well, the storyteller must "engage wonder, the creative process and the awareness of our existential limits" (Berryman 1991, 63-64). These components are important to Berryman because they invite, host, and reverentially respect the children in our care. Wonder invites them to engage. The creative process makes room for the children to wonder out loud through questions and rabbit trails. Finally, an awareness of one's existential limits permits children to be limited beings who are capable of reflecting a limitless God.

The other three aspects, Eucharist, community, and religious language make up what Berryman refers to as the unspoken lessons. What Berryman wants us to be aware of is how these three aspects of Christian life communicate to children. He believes everything speaks, space especially. Nye agrees stating that "children are especially sensitive to the feel of a place, even as they cross the threshold. They can 'read' its language easily" (Nye 2009, 42).

Berryman incorporates sacred story shelves. These are filled with religious symbols that make up our religious language. "The top shelf holds the most sensorial and most important images for the child. For example, the guiding parables are placed there in golden boxes" (Berryman 1991, 84). The items on lower shelves are not in golden boxes. Through placement and color, the importance of Jesus's words among the other words of scripture is being spoken to the children each time they enter the sacred space.

### **Communication**

Karen Henley agrees with Berryman, Stonehouse, and May that nonverbal communication is of uttermost importance. Henley quotes a study from UCLA researcher Albert Mehrabian stating that 50% of communication comes through our body language, gestures, and appearance while 38% comes from our tone of voice. This study found that a mere 7% of what is communicated comes through the actual words spoken (Henley 2002, 88). Nye agrees. She uses the acronym S.P.I.R.I.T when discussing the holy art of storytelling with children. Nye believes that space, process, imagination, relationship, intimacy, and trust lay the foundation for children to be able to hear well (Nye 2009, 69).

Henley agrees with Nye and Coles, that an adult's ability to listen to children communicates deeply. Henley believes listening teaches us to gage "where kids are mentally, morally, spiritually and emotionally" (Henley 1997, 91). Perhaps just as importantly as Coles states, "They offer us a chance to see a good part of what we are: human beings struggling to figure out what this world means" (Coles 1992, 91). Esolen echoes Coles in expressing that adults avoid

this in that “the real danger . . . to ourselves [is] that we will look upon their world (the child’s) . . . still touched with wonder and gratitude, and choose to allow those childlike virtues to enter our hearts” (Esolen 2010, 66).

### Tribal Storytellers

Henley considers Jesus’ storytelling techniques in scripture. She indicates that these were sensory experiences for the disciples (Henley 1997, 106). This is essential in communicating the gospel to children. She implores us to recognize and engage the children in what we previously discussed Seigel referring to as “bottom-up” thinking. She developed a five-step method of storytelling based upon professional storyteller Jack Maguire's design. Henley's method is called "the five-day sandwich" (Henley 1997 106-121). She, embodying the idea of “intentionality,” encourages the caregiver to spend five days building the story before presenting it to children.

On day one the caregiver reads the story. On day two the characters are considered. On day three the caregiver again reads the story this time looking for a meaningful phrase that the children can connect with. On day four the focus is on the setting or environment in which the story takes place. On day five the caregiver reads with each of the preceding days in mind. Day six is set aside to pray and enjoy the sandwich, as it were, before presenting it to the children on day seven (Henley 1997,117-121). Henley's model honors both the passage and the children. By steeping themselves in the story before their time with the children the caregiver can be fully engaged and present to both.

Vernie Schorr agrees with Henley that the art of storytelling is of the utmost importance in children's formation. He believes effective storytelling "is one of the most effective ways to develop character and conscience in children" (Schorr 2008, 94). Schorr, like Berryman and Henley, affirms that the caregiver should be able to tell rather than read the story. It should be internalized and simplified. The teller should draw in the senses by including the scene. Facial expressions and tone should be engaged while telling the story. Schorr suggests using visuals such as a flannel graph, simple art, or even allowing the children to act out the story as its being told. Perhaps most importantly, Schorr reminds us that the children should be involved (Schorr 2008, 97-101). The story is something to be lived not merely learned.

Sarah Arthur believes our ability to function well as tribal storytellers to our children depends upon how we understand scripture. Arthur, like Mulholland, insists "the Bible is not *first of all* a book of information. That is its secondary purpose. First of all, the Bible is a story" (Arthur 2010, 40). She reminds us that each Sunday in worship we are reenacting the stories in which we find our identity as Christian. We live our story of faith in symbols and rituals.

### Story-Linking

Karen Yust cites Hebrew scholar Walter Brueggeman imploring caregivers to "see their nurturing task as helping children embrace the stories of their faith tradition so they can 'affirm that this is *my* story about *me*, and it is *our* story about *us*" (Yust 2004, 42). For these authors is it about the children engaging with the story rather than learning the information in the story. Yust borrows the

terminology “story-linking” from researcher Anne Wimberly, to refer to this process by which a child begins to place their story within the metanarrative of God. Yust relies on Brueggeman’s model which identifies five aspects to story linking: receiving, hearing, celebrating, telling, and becoming (Yust 2004, 43).

Receiving “involves sharing our own experience of the sacredness of life and God’s love through compassionate care for our children” (Yust 2004, 43) Hearing is, of course, the art of storytelling as explored previously. Yust however, encourages the caregiver to reach beyond the scriptures teaching children how to listen for God’s story within other stories. Celebration for Yust does include religious celebration, like first communion or catechism.

However, she carries the idea of celebration beyond that into everyday life by connecting biblical stories to normal activities. For example, setting the table with a child while sharing the story of Abraham’s visitors at the oaks of Mamre is celebratory. For Yust, like Schorr, storytelling is something the child is invited to do. "For a story to become part of a child's understanding of the world, she needs to put that story into her own words" (Yust 2004, 64). The final process of story-linking is becoming. This is facilitated by inviting children into opportunities to serve as well as celebrate their small acts of kindness and generosity in which they reached beyond self as vessels of God’s love active in the world.

Arthur argues persuasively that to present scripture as merely a moral lesson diminishes its power. It keeps the listener from being able to engage the text. Arthur, as Yust, believes when we allow room for children to engage with the story, they can begin to enter into it. Mulholland refers to this as engaging the



sacred stories “iconographically” (Mulholland 2000, 70). Yust encourages the caregiver to cultivate an atmosphere of wonder.

She wants us to approach scripture believing that “the Bible is a world inviting us in” (Arthur 2010, 45). Gretchen Pritchard agrees that “the power of the gospel is not, primarily, that it gives us tools for an intellectual understanding of our relationship with God. Its power is imaginative” (Pritchard 1992, 13). We imagine past the story into our own lives that the same God of the story is actively engaging us now. We link our story to his story and the story of creation. This is not just reading the story; it is entering into the story in a sensory fashion which allows the story to come alive. This is key in empowering children to not only interpret life through the lens of scripture but to ground them in the identity as the beloved of God.

### **Conclusion**

It is very clear that to lead children in formative Christian development we must move away from an academic approach to spirituality and return to what is most natural for children, wonder. Children, according to Robert Clark, rely primarily upon “imagination, stimulated by stories, gestures, and symbols . . . [they are] not yet controlled by logical thinking” (Clark 1994, 238). Children are posed perfectly for authentic transformation as according to Boyd, the requirement for that type of transformation is the ability to envision what is invisible, a loving God and a kingdom into which we are invited (Boyd 2004, 35).

Anthony Esolen wrote a sobering piece that discusses ways in which a child’s imagination can be destroyed. “Sticking to the facts,” is one way because

it again is informative (Esolen 2010, 3). It does not cultivate wonder. He reminds us that to not enable children to live and celebrate wonder is detrimental not only to them but to us. He and Sasso implore us to recognize our need of children if we are to live with awakened hearts. Esolen is concerned that in not creating space and opportunity we deform children who naturally ask, seek, and knock.

Another way to kill a child's imagination according to Esolen is unfortunately what is communicated in many children's worship experiences today: transcendence is denied. Children's imaginations are not yet corrupt. According to Esolen the uncorrupt imagination "yearns of the holy- to behold its beauty . . . to be possessed by it" (Esolen 2010, 225). God is, as Calvin Miller exclaims, if anything, beautiful (Miller 2000, 113). Esolen identifies that "in both art and worship, the heart seeks out something beyond itself- a beauty or a power that is not its own (Esolen 2010, 225).

Ingersoll states that "children experience God, and the role of Christian formation is to help them develop a Christian language to make meaning out of those experiences" (Ingersoll 2014, 173). If we understand children's spirituality as "holy play," and we understand our role in it as those who direct the gaze of their wonder to Christ then we will cultivate spaces that allow children to come to Jesus as they are. Jennifer Orono speaks of "hurried children," in the context of how it affects their ability to connect when they are shuffled from one activity to the next. It teaches them that value is in the completion of tasks rather than in their being (Orono 2007, 104).

We must move away from spiritual models that mimic business models. Orono and Myers are correct in their assumption that as a body Christians should be at the forefront of the shift from viewing children as commodities to be invested in for gain to living, breathing, image-bearers of God fully capable of serving alongside adults in his family (Orono 2007, 105). George Barna is correct in his belief that as Christians, children should be our first priority as they are clearly a priority to God (Barna 2003, 44). This is the heart of authentic Christian spirituality: the fulfillment of God's heart through relationship with the object of his unfettered devotion.

That is not romanticism. That is the gospel. As Mulholland states "Our identification as God's chosen ones has nothing to do with us. This is the affirmation of God's unfathomably loving purpose for us" (Mulholland 2006, 118). In inviting children to engage with God through sacred space, holy symbol, and language, as well as wonder laden practices we open the door for authentic lives of transformation. As Schorr reminds us, if we desire our children to grow in Christian character, we need to remember that "it is first and foremost an inward transformation of spirit, mind, and conscience" (Schorr 2008, 35).

In chapter four we will discuss the research in preparation for, as well as the content of the resource and prayer models developed in the book *Child of Wonder: A Guide for Christian Caregivers in Leading Children in Formative Practice*. We will consider the assessment tool and the expert panel members who are participating in the reading and assessment of this resource.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DESIGN, PROCEDURE, AND ASSESSMENT

The purpose of this project was to create a resource for Christian Caregivers that would educate them concerning formative spiritual practices for children. The resource question was: In what ways will this resource educate Christian caregivers concerning formative spiritual practices for children? The goal was to create a resource that instructed caregivers concerning the biblical, historical, and theological foundations of children's spirituality. It would then present models that the caregivers could implement in order to lead children in into formative spiritual practices built upon those foundations.

This resource is aimed at the spiritual formation of children. According to Robert Mulholland, Christian spiritual formation is "the process of being conformed into the image of Christ for the sake of others" (Mulholland 2000, 25). I would add to this, also for the sake of God. Spiritual formation is about returning to our true nature as God's children, fashioned in his image and likeness. This returning is the deepest desire of God's heart for the world.

"For others," is a natural byproduct of a deep, abiding relationship with God. This resource was built upon the belief that spiritual formation is the process by which children live into God's dream of who they are, the beloved of God. It is out of this identity that they become Christ to the world. This resource presents the spiritual formation of children as the result of the trifold journey of reconciliation in which they learn to love and be loved by God, self, and others.

This project was completed in book form. As such, it required a

tremendous amount of research in several key areas. I began by having conversations with two dozen individuals that care for children in a Christian context. All of them, though from differing traditions and positions, had similar concerns. Parental influence was being cut short due to cultural demands, children were disengaged and had trouble focusing, bullying had become the norm, and screens had replaced books and creativity.

The overall consensus was children had no sense of themselves or their role in this world. These caregivers felt helpless as to how to ground children in identity. It was this consensus that compelled me to choose to address all Christian caregivers. I hoped that this resource would equip them with tools that would inspire and empower them to engage children ways that connects them to God, the source of all joy. This would allow them to discover themselves within him and in turn be compelled in love towards others.

Much of the research was highly academic. I was seeking not only to teach caregivers how to lead children in formative Christian practice but to lay a foundation that would allow them to synthesize this type of spiritual process into their belief system. Addressing Christian caregivers meant a wide audience base with varying faith traditions, fields of study, and levels of education. Due to this, I worked under the premise that the resource must first develop a sound theological understanding of the role of children within the body of Christ, of how Christ responds to children and of the role of the person of the Holy Spirit in leading children into a formational relationship with the living God.

This chapter will describe the topics of research undertaken to develop

this resource as well as a brief description of the prayer models. It will include the original goals, introduce the participants, present the thought process behind its development, and describe the measurement technique through which the effectiveness of the resource in meeting the following goals was measured:

1. This resource will establish the biblical foundation for the use of imagination in Christian spirituality.
2. This resource will establish the imagination within the theological foundation of the *imago Dei*.
3. This resource will provide prayer models based upon historical forms of Christian spirituality.
4. This resource will integrate insights from neurobiology as relating to children.
5. This resource will introduce concepts concerning a child's capacity to grow in relational literacy.
6. This resource will instruct readers in the role of communal storytelling in the spirituality of children.
7. This resource will present a holistic view of spirituality in children.
8. This resource will provide practical ways to integrate the use of the imagination in spiritual practices for children.
9. This resource will provide spiritual models that create space for children to have episodic encounters with God.

This resource was developed during an extremely difficult time emotionally and physically. A literal avalanche of trials collapsed upon me from the commencement of the doctoral program. Developing this resource served as oxygen, allowing me to breathe in the truth of God under the tremendous weight of these trials.

## Context

I chose the broad category of “Christian caregivers” as it fails to exclude beyond the parameter of Christian and care. In the early church, and even half of a century ago, it was understood that spirituality was planted at home in the family unit and strengthened within the context of community. We now live in an age where children rarely spend two or three years at home before beginning eight-hour school days five days a week. Most begin some sort of childcare program to accommodate their parent's work schedule at a few months old.

Culture demands that childhood be cut short. Parents relinquish their role of primary influence very early. The term Christian caregiver allows for all of those who serve these children including, but not exclusively, parents, therapists, teachers, children's ministry directors, homeschooling parents, as well as those in the church who feel the conviction of the Holy Spirit over the state of these little ones. These are the ones that this resource was designed to benefit.

I have learned that there is no possible scenario in which we create space, inviting God to encounter us that he fails to do just that. When we draw near to God he responds likewise (James 4:8). There is also no scenario in which we encounter God and are not changed (2 Cor. 3:18). This resource empowers the caregiver and children to position themselves for transformative, episodic encounters with the Living God. I had a conversation with one of the caregivers that served as a reader. She expressed how this resource stirred within her a desire to encounter God in the ways explored. She questioned why it had taken thirty years as Christians to learn that such encounters were possible for all.

This resource was designed to awaken the caregiver to wonder and presence even as they learn to engage and fan the flames of these attributes found naturally in children. As Rabbi Sandy Sasso reminds us “for children to give us a glimpse of what is deep inside of them is their greatest gift to us.” (Sasso 2004). This resource postures the caregiver to draw from the deep springs in children’s hearts where their infectious wonder is found.

This resource provides the practical knowledge caregivers need to overcome preconceived ideas about childhood. It invites them to discover what it means to live and breathe as a creative being. It instructs them in practices that can be used corporately, privately, or therapeutically.

It does this by first exploring what it means to be a people of the story. It addresses the question “how do we instill identity in children?” with the idea that the story of self is established as the continuation of God’s story. It directs the caregiver as to how to empower children to find their story within the metanarrative of God. The resource explores scripture and commentaries to discover how Jesus interacts with children. The biblical model presented illustrates Jesus as open and receptive to embrace and bless all children. It discusses the role of the Holy Spirit in enabling children to come to Jesus now.

Theologically, the resource considers the role of the imagination as described in the Pauline epistles. Specifically, the idea of the “eye of the heart being opened,” and “beholding the Lord” transformatively. It speaks of the centrality of the cross and how to present that to children in an appropriate way. The resource discusses the importance of our image of God in conjunction with



our ability to approach God. It explores the theological idea of reconciliation. Specifically, its trifold nature concerning God, self, and others as well as its ongoing reality within the life of every believer. The resource establishes a holistic model of children's spirituality through the historical model of Celtic Christianity.

The second section of the resource outlines six prayer models in detail. Each is placed within the spiritual practice of a historical figure. The first model is based on Teresa of Avila's idea of the interior castle. This model, "The Castle of the Heart," leads children through a guided imaginative process to the castle in their heart where Jesus and the Father, according to the gospel of John, have made their home (John 14:23). This model is a means by which children will learn to spend time with God and ultimately become established in the premise of abiding, God in them and them in God.

The second and third models fall under the umbrella of Ignatian spirituality. The Ignatian prayer of examen of consciousness teaches individuals to look for God's presence throughout their day. The second model, "The Next to Me Place," instructs caregivers on how to lead children in practicing God's presence as next to them. This is where our friends sit, next to us. Jesus is presented as a loving friend that cares about, and is present to, all of our experiences. It will result in children learning to be aware of Christ's presence with them always.

The Ignatian spiritual exercise is a way in which individuals learn to interact with scripture imaginatively in order to engage with it in a sensory fashion. The third model, called "My Gospel," instructs caregivers how to engage

children in scriptural narratives in this way so that children can learn to apply the narrative to their own daily experiences. Through the narrative, the caregiver helps the children to connect the gospel story to their own emotional experiences, interpret the emotional responses of others, and learn how Jesus interacts with them there. This not only teaches children how Jesus behaves towards them, but it also builds empathy in that it teaches them how to understand other's emotional responses in connection with their experiences.

The fourth model, based within Julian of Norwich's idea of God's revealing presence in a hazelnut, is called "Treasure Box." In this model, caregivers are instructed in multiple ways how to help children engage with everyday objects. This is done with the purpose of discovering aspects of God within them. These objects are contemplated and then kept within a treasure box that belongs to each child. This exercise is meant to cultivate wonder and help children live in the reality of an earth filled with God's glorious presence.

The fifth model is based upon Mother Teresa's spiritual practice of seeing Jesus in every person. She offered kindness to others as a way of showing kindness to Christ. "The Kindness Kalendar," is about teaching children not only to exercise kindness through words and deeds but to celebrate when they do. The caregiver instructs the children in how God celebrates kindness. Behaving as Christ to others strengthens one's identity as a child of God. This model is meant to cultivate a life of kindness towards others that solidify a child's identity as the image-bearer of a kind and generous God.

The six and final model, "Hello God, I'm Listening," is based upon Brother

Lawrence's premise of practicing God's presence which for him, was in reality, prayer without ceasing. In this model, caregivers are instructed in ways to help children connect with God through Disney movies, daily events, and even the taste, texture, color, and smell of strawberries. The purpose is to lead children into a contemplative life where they are listening for God's story and presence within all aspects of life. It is about learning to engage with God continuously.

As I stated before, the preparation for this resource was enormous. I studied not only commentaries, Bible dictionaries, and theologians, but hundreds of contemporary writers focusing upon spiritual formation and children's spirituality as well as each spiritual classic that the prayer models are grounded within. Throughout this process, I was able to meet with my field consultant who led me in imaginative prayer and also allowed me room to process what I was learning and remembering verbally. I am a highly verbal processor, so this allowed me to internalize what I was learning very effectively.

### **Participants**

Each participant read the resource on a volunteer basis. I selected participants with one or more of the following qualifications: ministry, education, or psychology. They each come from varying traditions within Christendom. We will examine the panel based on age, gender, years in their present faith community, and years of experience in the three categories cited above.

Two of the respondents fell between the ages 25 and 32. Two of the respondents fell between the ages 33 and 39. One respondent was between 40 and 49 years of age. Four respondents were between the ages of 50 and 59.

Two readers fell between the ages 60 and 69. The largest group of respondents fell between the ages of 70 and 79. There were five respondents in this age demographic.

My original intent was to attempt to secure equal amounts of female and male participants. This proved to be quite difficult. I learned that females still dominate the caregiving fields in all three categories. This led to an overwhelmingly larger pool of female participants than male participants. For this project there were twelve female participants and four male participants.

Years in a faith community was important as I wanted to gauge the readers knowledge of their community and commitment to that community. The largest amount of readers, totaling eight, belonged to the same faith community for more than fifteen years. No participants fell in the category of eleven to fifteen years within their faith communities. Four reported being part of their faith communities for six to ten years. Two belonged to their communities three to five years. Only two of the sixteen readers reported belonging to their faith community for under three years.

The last three categories measured the respondents' years in the three areas of expertise. The first measured years of experience in the field of Christian ministry. The largest group of respondents within this demographic was five respondents each reporting having more than fifteen years in ministry. Three respondents worked eleven to fifteen years in ministry. Two indicated having six to ten years in ministry. No respondents reported having less than three years in ministry or three to five years in ministry. Six of the respondents had no

experience in ministry.

In the field of psychology, the smallest pool of participants, totaling two, had over fifteen years of experience in the field of psychology. None of the participants reported working eleven to fifteen years in this field. Four participants indicated having six to ten years of experience in psychology. No participants reported having three to five years of experience in this field. Ten participants had no experience in the field of psychology.

The final demographic category measured years working in the field of education. The largest pool, totaling six, reported having over fifteen years working in the field of education. Only one respondent had six to ten years in this field of study. Three reported having three to five years working as educators and three additional respondents reported less than three years of experience. Three respondents had no experience in this field.

These findings show that the large majority of the readers were over fifty years of age and female. The pool was evenly divided between those belonging to their faith community for over fifteen years and those having under ten years of experience. Ten of the sixteen readers had over six years of ministry experience. Only six of the sixteen readers had over six years of experience in the field of psychology. Seven of the readers reported having over six years working as educators. This shows that at least one third of the reader have experience in each of the three specified fields of study.

### **Procedure and Assessment**

In designing this resource my efforts were spent researching several

specific topics. I studied commentaries from varying traditions to ensure that I was hearing from experts throughout the body of Christ. I sought to learn several things from these commentators; what is Jesus' stance towards children, what is the Holy Spirit's role in children coming to Jesus now, what does the Ephesian epistle mean when it refers to the eye of the heart, and how do we gaze upon Jesus as the second letter to the Corinthians instructs us.

I also explored the idea of approaching scripture iconically and relationally verses informationally. I read a great deal about different approaches to scripture within the field of spiritual formation. I considered the Jewish approach to scripture as sacred story. I also found several authors within the Christian faith that argue persuasively in approaching scripture narratively, looking for God within the story. The point was to inform myself as to lead my audience away from the idea of reading for behavior modification to reading for encounter.

Theologically speaking, I researched reconciliation, the image of God, and theology of childhood. I sought to understand the Pauline idea of reconciliation as it applies to the idea of spiritual formation through reading theologians such as Ralph Martin who specialize in Pauline theology. I also considered the scriptures referring to reconciliation and referred back to the commentators. Finally, I employed the Bible dictionaries in order to consider the historical understanding of reconciliation.

With the concept of *imago Dei*, I relied extensively upon theologians such as Thomas Oden and James Dunn. I also considered what the ancient fathers and mothers of the faith such as Ignatius and Teresa of Avila had to say about

humanity as image-bearers of the Divine. The theology of childhood is very specialized. I found several theologians who have specialized in this field such as Marcia Bunge and David Jensen. I discovered in this that the premise of *imago Dei* undergirds the theology of childhood.

I wanted to have a cultural model that presented a holistic, inclusive model of Christianity. I found this in my studies of Celtic Christianity. I read authors that wrote about this spirituality but also visited the writings and prayers of these Christians in order to understand their faith. Their idea of all humans as full image-bearers of the Divine greatly influenced my dream of what a contemporary model of children's spirituality should look like.

Approximately half of my research was spent reading contemporary authors discussing children's spirituality. I found many differing opinions and models. However, a large percentage of these authors argued for a wonder laden, imaginative spirituality that created space for children to interact with God in episodic ways, as does the resource developed for this project.

The last portion of the resource was dedicated to presenting historical figures and prayer models based upon their spirituality. For this portion, I studied the works of Ignatius, Julian of Norwich, Brother Lawrence, Teresa of Avila as well as writings by and concerning the spiritual life of Mother Teresa. Each model I presented was connected to one of these historical figures. The models themselves while embodying these individuals' beliefs are designed specifically to engage children in each of the three parts of the journey of reconciliation. They are designed to help children draw near to God, themselves, and others.

I used a written survey designed as a Word document to measure the effectiveness of the resource. It was sent as an attachment to each reader via email. I included instructions as to how to return it to a third-party email where a volunteer would compile them into one file and returned to me anonymously. The assessment tool begins by identifying demographics such as age, gender, years involved in a faith community, and years of experience in the fields of ministry, psychology, and education. They were asked to mark the choices that best describes them.

The assessment tool was compiled of twenty-seven quantitative questions: three questions per goals identified and listed above. The readers were instructed to choose their response from 1- Strongly Disagree, 2- Moderately Disagree, 3- Slightly Disagree, 4- Neutral, 5- Slightly Agree, 6- Moderately Agree, 7- Strongly Agree. The questions were randomized. They were designed to measure how well the resource presented per goal.

The survey concluded with three open-ended qualitative questions asking each participant how the resource challenged their view of children's spirituality, what their current models of practice are and how they could incorporate the ideas presented in this resource. I hoped to gauge through these answers how and if the readers will begin to engage in these practices with children.

Each member of the panel once evaluated for qualification was emailed a PDF copy of the manuscript. They were given five weeks to read the resource. The survey was emailed separately with instructions. I emailed each participant twice during the five weeks to ask if any questions or concerns had arisen during



their reading. I assured them that I was not pressuring them to complete the reading early but just checking in. The deadline for the return of the survey was March 8, 2020. A copy of the survey is included in Appendix Two.

In evaluating the surveys, I placed the randomized questions back under their original goal so that I could consider the data in light of these goals. Each table in the following section represents one goal and includes the three randomized questions pertaining to that goal. They are listed in order of the resource's greatest success to the least successful.

In the following chapter, we will consider both the quantitative and qualitative data. The analysis of this data will determine if this resource successfully executed each of the nine goals that it sought to achieve. It will also help gauge how this resource challenges the readers, what the readers' current practices are with children as well as how open the readers are to engaging children in the ways suggested in this resource.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### REPORTING THE RESULTS

The purpose of this project was to create a resource for Christian Caregivers that would educate them concerning formative practices for children. The research question was: In what ways will this resource educate Christian Caregivers concerning formative practices for children?

The assessment used to measure this resource was introduced in Chapter Four. The survey was designed to measure the extent to which the project goals and the research question were achieved. The twenty-seven quantitative and three qualitative questions addressed the nine project goals. There were three quantitative questions asked per goal. These were randomized in the survey. The qualitative questions provide a means by which to evaluate how the readers were challenged and able to synthesize the material presented in the resource. The quantitative questions were presented as statements to be measured whereas the qualitative questions were designed as open-ended questions. The data collected from these surveys will be presented in this chapter. The goals will be listed in order of the greatest average to least average. Since several goals measured equally, they will be evaluated in numerical order.

First, the data from the quantitative questions will be explored in order of prominence and documented in tables. Goal eight and nine shared an average of 6.92 so they will be considered numerically as will goal five and seven which shared an average of 6.69. Next, the composite findings for all goals measuring the resource will be considered and also placed in table form. Finally, the

qualitative questions will be considered in order to determine how the resource challenged the readers current ideas concerning children's spirituality, what their current practice of children's spirituality is, as well as if and how the participants intend to begin implementing the models presented within the resource.

### **Project Goals**

The following section will discuss the findings from the nine project goals around which the resource was developed. Each goal was represented in the assessment tool by three randomized questions designed to evaluate how effectively the resource fulfilled each goal. We will consider the finding of each of the twenty-seven questions in order to evaluate the original nine goals.

#### **Goal #8: Integration of the Imagination**

Goal #8 presented an average score of 6.92, placing this goal between strongly agree (7) and moderately agree (6) on the seven-point Likert scale while leaning towards strongly agree (7). The survey measured the goal: "This resource will provide practical ways to integrate the use of the imagination into spiritual practice for children. The three quantitative statements by which this goal was measured are (See appendix 2): #21 This resource provides practical ways to integrate the use of the imagination in spiritual practice for children. #8 This resource establishes the role of the imagination within a holistic model of children's spirituality. #24 This resource outlines spiritual practices which integrate the use of the imagination into children's spirituality. The results for goal eight are presented below in table one.

Table #1 Goal #8 Integration of the Imagination

Statement	Average	Responses
#21 This resource provided practical ways to integrate the use of the imagination in spiritual practice for children.	7.00	16
#8 This resource establishes the role of the imagination within a holistic model of children's spirituality.	6.88	16
#24 This resource outlines spiritual practices which integrate the use of the imagination into children's spirituality.	6.88	16
Composite	6.92	N=16

1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Moderately Disagree; 3=Slightly Disagree; 4=Neutral; 5=Slightly Agree; 6=Moderately Agree; 7=Strongly Agree

Statement #21 measured how well the resource provided practical ways to integrate the use of the imagination in spiritual practice for children. The sixteen readers strongly agreed that the resource did accomplish this task. Sixteen out of sixteen ranked it at a 7.00 on the Likert scale.

Statement #8 measured how thoroughly the resource established the role of the imagination within a holistic model of children's spirituality. The average score for this statement was 6.88. Two readers moderately agreed (6) and fourteen readers strongly agreed (7) that the resource accomplished this goal.

Statement #24 measured how successfully the resource outlines spiritual practices which integrate the use of the imagination into children's spirituality. The average score for this statement was 6.88. Two readers moderately agreed (6) and fourteen readers strongly agreed that the resource succeeded in fulfilling this goal.

The survey revealed that the resource was extremely successful in providing the readers with practical ways to integrate the use of the imagination in spiritual practice for children.

#### Goal #9: Spiritual Models for Episodic Encounters

Goal #9 presented an average score of 6.92, placing it between strongly agree (7) and moderately agree (6) while leaning heavily towards strongly agree (7) on a seven-point Likert-scale. The survey measured the goal: "This resource will provide spiritual models that create space for children to have episodic encounters with God. The three quantitative statements by which this goal was measured are (See appendix 2): #16 This resource provided spiritual models that create space for children to have episodic encounters with God. #20 This resource establishes that age is not a determining factor in having episodic encounters with God. #26 This resource establishes the legitimacy of children's capacity to have episodic encounters with God. The results for goal nine are presented below in table two.

Table #2 Goal #9 Spiritual Models for Episodic Encounters.

Statement	Average	Responses
#16 This resource provided spiritual models that create space for children to have episodic encounters with God.	6.94	16
#26 This resource establishes the legitimacy of children's capacity to have episodic encounters with God.	6.94	16
#20 This resource establishes that age is not a determining factor in having episodic encounters with God.	6.88	16
Composite	6.92	N=16

7=Strongly Agree; 6=Moderately Agree; 5=Slightly Agree; 4=Neutral; 3=Slightly Disagree; 2=Moderately Disagree; 1=Strongly Disagree

Statement #16 measured how well the resource provided spiritual models that create space for children to have episodic encounters with God. The average score for this statement was 6.94. One reader moderately agreed (6) and fifteen strongly agreed (7) that the resource was successful in reaching this goal.

Statement #26 measured how successfully the resource established the legitimacy of children's capacity to have episodic encounters with God. The average score for this statement was 6.94. One reader moderately agreed (6) and fifteen readers strongly agreed that the resource succeeded in fulfilling this goal.

Statement #20 measured how thoroughly the resource established that age is not a determining factor in having episodic encounters with God. The average score for this statement was 6.88. Two readers moderately agreed (6)

and fourteen readers strongly agreed (7) that the resource accomplished this goal.

The survey revealed that the resource was extremely successful in providing the readers with spiritual models that create space for children to have episodic encounters with God.

#### Goal #6: Communal Storytelling

Goal #6 presented an average score of 6.88, placing it between strongly agree (7) and moderately agree (6) on a seven-point Likert scale, leaning strongly towards strongly agree (7). It measured the goal; This resource will instruct readers in the role of communal storytelling in the spirituality of children. The three quantitative statements by which this goal was measured are (See appendix 2): #5 This resource instructs the readers in the role of communal storytelling in the spirituality of children. #19 This resource discusses the importance of children recognizing their story as within the overarching metanarrative of the biblical story. #27 This resource establishes the importance of story within the establishment of Christian identity. The results for goal six are presented below in table three.

Table #3 Goal #6 Communal Storytelling

Statement	Average	Responses
#27 This resource establishes the importance of story within the establishment of Christian identity.	7.00	16
#19 This resource discusses the importance of children recognizing their story as within the overarching metanarrative of the biblical story.	6.88	16
#5 This resource instructs the readers in the role of communal storytelling in the spirituality of children.	6.75	16
Composite	6.88	N=16

1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Moderately Disagree; 3=Slightly Disagree; 4=Neutral; 5=Slightly Agree; 6=Moderately Agree; 7=Strongly Agree

Statement #27 measured how well the resource established the importance of story within the establishment of Christian identity. All of the sixteen readers strongly agreed that the resource did accomplish this task. Sixteen out of sixteen ranked it at a 7.00 on the Likert scale.

Statement #19 measured how thoroughly the resource discussed the importance of children recognizing their own story within the overarching metanarrative of the biblical story. The average score for this statement was 6.88. Two readers moderately agreed (6) and fourteen readers strongly agreed (7) that the resource accomplished this goal.

Statement #5 measured how successfully the resource instructs the readers in the role of communal storytelling in the spirituality of children. The average score for this statement was 6.75. Four readers moderately agreed (6) and twelve readers strongly agreed (7) that the resource succeeded in fulfilling this goal.



The survey revealed that the resource was overall successful in instructing readers in the role of communal storytelling in the spirituality of children.

Goal #2: The Imagination within the *Imago Dei*

Goal #2 presented an average score of 6.77, placing it between strongly agree (7) and moderately agree (6) on the seven-point Likert scale while leaning towards strongly agree (7). The survey measured the goal: This resource will establish the imagination within the theological foundation of *imago Dei*. The three statements by which this goal was measured are (See appendix 2): #7 This resource establishes the use of imagination within the theological foundation of the *imago Dei*. #18 This resource establishes the role of the imagination in empowering children to live into the *imago Dei*. #22 This resource establishes how living into the *imago Dei* through an awakened imagination empowers children to live out the promise of reconciliation. The results for goal two are presented below in table four.

Table #4 Goal #2 The Imagination within the *Imago Dei*.

Statement	Average	Responses
#18 This resource establishes the role of the imagination in empowering children to live into the <i>imago Dei</i> .	6.94	16
#7 This resource establishes the use of imagination within the theological foundation of the <i>imago Dei</i> .	6.81	16
#22 This resource establishes how living into the <i>imago Dei</i> through an awakened imagination empowers children to live out the promise of reconciliation.	6.56	16
Composite	6.77	N=16

1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Moderately Disagree; 3=Slightly Disagree; 4=Neutral; 5=Slightly Agree; 6=Moderately Agree; 7=Strongly Agree

Statement #18 measured how well the resource established the role of the imagination in empowering children to live into the *imago Dei*. The average score for this statement was 6.94. One reader moderately agreed (6) and fifteen readers strongly agreed (7) that the resource accomplished this goal.

Statement #7 measured how well the resource established the use of the imagination within the theological foundation of the *imago Dei*. The average score for this statement was 6.81. Three readers moderately agreed (6) and thirteen strongly agreed (7) that the resource was successful in reaching this goal.

Statement #22 measured how successfully the resource established how living into the *imago Dei* through an awakened imagination empowers children to live out the promise of reconciliation. The average score for this statement was

6.56. One reader was neutral (4), four readers moderately agreed (6) and eleven readers strongly agreed (7) that the resource succeeded in fulfilling this goal.

The survey revealed that the resource was successful in establishing the imagination within the theological foundation of the *imago Dei*.

#### Goal #1: Biblical Foundations for the Imagination

Goal #1 presented an average score of 6.71, placing this goal between strongly agree (7) and moderately agree (6) on the seven-point Likert scale while leaning towards strongly agree (7). The survey measured the goal: The resource will establish the biblical foundation for the use of the imagination in Christian spirituality. The three quantitative statements by which this goal was measure are (See Appendix 2): #2 This resource establishes the biblical foundations for the use of the imagination in Christian spirituality. #12 This resource uses the biblical text contextually when establishing the use of the imagination within the biblical text. #9 This resource links the biblical foundation for the use of the imagination to historical practices within Christian Spirituality. The results for goal one are presented below in table five.

Table #5 Goal #1 Biblical Foundations for the Imagination

Statement	Average	Responses
#2 This resource establishes the biblical foundations for the use of the imagination in Christian spirituality.	6.81	16
#12 This resource uses the biblical text contextually when establishing the use of the imagination within the biblical text.	6.68	16
#9 This resource links the biblical foundation for the use of the imagination to historical practices within Christian Spirituality.	6.63	16
Composite	6.71	N=16

1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Moderately Disagree; 3=Slightly Disagree; 4=Neutral; 5=Slightly Agree; 6=Moderately Agree; 7=Strongly Agree

Statement #2 measured how well the resource established the biblical foundations for the use of the imagination in Christian spirituality. The average score for this statement was 6.81. One reader slightly agreed (5), one moderately agreed and fourteen strongly agreed (7) that the resource was successful in reaching this goal.

Statement #12 measured how well the resource uses the biblical text contextually when establishing the use of the imagination within the biblical text. The average score for this statement was 6.68. One reader slightly agreed, three readers moderately agreed (6) and twelve readers strongly agreed (7) that the resource accomplished this goal.

Statement #9 measured how successfully the resource linked the biblical foundation for the use of the imagination to historical practices within Christian spirituality. The average score for this statement was 6.63. One reader slightly

agreed (5), four readers moderately agreed (6) and eleven readers strongly agreed (7) that the resource succeeded in fulfilling this goal.

The survey revealed that the resource was successful in establishing the biblical foundation for the use of the imagination in Christian Spirituality.

#### Goal #5: Growing in Emotional Intelligence

This goal achieved an average score of 6.69, placing this goal between strongly agree (7) and moderately agree (6) on the seven-point Likert scale while leaning towards strongly agree (7). The survey measured the goal: This resource will introduce concepts concerning a child's ability to grow in emotional intelligence. The three quantitative statements by which this goal was measured are (See appendix 2): #25 This resource introduces concepts concerning a child's capacity to grow in emotional intelligence. #14 This resource introduces the concept of empathy potential in relation to children's spirituality. #1 This resource demonstrates how the incorporation of the imagination into spiritual practice increases a child's ability to exercise empathy. The results for goal five are presented below in table six.

Table #6 Goal #5 Growing in Emotional Intelligence.

Statement	Average	Responses
#1 This resource demonstrates how the incorporation of the imagination into spiritual practice increases a child's ability to exercise empathy.	6.75	16
#14 This resource introduces the concept of empathy potential in relation to children's spirituality.	6.75	16
#25 This resource introduces concepts concerning a child's capacity to grow in emotional intelligence.	6.56	16
Composite	6.69	N=16

1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Moderately Disagree; 3=Slightly Disagree; 4=Neutral; 5=Slightly Agree; 6=Moderately Agree; 7=Strongly Agree

Statement #1 measured how successfully the resource demonstrated how the incorporation of the imagination into spiritual practice increases a child's ability to exercise empathy. The average score for this statement was 6.75. Two readers slightly agreed (5), three readers moderately agreed (6) and eleven readers strongly agreed (7) that the resource was successful in reaching this goal.

Statement #14 measured how well the resource introduced the concept of empathy potential in relation to children's spirituality. The average score for this statement was 6.75. Four readers moderately agreed (6) while twelve readers strongly agreed (7) that the resource accomplished this goal.

Statement #25 measured how successfully the resource introduced concepts concerning a child's capacity to grow in emotional intelligence. The average score for this statement was 6.56. Two readers slightly agreed (5), three

readers moderately agreed (6) and eleven readers strongly agreed (7) that the resource succeeded in fulfilling this goal.

The survey revealed that the resource was successful in introducing concepts concerning a child's ability to grow in emotional intelligence.

#### Goal #7: A Holistic View of Spirituality

Goal #7 presented an average score of 6.69, placing this goal between strongly agree (7) and moderately agree (6) on the seven-point Likert scale while leaning towards strongly agree (7). The survey measured the goal: This resource will present a holistic view of spirituality in children. The three quantitative statements by which this goal was measured are (See appendix 2): The: #23 This resource presented a holistic view of children's spirituality. #11 This resource gives a historical model of holistic spirituality within Christendom. #17 This resource outlines the necessary components in the development of a holistic children's spirituality within current culture. The results for goal seven are presented below in table seven.

Table #7 Goal #7 A Holistic View of Spirituality

Statement	Average	Responses
#23 This resource presented a holistic view of children’s spirituality.	6.81	16
#17 This resource outlines the necessary components in the development of a holistic children’s spirituality within current culture.	6.69	16
#11 This resource gives a historical model of holistic spirituality within Christendom.	6.56	16
Composite	6.69	N=16

1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Moderately Disagree; 3=Slightly Disagree; 4=Neutral; 5=Slightly Agree; 6=Moderately Agree; 7=Strongly Agree

Statement #23 measured how successfully the resource presented a holistic view of children’s spirituality. The average score for this statement was 6.81. One reader slightly agreed (5), one reader moderately agreed (6) and fourteen readers strongly agreed (7) that the resource was successful in reaching this goal.

Statement #17 measured how well the resource outlined the necessary components in the development of a holistic children’s spirituality within current culture. The average score for this statement was 6.69. One reader slightly agreed (5), three readers moderately agreed (6) while twelve readers strongly agreed (7) that the resource accomplished this goal.

Statement #11 measured how successfully the resource gives a historical model of holistic spirituality within Christendom. The average score for this statement was 6.56. One reader was neutral (4), one reader slightly agreed (5),



two readers moderately agreed (6) and twelve readers strongly agreed (7) that the resource succeeded in fulfilling this goal.

The survey revealed that the resource was successful in presenting a holistic view of spirituality in children.

### Goal #3: Historically Based Prayer Models

Goal #3 presented an average score of 6.67, placing this goal between strongly agree (7) and moderately agree (6) on the seven-point Likert scale while leaning towards strongly agree (7). The survey measured the goal: This resource will provide prayer models based upon historical forms of Christian spirituality. The three quantitative statements by which this goal was measured are (See appendix 2): #4 This resource provides a prayer model based upon Ignatian spirituality. #10 This resource provides a prayer model based upon Teresian prayer. #15 This resource provides a prayer model that is based upon Brother Lawrence's model of practicing the presence of God. The results for goal three are presented below in table eight.

Table #8 Goal #3 Historical Based Prayer Models

Statement	Average	Responses
#4 This resource provides a prayer model based upon Ignatian spirituality.	6.75	16
#10 This resource provides a prayer model based upon Teresian prayer.	6.69	16
#15 This resource provides a prayer model that is based upon Brother Lawrence's model of practicing the presence of God.	6.56	16
Composite	6.67	N=16

1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Moderately Disagree; 3=Slightly Disagree; 4=Neutral; 5=Slightly Agree; 6=Moderately Agree; 7=Strongly Agree

Statement #4 measured how successfully the resource provided a prayer model based upon Ignatian spirituality. The average score for this statement was 6.75. Four readers moderately agreed and twelve strongly agreed (7) that the resource was successful in reaching this goal.

Statement #10 measured how well the resource provided a prayer model based upon Teresian prayer. The average score for this statement was 6.69. Five readers moderately agreed (6) while eleven readers strongly agreed (7) that the resource accomplished this goal.

Statement #15 measured how successfully the resource provided a prayer model that was based upon Brother Lawrence's model of practicing the presence of God. The average score for this statement was 6.56. Two readers slightly agreed (5), three readers moderately agreed (6) and eleven readers strongly agreed (7) that the resource succeeded in fulfilling this goal.

The survey revealed that the resource was successful in providing prayer models based is historical forms of Christian spirituality.

#### Goal #4: Insights from Neurobiology

Goal #4 presented the lowest average score measuring at 6.33, placing the goal between strongly agree (7) and moderately agree(6) on a seven-point Likert scale while leaning strongly towards moderately agree (6). The survey measured the goal: This resource integrates insights from neurobiology as relating to children. The three quantitative statements by which this goal was measured are (See appendix 2): #6 This resource integrates insights from neurobiology as relating to children. #3 This resource discusses the role of spirituality in forming healthy thought patterns in children. #13 This resource discusses the role sensory learning plays in the development of a child's mind. The results for goal #4 are presented below in table #9.

Table #9 Goal #4 Insights from Neurobiology

Statement	Average	Responses
#13 This resource discusses the role sensory learning plays in the development of a child's mind.	6.50	16
#3 This resource discusses the role of spirituality in forming healthy thought patterns in children.	6.25	16
#6 This resource integrates insights from neurobiology as relating to children.	6.25	16
Composite	6.33	N=16

1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Moderately Disagree; 3=Slightly Disagree; 4=Neutral; 5=Slightly Agree; 6=Moderately Agree; 7=Strongly Agree

Statement #13 measured how well the resource discussed the role sensory learning plays in the development of a child's mind. The average score for this statement was 6.50. Two readers slightly agreed (5), four readers

moderately agreed (6) while ten readers strongly agreed (7) that the resource accomplished this goal.

Statement #3 measured how successfully the resource discussed the role of spirituality in forming healthy thought patterns in children. The average score for this statement was 6.25. Six readers moderately agreed (6) and ten readers strongly agreed (7) that the resource was successful in reaching this goal.

Statement #6 measured how successfully the resource integrated insights from neurobiology as relating to children. The average score for this statement was 6.25. Three readers slightly agreed (5), six readers moderately agreed (6) and seven readers strongly agreed (7) that the resource was successful in fulfilling this goal. The survey revealed that the resource fell evenly between moderately successful and strongly successful in integrating insights from neurobiology as relating to children.

The research question for the development of this resource was: In what ways will this resource educate Christian Caregivers concerning formative practices for children? The quantitative data indicates that the resource was most successful in integrating practical ways to use the imagination in spiritual practices for children (goal #8), providing spiritual models that create space for children to have episodic encounters with God (goal #9), and educating the caregivers concerning the role of communal storytelling in children spirituality (goal #6).

The quantitative data revealed that the resource was still highly successful, while slightly less so, in educating the caregiver concerning the

establishment of the imagination within the theological foundation of *imago Dei* (goal #2), the establishment of the biblical foundations for the use of the imagination in Christian spirituality (goal #1), and conveying concepts concerning a child's ability to grow in emotional intelligence (goal #5),

The quantitative data indicates that the area the resource was the least successful was in presenting a holistic view of children's spirituality (goal #7), the placement of the prayer models within historical forms of Christian spirituality (goal #3), and integrating insights from neurobiology as relating to children's spirituality (goal #4). In hindsight it is clear that in addition to presenting a historical model of holistic children's spirituality it would be beneficial to outline precisely what those components would be today. Although the historical figures were presented concerning each model it is clear that the reader would benefit from a more thorough explanation. In addition, more research relating to insights from neurobiology concerning children's spirituality would assist the resource in more completely attaining its goals.

#### Composite of Goals

The research question was: In what ways will this resource educate Christian Caregivers concerning formative practices for children? The quantitative data indicates that the total composite score for all nine goals was 6.75 on a seven-point Likert scale. The results are presented below in table #10.

Table #10: Composite of Goals

Goals	Average	Responses
#8 This resource will provide practical ways to integrate the use of the imagination in spiritual practice for children.	6.92	16
#9 This resource will provide spiritual models that create space for children to have episodic encounters with God.	6.92	16
#6 This resource will instruct readers in the role of communal storytelling in the spirituality of children.	6.88	16
#2 This resource will establish the imagination within the theological foundation of the <i>imago Dei</i> .	6.77	16
#1 The resource will establish the biblical foundation for the use of the imagination in Christian spirituality.	6.71	16
#5 This resource will introduce concepts concerning a child's ability to grow in emotional intelligence.	6.69	16
#7 This resource will present a holistic view of spirituality in children.	6.69	16
#3 This resource will provide prayer models based upon historical forms of Christian spirituality.	6.67	16
#4 This resource will integrate insights from neurobiology as relating to children.	6.33	16
Composite	6.73	N=16

1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Moderately Disagree; 3=Slightly Disagree; 4=Neutral; 5=Slightly Agree; 6=Moderately Agree; 7=Strongly Agree

The qualitative analysis in the following section will offer further insights into the successfulness of the resource. It will consider the answers of each reader to the three open-ended questions in order to determine how their understanding has been challenged, what their current practice is, and how they may begin to integrate these practices in the lives of the children in their care.

## **Qualitative Analysis of Data**

In examining the qualitative questions, it became clear that one reader opted not to answer the open-ended question and one reader only opted to answer question one. Due to this the response pool will be fifteen for question one and fourteen for questions two and three rather than sixteen as in the quantitative analysis. We will consider each of these three questions independently in order to determine the findings.

### **Question #1: How Were the Readers Ideas Challenged**

The first open-ended question was: "How has this resource challenged your current ideas concerning children's spirituality?" Ten of the participants expressed that the ideas presented in the resource were unfamiliar to them and eight of these ten expressed that these ideas challenged their current practice. Three participants expressed that the resource was a source of affirmation and encouragement rather than a challenge. These respondents shared the beliefs presented in the resource concerning the incorporation of the imagination into children's spirituality and the need for an experiential spirituality. Two respondents expressed that they were somewhat familiar with the ideas presented but found the resource helped them to become more open to the implementation of such practices

Two respondents who were deeply challenged, shared that they went and researched the biblical text and additional material. Each ultimately reached the decision that the ideas presented in the resource were valid and important. One participant stated that they found the resource to be "mind blowing," indicating

that their mind was spinning with ways in which to incorporate the ideas presented within it. Four readers indicated that the resource highlighted for them that while there is an awareness of the importance of experience within their faith communities, the emphasis is placed upon providing children with the right information about God rather than leading them into a relational encounter with God in order to shape them religiously.

The consensus for the twelve readers that were either unfamiliar with or vaguely familiar with the ideas presented by the resource is best described through this respondents' comment: "It has broadened the scope of my ideas about theological concepts that could be taught to children beyond mere telling and re-telling of Bible stories." The respondent explains, "exploring the theology imbedded in the stories in a way that is meaningful to children while at the same time being affirming" is an idea that is appealing to them.

These twelve readers acknowledged that the models and knowledge presented in this resource has the potential to open the door for children to have episodic encounters with God. They expressed, in varying ways, their conviction that such practices were a vital part of living an emotionally and spiritually healthy life. They indicated that the resource helped them to see that spirituality is not something we teach children, rather it is something living that we invite children to engage in. While very openly communicating that the ideas were challenging, they were also excited to be awakened to the possibility of leading children into dynamic living relationships with God. It was pleasing that after engaging with the resource none of the respondents were closed to these ideas.



Three respondents indicated that they were not challenged, rather their current understandings were strengthened through the resource. They feel strongly that children need encounters with God and found the knowledge that there are so many resources available very encouraging. One participant indicated that the greatest benefits of the resource for them personally was giving them a concrete foundation through which to educate those under their supervision in these practices. Another of these three readers felt the resource would be instrumental in instructing and educating their congregation members and teachers concerning the merit of such practices.

One of these three participants expressed appreciation that “this manuscript offers a very humbling insight around modeling ways to incorporate understanding in a child’s mind through small, though intentional, everyday moments.” They seemed particularly drawn to the reminder that children can and should engage with God in the everyday ordinary happenings of life. Another such respondent indicated that the resource reminded them that “while being self-discipline through exterior action is important, a healthy imagination—a mind that is being renewed—is all-important.”

One respondent commented that “the vast amount of materials presented in this document have shown areas that need to be addressed.” Another agreed indicating that they believe the resource challenges the church to address “the misunderstandings” concerning the way Jesus relates to children and to reform our idea of religious studies for children in light of these ideas in order to draw the children, who are the future of our faith, into a living relationship with God. Five

participants expressed their appreciation for the models being detailed and reproducible as well as being grounded in historical models. These participants indicated that fostering such was key in leading children into a rich spiritual life in which they learn to episodically encounter God.

While three readers did indicate that the resource reinforces rather than challenged their current beliefs concerning children's spirituality, it is clear the majority of readers were challenged by the resource. Four readers appear to be engaging in active contemplation concerning what a holistic model of children's spirituality should look like in the context of their faith community and/or current practice in light of this resource. I found reading the answers to this question deeply humbling as it became apparent that the resource did do what it was designed to do: educate and move the caregivers into engaging children in holistic, episodic, sensory forms of spiritual practice.

#### Question #2: Current Models of Practice

The second open-ended question presented to the readers was "What is the current model of spiritual practice in place for the children within your care?" Two readers, who indicated in the demographic section that they worked in therapeutic settings, expressed that they often use prayer as a means to calm and care for children. One of these two mentioned encouraging children to allow God to participate with them in problem solving. Three, who indicated in the demographic section that they have worked in ministry, revealed that children's sermons and the use of religious symbols in those sermons were the standard practice within their faith community.

Six respondents indicated that the children participated in a service separate from the adults that were centered around biblical stories.

Two participants indicated that their faith communities were beginning to move away from these traditional models and incorporate intergenerational activities that “involve imagination and finding a spiritual place.” One of these two respondents mentioned helping children “take charge of their learning and understanding,” as well as “using more experiential kinds of activities.” I was pleased to learn of these recent integrations of spiritual practice.

Five admitted to being frustrated and concerned over the predominantly “top-down,” (referencing Daniel Seigel’s work in the resource) models of spirituality being used currently within their faith communities. They indicated that these were bible reading, prayer, and worship, in their traditional sense, i.e. read the Bible story, pray for the children, and sing songs. They expressed that the emphasis was on a right understanding of Jesus and scripture rather than an interactive relationship with Jesus and scripture.

One respondent was particularly frustrated that the only model they had ever engaged children in was “entertainment, babysitting, trite games that kept them [children] quiet for an hour so their parents could enjoy the service in the sanctuary.” They indicated that in the twenty years of belonging to their denomination this is the only model they ever experienced concerning children. Another three participants explained that the models in the faith communities had been the same for decades.

Three readers were actively engaged in these types of practices with children in both ministerial and clinical settings. These practices were referred to as children using their “sanctified imaginations” or “wise mind.” Sensory practices as described in the models presented in the resources were used regularly when engaging with children spiritually and therapeutically. One mentioned that while their faith communities do not incorporate practices like those detailed in the resource that their children are engaged in this way at home.

While these three participants were engaged in current models that allowed for children to engage episodically, it became abundantly clear that this was not the norm. Praying for children, singing songs, and reading biblical stories were the most commonly mentioned practices. What the question did not take into consideration is what the personal practice of these individuals may be with their children or grandchildren apart from their area of expertise. As shared above one respondent did differentiate within their answer as to the corporate experience as well as their family’s personal practice, which were vastly different.

### Question #3: Incorporation of Ideas

The third open-ended question was: What are a few ways you could incorporate the ideas in this resource into the spiritual lives of the children in your care? Three respondents were intrigued by the idea of incorporating sacred space into the spirituality of the children within their care. They agreed with the resource that space communicates powerfully to children. They communicated that sacred space was vital in reinforcing the symbols and traditions that bestow within us Christian identity.

Throughout the responses it became clear that the respondents were particular drawn to the “Castle Prayer,” “Treasure Box,” and “My Gospel” models. Five expressed their intentions to incorporate these practices immediately within camps, small groups, homes, and therapeutic settings. One such participant expressed their appreciation for the resource providing “guided settings that will allow them [children] to fully utilize their imaginations while growing in spiritual development and personal understanding of their relationship with God.”

One participant felt that since the resource presented the models in easily replicable models, they could be easily incorporated into VBS, Sunday school and even confirmation classes. Another, who indicated in their response that they worked in a therapeutic setting, expressed their desire to begin teaching the models to parents of children in their care. They believed that these models would assist in the healing and spiritual and emotional growth of these children. Twelve participants actively described ways in which they plan to use the models and information in the resource to move children in their care, or their faith communities as a whole forward into such practices.

I was very encouraged to hear how many respondents planned to utilize the models presented within the resource. However, what was unexpected was how many indicated that they intended not only to utilize the models with the children in their care but also with adults. Four planned to begin to incorporate these practices into their own daily lives. One such participant stated, “this resource inspired me to look for other holistic ways in which I can allow prayer to develop organically as more than something I do, but something I live.”

Six respondents expressed ways that the resource had personally helped them. One participant stated “this resource has helped give me permission to help kids see God in everything and to not have to tie every experience to a concrete ‘lesson’- because relationships, with each other and God, aren’t primarily about getting it right, they are about being together.” They went on to explain how performance and perfectionism had always been a challenge for them. Three participants plan to use the resource to instruct groups of adults under their supervision so that they could learn to engage children in this way. One of these expressed their appreciation that several models were simplistic enough to use in community outreach and with students in their care.

The answers provided indicate that the readers did fully engage with the material. When I analyzed the quantitative data, I was concerned about how high the majority of goals scored. Some people, me included, when filling out surveys just check the highest box without considering the question. However, the majority of the answers to the qualitative questions were in-depth and thoughtful. Eight respondents needed extra pages for their answers. I could particularly see from analyzing the answers to question three that the majority of the readers had already begun to think and dream of ways in which to incorporate the ideas and models presented in the resource into the lives of the children in their care.

The eagerness of the respondents to begin using these models in therapeutic settings as well as in churches and homes leads me to believe that they did engage and rank the quantitative questions truthfully. One participant explained the high scores she gave stating,

The reason I gave each category such a high score is because I finally see a well-rounded approach to incorporate ideas I learned, and thought were adult concepts. I see now they are easily demonstrated with children and probably greatly enhanced by their spontaneity and amazing child-like understanding. This has changed my fundamental understanding of children's spirituality.

The qualitative data supports the finding of the quantitative data. The resource successfully executed its goals and educated the caregivers accordingly.

The following chapter will discuss reflections gleaned from this project. It will consider information based upon the findings presented, the application to ministry, particular concerns for future study, as well as personal goals. It will attempt to translate the findings into practical wisdom and communicate the transformative nature of the experience of participating in the Doctor of Ministry program at Ashland Theological Seminary.

## CHAPTER SIX

### SUMMARY AND REFLECTIONS

My father is a devoted and somewhat charismatic Catholic. His favorite quote is by French priest, philosopher, and geologist, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. "Someday, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides, and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love, and then, for a second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire" (de Chardin 1936, 86-87). I have pondered this saying for much of my adult life. Although I understand it intellectually, I have always felt there is something of substance buried within it just beyond my sight.

I have shared throughout this project, as well as in the resource, about my youngest daughter's struggles with depression and anorexia that began during my first semester at Ashland Theological Seminary. My daughter, although raised in a loving home with two parents most of her life, always desperately wanted her biological father's affection. He was, and is, a drug addict incapable of choosing her. I watched her for the last four years chasing after so many things looking to fill the hole inside of her left by him. This precious soul thought if she could just master the winds, harness the waves, then somehow, she could climb on top of her pain instead of being buried beneath it.

Pain, just like the wind, waves, and gravity cannot be mastered, they can only be embraced, accepted, and used as they are. We cannot master the wind, but we can use it to power turbines. The same is true of the waves and of pain. My daughter came face to face with the ugliness of her father's addiction this



Christmas. He is no longer the functioning drug addict he has been all of her life. The heroine finally took possession of him. She found out when she stopped by his job to drop off Christmas gifts. When she called weeping my head began to spin. My soul cried "Oh God, I just can't, I can't lose her again."

The most marvelous thing happened. She did not run from her pain. She embraced it and even invited others into it. She wept on my lap the day before Christmas Eve. She hugged her stepfather so tightly as through tear-filled eyes she thanked him for always being the daddy she needed. She allowed herself to suffer and in doing so she rediscovered love, genuine love.

Yesterday she sat with me and asked me about my work. As I described to her the content of the resource, she said to me, "Mom, those are the things you did with me and sissy." I replied, "Yes." She said, "Mom I am going to do all of those things with my kids because what was instilled in me then is what carried me through the darkest days of my life." She is finally done trying to master the winds and the waves and she is in the process of rediscovering the fire of God's love that has always burned brightly from the home he inhabits in her beautiful heart.

This resource is deeply personal to me as I am so convinced of the necessity of a living, interactive relationship with God. Although I worked with children for nearly a decade both in the inner city and within the church, my primary work is not with children now. Let me rephrase that; my primary work is with the echo of the wounded children in the hearts of women. The first step I take with every woman I have the honor of working with is to help them enter into

direct encounter and communication with God. It is only through learning to engage him within the hallways of their hearts that they find the wisdom, courage, and healing they need in order to walk as healthy daughters of the living God.

I meet with women regularly, some coming out of deeply abusive childhoods, others from relatively normal homes. They are struggling. They are trying to reconcile their childhood experiences with what they know of God today. They struggle because God was not theirs in childhood. They may have gone to church. They may have had deeply spiritual parents whom they watched talk to God, but they never learned to touch him, to play with him, to let him gather them up. My deepest desire in creating this resource is that every child would have the opportunity to enter into an intimate relationship with their Creator that would sustain them through every season of their lives as it did my daughter.

I work with adult women to help them experience what they should and could have learned and experienced as children, God's intimate indwelling presence. This project was developed in the hope and belief that if children learn to relate to God in a deeply experiential way it will lead them into a life sustained by that relationship with God. They will not have to seek to master the wind and the waves for they will know the one whom the wind and the waves obey. They will not have to rediscover fire for it will burn brightly within them. The fire de Chardin spoke of is, after all, the fire of God's infinite love.

The conclusion of this project, as demonstrated through the survey, is that many adults have not experienced the kind of episodic encounters described in

the resource as available to all, yet they want to and do believe that it is possible. Due to this lack of knowledge, the children in their care have not been introduced to episodic spiritual practices either. It is encouraging how many respondents communicated their plans to utilize the models presented in the resource in not only the lives of the children within their care but in their own lives as well.

I am confident that these adults and the children in their care will find themselves in deeply personal relationships with God through utilizing the models and information presented to them through the resource. I am also confident that these children, just like my daughter, will, through this relationship with God, always be able to find their way home again, for the fire of such love never fades nor dies, it waits, it forever beckons, "Come."

### **Project Goals**

The purpose of this project was to create a resource for Christian Caregivers that would educate them concerning formative spiritual practices for children. The following goals were established to guide the development of the resource upon which this project was based. Nine goals were developed and assessed for the measurement of the resource by a seven-point Likert scale that ranged from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7). Each goal will be analyzed, beginning with the most prominent findings. The goals established for the project are listed below.

1. This resource will establish the biblical foundation for the use of imagination in Christian spirituality.
2. This resource will establish the imagination within the theological foundation of the *imago Dei*.

3. This resource will provide prayer models based upon historical forms of Christian spirituality.
4. This resource will integrate insights from neurobiology as relating to children.
5. This resource will introduce concepts concerning a child's capacity to grow in relational literacy.
6. This resource will instruct readers in the role of communal storytelling in the spirituality of children.
7. This resource will present a holistic view of spirituality in children.
8. This resource will provide practical ways to integrate the use of the imagination in spiritual practices for children.
9. This resource will provide spiritual models that create space for children to have episodic encounters with God.

The composite score for all nine goals was 6.75, placing it between moderately agree (6) and strongly agree (7), while leaning heavily towards strongly agree (7). The two highest scoring goals were goal #8, the provision of practical ways to integrate the use of the imagination in spiritual practices for children and goal #9 the provision of spiritual models that create space for children to have episodic encounters with God. Each presented a composite score of 6.92 on a seven-point Likert scale. The data reveals that the respondents strongly agreed that the resource achieved this goal.

Goal #6, educating the respondents concerning the role of communal storytelling in children's spirituality achieved a composite score of 6.88 on a seven-point Likert scale. This places it between strongly agree (7) and moderately agree (6). The resource therefore performed very well in this area.

Goal #2, the establishment of the imagination within the theological

foundation of the *imago Dei*, presented a composite score of 6.77 on a seven-point Likert scale. This places it between strongly agree (7) and moderately agree (6). The resource was very successful in educating the caregivers concerning this goal.

Goal #1, the establishment of the biblical foundations for the use of the imagination in Christian spirituality, achieved a composite score of 6.71 on a seven-point Likert scale. This places it between strongly agree (7) and moderately agree (6). The data indicates that this goal was successfully executed by the resource.

Both goal #5, the introduction of concepts concerning a child's ability to grow in emotional intelligence and goal #7, the presentation of a holistic view of spirituality in children achieved a composite score of 6.69 on a seven-point Likert scale. This places both goals between strongly agree (7) and moderately agree (6). The resource was successful in education the respondents concerning both of these topics of discussion.

Goal #3, the provision of prayer models based upon historical forms of Christian spirituality presented a composite score of 6.67 on a seven-point Likert scale. This places the goal between strongly agree (7) and moderately agree (6). The resource was quite successful in the presentation of these prayer models.

Goal #4, the integration of insights from neurobiology as relating to children was by far the least successful of all nine goals. This goal presented a composite score of 6.33 on a seven-point Likert scale. This places it in between strongly agree (7) and moderately agree (6) while leaning significantly towards

moderately agree. Therefore, the data indicates that the resource was only moderately successful in obtaining this goal. The resource was highly successful executing all of its goal except for goal #4.

All but two of the respondents mentioned the importance of goals eight and nine in the qualitative section of the survey. However, none of the fifteen participants mentioned the role of communal storytelling although scoring it very highly in the quantitative section. This raises the question, did the respondents already understand the importance of communal storytelling or was the importance of that eclipsed by the notion of experiential practices? Only one respondent indicated that they were excited to engage in the practice that focuses on the role of story called “My Gospel,” in the qualitative section whereas seven mentioned excitement and eagerness over the purely imaginative practices such as “The Castle Prayer.”

#### Goal #8: Integration of the Imagination

Goal #8 is the first of two goals to achieve an average score of 6.92 on a seven-point Likert scale. The goal being measured was “This resource will provide practical ways to integrate the use of the imagination in spiritual practice for children.” The three statements by which this goal was measured were: #21 This resource provided practical ways to integrate the use of the imagination in spiritual practice for children. #8 This resource establishes the role of the imagination within a holistic model of children’s spirituality. #24 This resource outlines spiritual practices that integrate the use of the imagination into children's spirituality.

The responses to the qualitative questions indicated that these were new ideas to many of the readers. They also suggested an eagerness to embrace the use of the imagination within not only the spirituality of the children but also in their own spiritual lives. Faith itself is an imaginative act. We must be able to imagine a God who is love reaching out to us as objects of that love through the embodiment of that love in the giving, sacrificing, and rising of his son. Throughout the scripture, we are challenged to imagine a kingdom that is very different from the world in which we live. As Greg Boyd attests, “imagination, when guided by the Holy Spirit, and submitted to the authority of scripture, is our main receptor to the spiritual world” (Boyd 2004, 16).

One of the strengths of the resource is that it provides practical ways to engage in spirituality imaginatively. Boyd bemoans that a lack of integration of the imagination in the spiritual life is why “modern believers do not experience their faith as real” (Boyd 2004, 16). He attests to the same findings that the survey indicates “nothing is as transforming as the realization that...*you can experience Jesus as real* by allowing the Holy Spirit to inspire your imagination” (Boyd 2004, 16). Four respondents expressed experiencing the hope of the possibility of such a transformative experience through their interaction with the resource. In providing concrete examples not only of guided imaginative practices but of how to intentionally engage God through the imagination throughout the course of everyday life the resource empowers the readers to live into this life along with the children in their care.

### Goal #9: Spiritual Models for Episodic Encounters

Goal #9 is the second of the two goals which achieved an average score of 6.92 on a seven-point Likert scale. The goal being measured was “This resource will provide spiritual models that create space for children to have episodic encounters with God.” The three statements by which this goal was measured were: #16 This resource provided spiritual models that create space for children to have episodic encounters with God. #20 This resource establishes that age is not a determining factor in having episodic encounters with God. #26 This resource establishes the legitimacy of children’s capacity to have episodic encounters with God.

The answers to the qualitative questions indicated that the respondents were openly embracing these concepts. Although ten were completely unfamiliar with the types of practices introduced to posture children for encounter with God, the answers indicated that they were open to the possibility. The responses revealed that the participants were eager to engage children in the spiritual practices presented in the resource.

Scripture is full of human interactions with God. Moses meets God in the burning bush (Exodus 3:1-17), Abraham’s theophany at the oaks of Mamre (Gen 18:1-8), and of course the Gospels in which Jesus walked with humanity as both fully man and fully God. Christ appeared post-crucifixion many times. Episodic encounters with him did not end post ascension. The apostle Paul encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-19). It is indicated throughout the epistles that we can “see” God and in this “seeing” be transformed (2 Cor 3:16-



18). Paul explains that we “see,” with the eye of our heart, or understanding (Eph 1:18-19). The resource presents this “eye,” as humanity's ability to imagine.

Jean-Paul Sartre, in his work *The Imagination*, speaks of seeing a blank piece of white paper and then turning from the paper to look at the wall. He attests that although he is no longer "seeing" the paper as "fact" the paper remains and appears to him as "imaged." The paper's existence is not questioned even though it is now being "seen" in a different capacity (Sartre 1936, 5). This is how we “see” Jesus now. Children enter into this type of “seeing” much more readily than adults. For ten of respondents, the idea of encountering God in such ways as presented in the resource was completely new. However, their answers indicated that the resource successfully opened them to the idea of creating space for children to encounter God in these experiential ways.

#### Goal #6: Communal Storytelling

Goal #6 achieved an average score of 6.88 on the assessment of the resource. The goal was “This resource will instruct readers in the role of communal storytelling in the spirituality of children.” The three quantitative questions by which the goal was measured were: #5 This resource instructs readers in the role of communal storytelling in the spirituality of children. #19 This resource discusses the importance of children recognizing their story as within the overarching metanarrative of the biblical story. #27 This resource establishes the importance of story in the establishment of Christian identity.

I found it particularly interesting that the statement under this goal, “This resource establishes the importance of story in the establishment of Christian

identity,” received a perfect score of 7.00. All respondents felt the resource performed perfectly in this regard. In preparing for this resource I interviewed dozens of Caregivers. All expressed their concern over the lack of identity in children within the current culture. There is a consensus that this is fundamentally important for our children. The tool indicates that the resource successfully communicates this importance.

The responses signal that the readers agree that children, just as all of us, need a story within which they can define and make sense out of their existence. According to William Bausch “all of our logical, scientific theological discord is secondary” (Bausch 1984, 17). We find meaning in stories. Jesus understood this and so the gospels are full of stories that he told. John Navone reminds us

Since story is the only means by which the interpersonal reality of humankind can be expressed in its cognitive and affective fullness and since our relationship to God is fundamentally interpersonal, it follows that storytelling and story listening provide the most appropriate means of enabling us to live in this relationship (Navone 1981, xvi).

Through hearing God’s story and learning to place their lives within that story children begin to interpret life through this reality.

Defining one's self as a child, an image-bearer of he who is good, is of paramount importance in the establishment of Christian identity and in the ability to accept and grow into our best selves. Living within the story that tells us that we are the object of the desire of our Creator who is love, positions us to live freely. We do not have to seek worth in empty pursuits because our worth is defined by his love. Children who find their stories within this story are free to pursue a life that is creative, generous, and holy.

## Goal #2: The Imagination within the *Imago Dei*

Goal #2 achieved an average score of 6.77 on a seven-point Likert scale.

The goal being measured was “This resource will establish the imagination within the theological foundation of the *imago Dei*.” The three statements by which this goal was measured were: #7 This resource establishes the use of imagination within the theological foundation of the *imago Dei*. #18 This resource establishes the role of the imagination in empowering children to live into the *imago Dei*. #22 This resource establishes how living into the *imago Dei* through an awakened imagination empowers children to live out the promise of reconciliation.

The idea of being created in the image of God is a very familiar Christian doctrine. The resource introduces spiritual formation as the journey of being reconciled to God, self, and others. It is through this that we most fully live into our identities as bearers of the image of God. Amos Wilder states that the imagination is “a necessary component of all profound knowing and celebration . . . it is at a level of imagination that any full engagement with life takes place” (Wilder 1976, 2). The formative journey of reconciliation begins with the imagination being awakened by the Holy Spirit to see God, self, and others as God sees them. Only then can we begin to truly know and celebrate one another as the image of God as we engage in this life.

Living as the image of God is somewhat paradoxical in that it is both something we have always been, and it is something we are becoming. Like the kingdom of Heaven, it is both here and now and then and later. The fathers and mothers of the faith explain it as something buried deep within us that is always

there but needs to be unearthed. What unearths it is love, both the action and the person. God is love and we love as we are loved (1 John 4:8-9). We must first imagine that we are loved, imagine that we receive that love. Out of that place, we are filled with love to give to others. This is the process of becoming what we are, the *imago Dei*. I was not able to measure according to the assessment how the respondents view this in their own spiritual lives as the qualitative questions did not address this with the respondents.

While the resource successfully presents this according to the quantitative data this topic did not arise in the answers to the qualitative questions. Therefore, there is room for further study in order to understand how children are currently perceived. Do the respondents see children as fully bearing God's image now? Is the correlation between imagining one's self as such and living into said image valid in the eyes of the reader?

#### Goal #1: Biblical Foundations of the Imagination

Goal #1 achieved an average score of 6.71 on a seven-point Likert scale. The goal being measured was "The resource will establish the biblical foundation for the use of the imagination in Christian Spirituality. The three statements by which this goal was measured were: #2 This resource establishes the biblical foundations for the use of the imagination in Christian spirituality. #12 This resource uses the biblical text contextually when establishing the use of the imagination within the biblical text. #9 This resource links the biblical foundation for the use of the imagination to historical practices within Christian Spirituality.

Three respondents mentioned in the qualitative responses that they were

challenged biblically. One indicated that they were prompted to return to the scripture and search these ideas out for themselves. They concluded that several areas of scripture imply the use of the imagination in spirituality indirectly, particularly the writings of the Apostle Paul. We must be open to embracing the gift of the imagination as a people if we are to learn to love God with our whole being. N.T. Wright reminds us that “the Bible helps us, enables us, to understand, to re-appropriate, to celebrate the role of the imagination as part of our redeemed, renewed, image-bearing humanness. You need imagination to live in God’s world” (Wright 2005, 1).

Wright is absolutely correct however, unfortunately throughout history imagination became equated with pretend or make-believe. This was not always the case. The resource illustrates through several historical models that many of the richest practices in the history of Christendom are indeed imaginative practices. Ignatius imagined the scriptures. Teresa imagined God within her. Brother Lawrence imagined life lived intimately, moment by moment, with the unseen yet living God. The responses reveal a willingness to return to these beliefs and practices in leading our children into relationship with God.

#### Goal #5: Growing in Emotional Intelligence

Goal #5 is the first of two goals to achieve an average score of 6.69 on a seven-point Likert scale. The goal being measured was “This resource will introduce concepts concerning a child’s ability to grow in emotional intelligence.” The three quantitative questions by which the goal was measured were: #1 This resource demonstrates how the incorporation of the imagination into spiritual

practice increases a child's ability to exercise empathy. #14 This resource introduces the concept of empathy potential in relation to children's spirituality. #25 This resource introduces concepts concerning a child's capacity to grow in emotional intelligence.

It is no secret that bullying has reached epidemic proportions over that last decade. According to Mary Gordon, "lack of hope is an epidemic; children who are bullied are often devoid of hope, that frail connection to the future" (Gordon 2005, 169-170). This indicates a lack of empathy in our children. A wholistic spirituality should by its very nature produce empathy. Unfortunately, the qualitative data did not lend any information concerning the respondents' stance on these issues. However, the high score of the quantitative responses did indicate that the resource successfully communicated to the participants the ability that children have to grow in emotional intelligence.

In teaching children to engage scripture imaginatively we posture them to grow in their ability to empathize with others. Particularly the model "My Gospel," assists them in connecting their own emotional experience to the experiences of the biblical characters. In making these connections they grow in their ability to correctly interpret others' emotions and respond out of compassion as they see Jesus responding throughout the Gospels. As Gordon states "real communication happens at an emotional level. When we share our feelings, opinions, values, and deeply held beliefs with one another, we are able to relate as human beings" (Gordon 2005, 133).

## Goal #7: A Holistic View of Spirituality

Goal #7 is the second of the two goals which achieved an average score of 6.69 on a seven-point Likert scale. The goal being measured was “This resource will present a holistic view of spirituality in children.” The three quantitative questions by which the goal was measured were: #23 This resource presented a holistic view of children's spirituality. #17 This resource outlines the necessary components in the development of holistic children's spirituality within the current culture. #11 This resource gives a historical model of holistic spirituality within Christendom.

The qualitative data suggests that the resource was very effective in presenting these concepts to the participants. Two of the qualitative responses indicated that the readers were intrigued with the concept of a seamless spirituality which invites and embraces God's presence with us in every aspect of life. As Benner states, “Healthy spirituality always grows out of and nurtures a love of life” (Benner 2011, 72). Again, these are not new concepts. As presented in the resource, the Celtic Christians provide a holistic inclusive model of communal Christian life. They provide us with a historical model in which children were valued as full members of the body of Christ. It also provides a historical model of life lived with God.

The Covid-19 pandemic has proven perhaps more than anything how vital this is. I have had conversations with several people who, being unable to participate in their communal gatherings, have been left feeling empty and cut off from God. Benner is correct in attesting that “A sense of belonging is absolutely

vital to human well-being” (Benner 2011, 73). The gathering of the saints communally is of the utmost importance however our relationship with God must extend beyond the walls of the building into the hallways of our hearts. A holistic spirituality allows us to live all of life with God. He is in our quiet places, in the play with our children, even in the mundane daily tasks when we learn to live with our hearts open to his constant presence in and with us.

### Goal #3: Historically Based Prayer Models

Goal #3 achieved an average score of 6.67 on a seven-point Likert scale. The goal being measured was “This resource will provide prayer models based upon historical forms of Christian spirituality.” The three quantitative questions by which the goal was measured were: #4 This resource provides a prayer model based upon Ignatian spirituality. #10 This resource provides a prayer model based upon Teresian prayer. #15 This resource provides a prayer model that is based upon Brother Lawrence’s model of practicing the presence of God.

The qualitative responses indicated that ten of the sixteen respondents were not familiar with these types of historical prayer models and three were only slightly aware. One of the three respondents who currently lead children in these types of spiritual practices expressed a complete lack of knowledge concerning the use of imaginative practices in historical models. This respondent expressed joy over being awakened to the rich heritage throughout history of these imaginative, episodic spiritual practices.

What the resource invited the reader into is not new. The spiritual classics that have stood the test of time are filled with stories of people encountering God



through spiritual practices that are highly imaginative. Richard Foster reminds us “you can *actually* encounter the living Christ . . . It can be more than an exercise of the imagination; it can be genuine confrontation. Jesus Christ will actually come to you” (Foster 1978, 22). The fathers and mother of our faith understood this and sought to be confronted by Christ in their imaginative faculties in order to be transformed.

One respondent’s answer indicated almost a sense of relief over these practices being grounded in the historical practices of the church. It provided a sense of security. Time has already proven the fruit of such practices. We are not introducing something new, rather we are unearthing the practices of the mothers and fathers of our faith. We are inviting children to be confronted by Jesus.

#### Goal #4: Insights from Neurobiology

Goal #4 achieved an average score of 6.33 on a seven-point Likert scale. The goal being measured was “This resource will integrate insights from neurobiology as relating to children.” The three quantitative questions by which the goal was measured were: #3 This resource discusses the role of spirituality in forming healthy thought patterns in children. #13 This resource discusses the role sensory learning plays in the development of a child’s mind. #6 This resource integrates insights from neurobiology as relating to children.

The quantitative data suggests that the resource, while moderately successful, would have been more beneficial if it had discussed in-depth insights from neurobiology as relating to children more thoroughly. Of the questions measuring the effectiveness of the goal, this is the one that scored lowest. The

resources mainly focused on the aspects of sensory learning and the brain. More data could have been incorporated concerning the effects of these types of practice on the brains of children.

Several studies have been done not only within the Christian arena but in the secular world concerning the effects of imaginative practices on the brains of children. Charlotte Reznick's work on the imagination proves that "imagery...[in] bypassing the natural defenses of the logical brain, it allowed children to go directly to the intuitive part of themselves and let their heart speak" (Reznick 2009, xix). These practices allowed children to engage and process emotion successfully which is imperative in emotional health. Ultimately, what she found was that this was key to empowering children to move from stress and anxiety into peace and joy.

### **Application**

The most critical findings of the survey are that children are rarely engaging God episodically in their spiritual practice, yet caregivers are open to embracing and leading children into such practices. The qualitative responses specifically highlight these findings. In considering both the quantitative and qualitative findings it becomes apparent that foundations and practices outlined in this resource are desperately needed within the body of Christ today in order to lead children into lasting experiential relationships with God.

The survey reveals a hunger within caregivers not only to lead children in such practices but to engage in them themselves. The resource goes to great length in laying a historical, biblical, and theological foundation by which to

empower the caregivers to present these practices in such a way as to dispel suspicion and fear concerning such practices. This was imperative as the qualitative responses revealed that these foundations helped move three participants from suspicion to acceptance.

The survey reveals that the resource was embraced positively by the participants. These participants, though coming from one of three areas of expertise, ministerial, educational, or psychological, all have extensive experience concerning children. Particularly how they learn and grow most effectively. While all the respondents are Christian, they come from varying traditions. The qualitative data shows that those whose current practice liturgical were much less familiar with these types of spiritual practices. However, they were just as eager to embrace these practices.

While the survey clearly indicated the success of the resource in educating and leading Christian caregivers in spiritual practices for children it also left several questions unanswered. The importance of the role of communal storytelling in children's spirituality scored 6.88 on the seven-point Likert scale. This leaves the question of was this already of utmost importance in the belief system of the respondents? Did the resource confirm or compel this belief?

Another area that would have benefited from further qualitative questions was how children are currently viewed in the participants' communities. While the current practices were revealed in the qualitative section of the survey, the survey failed to address what the current view of children within their communities is. Are children seen as full bearers of God's image now? Do the

communities of the respondents embrace children's ability to have a deep and meaningful relationship with God as they are?

The study reveals that the material presented in the resource is vital. The respondents, though mostly unfamiliar with these practices, embraced them. The qualitative section revealed that the respondents found that the practices were presented in a practical way allowing any caregiver to lead children successfully in these practices. Looking forward, I will be in contact with the several caregivers who expressed plans to begin the incorporation of such practices within their congregation to evaluate how the congregation responded and how the practices affected those engaging in the spiritual practices. I am particularly curious to see how the respondents that do integrate the practices modify them and develop further practices based upon the foundations presented to empower them to such an end.

### **Further Study**

It is clear to me that a longitudinal impact study would be of tremendous value to the body of Christ. It would be of great benefit to be able to present scientific data by following a group of children being led in these practices throughout their childhood. This would allow us to gauge if the children continue these practices on their own into their teen years and adulthood. It would also allow for a comparative study between children who do practice this form of spirituality versus children who do not. In comparing the two groups we would be able to evaluate how these practices affect empathy, stress, and identity in the children practitioners.

It would also be of tremendous value to design a retreat for caregivers in which they are saturated in these practices in order for them to experience the power of such practices in connecting the human heart to God. This would help dispel any suspicion or belief that these are only practices for children rather than practices we should learn as children and carry with us into adulthood. I have met several strong, faithful Christian leaders who do not believe that everyone can encounter God in this type of experiential way. They attribute such practices to mysticism and dismiss them as unnecessary in our faith walk. In inviting leaders to come and encounter God through these practices the misconceptions about such practices can be dispelled by experience replacing opinion.

Finally, I think it would be particularly beneficial to measure the effects of these practices on high risk youth. It is proven biologically that such practices alter brain patterns. A study that explores how these Christian practices can bring healing and identity to abused and troubled children would certainly be of great value as God is close to the brokenhearted (Psalm 34:18) and he promises to comfort those who mourn (Matt 5:4). Can these practices be used to bind up the broken hearts of the unfortunate children in our society and lead them into a life in which they can celebrate and experience themselves as the beloved of God? This is worth exploring.

### **Personal Goals**

Whenever we open ourselves up to focus on a specific aspect of God and spirituality, we can rest assured we will be impacted. Therefore, as I entered into this project, I held some desires for my own life and heart before God. These

were the desires, the personal goals I had for myself as I explored children's spirituality. My personal goals for this project were:

1. To implement these prayer models regularly in my own prayer life.
2. To focus daily upon becoming more "childlike," in openness, receptivity, and presence.
3. To dig deeply to grasp more fully Christ's admonition to "become like a child."

#### Goal #1: Implement

It is ironic how coming so close to falling completely apart aided me in fulfilling this goal. As I have mentioned throughout the resource and the project, my youngest daughter became very emotionally ill during my first class at Ashland. Her journey into anorexia and self-harm was the most painful experience of my adult life. Love can be so wounding. The anguish drove me to seek out a therapist certified in formational prayer through Ashland Theological Seminary. I knew I needed the kind of help I would only get through touching God but it was very difficult for me to find my way to him when my imagination was so full of fearful images of my baby's skeletal frame with gashes on her hips.

I drove an hour and a half each week to meet with Doris Motte. She would patiently lead me in imaginative spiritual practices. God slowly but surely gathered the broken pieces of my heart and mended them back together. He taught me so much through the eye of my heart about the grace that he gives through the woundings of love. My heart began to open again. He brought me, through these simple childlike practices, to a place I never dreamed I could

reach. He brought me to a place where I can celebrate that dark and painful season because through that season I became so much more like a child. I learned to let go and to be carried. He filled my imagination again with the images of his glory and grace and his undying faithfulness to those who believe.

#### Goal #2: Focus

Through this process of healing aided by the spiritual practices outlined in the resource, I find that I have become more open and receptive to God and others. I have struggled with control and perfectionism for most of my life. Through my daughter's illness, I came face to face with the reality that control is an illusion. I had no power to fix her. I could barely help myself some days. Feeding her six times a day and then watching her writhe in pain after every meal was all-consuming. Nothing was perfect. Everything was a mess, but it was my mess and I found that although it was nearly unbearable there was no place I would have rather been than fighting by her side.

Many ideas I had about God and the world faded away. They just did not matter anymore. What mattered was his presence, his promise to never leave nor forsake me. What mattered was my ability to open and receive from him what I needed to make it through the daily disasters. I not only learned to open and receive but I learned so much about relinquishment. I had my proposal done and approved before the last day of class, but I will be the last one finished with my dissertation and will graduate separately from my class. I just did not have enough strength to fight for my daughter and finish strong. I relinquished one thing for the other and rested in God's knowledge of where I was and what I

could manage. I trusted that somehow, even if I never graduated there was a purpose for me in the journey.

### Goal #3: Dig Deep

I wish I could say I decided to take the journey of “becoming childlike” intentionally. The truth is it was thrust upon me. When my daughter left our home to live with my parents so we could all begin to heal I felt that I would drown if my grief. God would whisper to me as I wept,

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior (Isaiah 43:1-3).

Taking him at his word, trusting him was all that I had. I came to realize that this is truly all we ever have. The rest pales in comparison.

God has brought me to a place through this journey where I understand that if it is too difficult for a child to live it is not the Gospel of Christ. Somehow through my brokenness, I discovered the radical inclusivity of the Gospel. I love to study. I adore theology and exploring lofty ideas. That is okay, but that is not the journey. The journey is trusting a God that meets me in the home he has built in my heart. It is being held by the God who calls himself my help. It is about living as Jesus did, as a beloved child of his Father.

### Conclusion

The survey findings conclude that the introduction and practice of holistic, imaginative, experiential spirituality is imperative for the next generation. The church must open her heart to again embrace these life-giving practices that



invite our hearts to engage intimately with God through the incorporation of the imagination. Our children are floundering. Their hearts are not engaging with God in a way that will sustain them throughout this life into eternity.

The hunger in the responses of the participants makes it abundantly clear that there is a longing within the caregivers also for a deeper connection with God. One respondent questioned why after being a Christian for thirty plus years they had never known that such experiential encounters with God were available to his children. This is a tragedy. The hearts of God's children cry out "Oh my dove, in the clefts of the rock, in the covert of the cliff, let me see your face, let me hear your voice" (Song of Sol. 2:14).

I entered into this study as one who has studied, taught, and practiced spiritual formation through ancient practices. I, as Jared Boyd, agree with the mystic known as Saint John of the Cross who attests that "The Christian imagination plays a great role in the spiritual development of the soul" (Boyd 2017, 19). What my research introduced me to was the depth and breadth of this understanding throughout the history of Christianity. Not only the Catholic saints, but theologians and commentators understand this. Why then is the role of the imagination in spiritual practice overlooked by the body of Christ at large?

We as people fear what is beyond our ability to control and reason yet God himself is beyond this ability. We live in so much fear of being deceived that we do not embrace the practices that allow us to draw near, believing that if we "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths" (Proverbs 3:5-

6). What I have rediscovered in embracing these practices for myself once again is that they very quickly birth the fruit of peace as they redirect one's gaze towards God. I am able to hear him in the wind again and capture his smile in the bird's song. There is no aspect of my life that I find easier or harder to engage him in because I have begun once again to imagine that he is always with me.

In providing practical ways to help children engage with God holistically, imaginatively, and episodically we will help birth a generation that walks with God. We want, as God does, for him to be known, to be loved, and to be enjoyed by his children. Children engaged in this type of spirituality will grow in the three-fold journey of reconciliation. They will be lovers of God, servant of neighbor, and embracer of self. All that we as humans need to be emotionally healthy and whole is made available through intimate connection with the living God. The foundations and practices this resource present will equip caregivers to lead children into such a life with God.

APPENDIX ONE

ASHLAND THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

CHILD OF WONDER: A RESOURCE FOR CHRISTIAN CAREGIVERS  
LEADING CHILDREN IN SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

A PAPER SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF  
ASHLAND THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY  
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ASHLAND, OHIO  
APRIL 4, 2015

## **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this project is to create a resource for Christian Caregivers that will educate them concerning formative spiritual practices for children.

The research question is: In what ways will this resource educate Christian Caregivers concerning formative spiritual practices for children?

## **Overview**

The focus of this resource is to educate Christian caregivers concerning formative spiritual practices for children. This resource will address the failure of current cognitive models of learning in leading children into authentic, experiential relationship with God, self, and others. This resource will inform Christian caregivers as to the current crisis concerning relational illiteracy within children. The specific focus of this resource is to instruct Christian caregivers in formative practices that engage the whole child, rooting them firmly in the reality of a living, loving, approachable God, as made evident through Jesus Christ. These practices will be episodic, creating space for children to cultivate awareness of God, self and others thus promoting a spirituality that is wholistic, experiential and empathic.

This resource will be in book form. Part one will advocate moving away from models educating *about* God, self, and others, towards models that create space for episodic encounters *with* God, self, and others. It will do this by introducing caregivers to the latest scientific discoveries about sensory learning, exploring cultural models that nurture wholistic spirituality, and promoting the integration of the imaginative process into spiritual practices. Models presented

in part two will instruct caregivers in formative practices for children that are episodic. They will be designed to position children for growth in intimacy, empathy, and awareness of God, self, and others. This resource will be evaluated concerning relevance, soundness, and practice by experts in the fields of psychology, education, spiritual formation, and Christian ministry. The evaluation will be in survey form with the option of including a personal statement.

### **The Foundation**

Max DePree in *Leadership is an Art*, recounts a story told to him by an adviser, Dr. Carl Frost. Frost was in Nigeria in the late 60's when electricity first made its way to the remote village where he resided. Each family was given a single light that dangle from the roof of their hut. Prior to the dawning of electricity, nights in this village were spent communally, gathered around the fire listening to the elders tell the stories that bound them together as a people. Now each family rushed home at sunset to their own hut where they stared in silence and wonder at a dingy bulb dangling from the ceiling. They began to lose their story and in losing that, they also lost themselves (DePree 2004, 81-82).

During the decade that I spent ministering to children, both in and beyond the walls of the Church, one thing became apparent, these children, regardless of the demographics, were lacking true identity. They had not been grafted into a story. They were lost, left to re-discover, or re-invent a purpose, a reason for their life. The children of America are without tribal storytellers. They are gathered around their tiny lights, hypnotized by the empty allures of this flickering

technological age, looking for a story to ground themselves in where no story is to be found. Summer days are no longer filled with the sounds of children playing, riding bikes, building forts. The streets are empty, void of the creative energy that once mark childhood in America. Our children were not tethered to a story and were thus swept away by the tumultuous winds of stimulus that fill the air of this age with the roar of toxic sights and sounds.

This realization has led me to ask many questions. How is identity linked to story? How does being cradled by the arms of our forefathers empower us to live presently, while dreaming into tomorrow? One thing is clear. Story matters, particular for the Christian. Ours is the story of a God who creates each person with great care. Ours is the story of a people loved by God and joined in love to one another. Ours is a story of the God-man, Jesus Christ who takes us by the hand and leads us back to Eden. Ours is a story of a life lived in, with and through God. We are a people who sit and sup with God, and not just any god, the God of all creation! Our story is a story of reconciliation.

Author and teacher, Leanne Payne in *The Healing Presence* reminds that “we are mythic beings: we live by and in our symbols . . . Symbols bind up reality for us” (Payne 1989, 140). Symbols come from story. Their purpose is to remind us, to call us back to who we are in ourselves, in relationship to one another, and in the grand scheme of life as we know it. Symbols tell us that we belong to a story that holds within itself purpose and meaning. Our Christian story tells us that this grand purpose is love. We exist in Love, for Love and through Love and are thus capable of extending and receiving love from and into our own being.

The great tragedy that I have witnessed in children, is that even those within the Judeo-Christian tradition do not place themselves within the love story of scripture. It is not their story. It is Abraham's story, David's story, Peter, and Paul's story, even Jesus' story, but not their story. It is something to learn rather than enter into.

Living and interpreting life from within God's story grounds us in an identity which is important. It is a story of belonging, in which we are loved and understood. What we are not, however, is central. We are placed in God's story rather than placing Him within a story of our own creating. We learn to image ourselves and all of life through the reality that we belong to a people gathered by and to God who is Love. True human identity is found in the biblical story.

This is precisely why our children are floundering. They have no reference point beyond themselves, no tether from which it is safe to soar. Without such a reference point one "languishes in the dark chains of introspection and narcissism, the worship of self" (Payne 1989, 154). If scripture is merely presented as a behavior modification tool, a book about people to emulate we reduce the Christian existence to system of reward and punishment. It becomes performance driven, void of the grace that promotes presence and delight. It becomes filled instead with the demands and duties that promote anxieties from which to escape. The Christian narrative becomes no different than any other story of good and evil. We are left to rescue ourselves. This is not good news.

There are moments when I feel as if God lifts a veil and I can hear both the groaning of the Father, "Adam, where are you?" and the cry of the lost

children, deaf to His voice shouting in agony, “My God, My God why have you forsaken me?” longing to touch. The wonderful truth is that they have touched. They do touch. They answer one another, embracing eternally in the life, death and resurrected reign of Christ Jesus our Lord made accessible through the Beloved Holy Spirit. The reason I have chosen to write this resource is that I still believe in the Good News. I believe in a God who is alive and still says “Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them” (Matt. 19:14) (Unless otherwise noted, all scripture references are taken from the NRSV- New Revised Standard Version).

Theologian Luke Timothy Johnson asks a wonderful question in *Living Jesus: Learning the Heart of the Gospel* “Do we think he [Jesus] is dead or alive?” (Johnson 1999, 3-6). Johnson's point is that the way we interact with the living and the dead is very different. I, as Johnson, am convinced that much of the way we teach children concerning Christ points to a dead, rather than living God. We learn about the dead. We learn from the living. The story of the dead is completed, while the story of the living continues to unfold. Children do not need more information. The need to know God. The need to encounter the embodiment of love in Christ Jesus our Lord. They need to touch Him, to be gathered to him as were the children in the gospel narratives. Is this not why the Holy Spirit came, to continue to reveal Jesus to, through and in us?

I chose to design this resource in order to instruct Christian caregivers to this end: Jesus Christ is alive. His story continues and the children we touch are part of that story. We must introduce them to the Living God that they may find



their place in His ongoing story. We must make room for God to become so big in their hearts and lives that His glorious train spills forth from the temple of their being. We must not keep them from Him but rather help them to allow the Scriptures to open their imagination to what He is doing and saying now. We must help them to view Scripture as a doorway which leads to His person. We must let them use all of their imaginative faculties to learn to be with Jesus. We must teach them to approach Him, believing He exists, knowing He always rewards those who seek Him (Hebrews 11:16).

### **Biblical Foundation**

There are several key factors to consider within the biblical text that validate the importance of the development of this resource. Although the Gospel narratives do not have a tremendous amount to report concerning Jesus's interactions with children, the few that are reported present Jesus's stance towards children in a clear and irrefutable way. The pericope that I will build this project upon appears in all three synoptic gospels Mark 10:13-16, Matthew 19:14, Luke 18:15-17. This project will presume Markan authority, and thus focus specifically upon the pericope as reported by said author.

In order to claim biblical soundness, it is not enough to build this resource merely upon how Jesus interacted with children while He walked the earth. I must show that the bible supports the idea of a Living Jesus who is approachable today through the person of the Holy Spirit in conjunction with our imaginative faculties. In order to explore this truth, I will consider John 14:15-31. Though most scholars acknowledge John 14 as a whole, there is a natural subdivision in

the farewell discord falling between 14:1-14 and 14:15-31. The focus of this project will be on John 14:15-31 as it is dependent upon the promise of the Holy Spirit as the mediator of continuing fellowship with Jesus and the Father.

#### Mark 10: 13-16

The scene presented in the Markan narrative is one of the most touching in all of the gospels. It openly portrays the passionate yet tender heart of Christ towards humanity. Tragically, both Luke and Matthew cut from their reports the emotional reaction of Jesus towards both the disciples and the children. They omit his irritation completely. Matthew reports Jesus laying his hands on them and the leaving, while Luke never presents any evidence that the children were rewarded an opportunity to interact with Jesus. Mark's gospel portrays a much different scenario. "Here Jesus took children into His arms, a physical gesture which symbolizes His protection and care. Mark alone mentions that 'He put His arms round them'" (Strange 1996, 49). Judith Gundry identifies "Jesus' hug...as an adoptive embrace, an assumption of a parental role" (Gundry 2008, 156).

Jesus functions in this pericope not only in a priestly role, bestowing blessing, as eluded to in Matthew's less climactic account, but as the reigning patriarchal figure in God's family. Derrett speculates that Jesus "exceeded the adults' expectations: he embraced them [the children] as his kindred (and thus superior to the disciples!) and placed on them His hands (obviously on their heads) and thoroughly blessed them" (Derrett 1983, 12). He further states that the language Mark used indicates that the blessing was celebratory, carrying within it "overtones of congratulations" (Derrett 1983, 12). It is passionate.

W. N. Clarke agrees with Derrett's treatment of the Greek, indicating that the word the author chose to use for blessed, "is a strong compound word used here alone in the New Testament. It is more expressive of a fervent intercession for the little children than the ordinary word" (Clarke 1881, 146). This is not the only unusually strong language used in this pericope. "In 10:14 the narrative describes Jesus as becoming indignant (or, as the Greek word suggests, 'becoming incensed at what is wrong')" (Bailey 1995, 61).

Ignoring Markan priority allows for the argument that this narrative is solely about discipleship. Linking the pericope to Jesus' earlier teaching in which he placed a child in the midst of them following an argument over who was greatest among them does not require one to dismiss Jesus' obvious affection for the children (Matt. 18:1-5, Mark 9:33-37, Luke 9:46-48). This objectifies the children. It implies that they were nothing more than a convenient illustrative tool to Jesus. Mark's use of passionate language indicating Jesus frustration towards the disciples and his tenderness towards the children does not allow this restriction.

Jesus is not using the children conveniently as a teaching point. He wants them to come. The author's "wording implies that it was no one-time occurrence" (Black 2011, 224). A clearer understanding of this passage would be "let 'them be coming to me,' present tense, always coming" (Lenski 1961, 424). Ben Witherington III treats this passage with due diligence in suggesting that it is both demonstrative and factual. It is not merely an antidote for discipleship "but it is just possible that what is meant is receiving the dominion in a like fashion to which one should receive a child-unconditionally and with open arms, as Jesus

did” (Witherington 2001, 278). Witherington acknowledges that there is a message about how disciples should relate to the kingdom without negating the significance of the children to Jesus.

Although Luke uses the term “babes,” indicating infants, Mark and Matthew use a more inclusive term allowing for children up to around twelve years of age. The point being that in reading, and praying, and learning from the text, how to relate and receive children one must remain “open to the child [within the text], and receive her [or him] without imposing preconditions on the encounter” (Willmer and White 2013, 21). This could be any child and therefore must be every child. The focus need not be on “any inherent qualities that children possess, but on their status as heirs” (Eubanks 1994, 401). All children can come and keep coming regardless of their attributes or nature.

The passage must be heard in freedom as God's response to children before being heard as a posture adult disciples must take. Jesus' model in this pericope instructs Christian caregivers to make war against anything that keeps children from coming unhindered to Him. It indicates that allowing them to draw near to Jesus in order to receive His touch, blessing, and the affirmation of His promise to them as co-heirs in the kingdom of God takes precedent over even instruction. “He invited the children to come to Him *not* so that He might initiate them into the adult realm but so that they might receive what is *properly theirs*—the reign of God” (Gundry-Volf 2001, 60). This is the posture caregivers must take when leading children in spiritual practice. It is not about changing the children, but rather about encouraging them to come to the Living God whose

arms are still outstretched to gather and to bless.

#### John 14

This resource will be rooted in the promises of John 14 that indicate a Triune god who is fully accessible. In Jesus farewell discourse He makes several promises. He promises to send another Advocate that will remain forever (Jn. 14:16). He promises not to leave the disciples as orphans (Jn. 14:18). He promises to love and reveal himself to those who demonstrate love for him through obeying His command to love (Jn. 14:21). He promises that He and the Father, who also will love them, will come, and make their home with them (Jn. 14:23). He promises that He is both going and coming (Jn. 14:28).

In the world of Jesus an orphan was any child without a father. Recall in the discussion of the Markan narrative above as Judith Gundry describes Jesus embrace as “an adoptive embrace” (Gundry 2008, 156). The loss of a Father

could result in the loss of legal and physical protection and diminished daily provision...In most cultures the god of orphaned children and the king became the patrons of the vulnerable, and legislation was designed to guarantee long-term security by specifying the means of the transfer of the family inheritance. (M.D. Carroll 2003, 619)

Jesus is promising continued presence, protection, and provision through the mediation of the new Advocate, the Holy Spirit.

Köstenberger speaking of Jesus promise to “be seen” by the disciples, attests that this does not refer to the pre-ascension sightings, but rather the Pentecostal experience, which will enable the disciples to enter into and fully “understand His [Jesus] union with the Father and their union with Jesus” (Köstenberger 2004, 439). Turner agrees, “this promise cannot refer to Jesus’

'Second Coming' (for then the world *shall* see); nor to resurrection appearances” (Turner1992, 349). According to Turner “the Paraclete will witness to and reveal especially the glorified Son” (Turner 1992, 349).

The imagery of Father and Son making their home with the disciples is tender and intimate. This is not the wording of a God who is withdrawing and simply commissioning them with power to complete a mission. “In John to 'receive,' 'see,' 'know' in relation to God are all faith terms, and imply receiving the revelation, seeing it embodied in Jesus, and entering into the communion with God which knowledge of God entail” (Beasley-Murray 2000, 257). The word that the author uses in verse 21 “*emphanizein* (to manifest, to reveal) appears only here in the New Testament and it is an appropriate word since it is used of theophanies” (Moloney 1989, 408).

The understanding of the Paraclete's ability and desire to continue to reveal God to believers is paramount in a theology that enables children to come to Jesus presently. “The experience of the absent one [Jesus] during the in-between time, therefore undermines all the reactions that one might expect...In place of consternation and fear the Spirit-filled disciples will experience love, deepening belief, and joy” (Moloney 1989 412-413). The gift that this gospel narrative promises is best illuminated by the apostle Paul's claim in Roman 8:14-15 “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and

joint heirs with Christ.”

This is exactly what Jesus promises in John 14. “Eschatologically speaking, the disciples still live in the present age, which is passing away, while Jesus speaks from the standpoint of the coming age . . . He invites the disciples to join Him there, but they have not as yet . . . Jesus is addressing disciples whom He has invited to live in, and out of, the resources of another age” (Smith 1999, 272). These “resources of another age,” this “inheritance,” is made accessible through the indwelling that the believers now experience in the person of the Holy Spirit.

Steve Seamands in *Ministry in the Image of God: The Trinitarian Shape of Christian Service*, quotes Paul Fiddes speaking of the “perichoretic dance of the Trinity . . . the partners not only encircle each other and weave in and out between each other as in human dancing; in the divine dance, so intimate is the communion, that they move in and through each other so that the pattern is all-inclusive” (Fiddes 2000, 72). In the giving of the Son, and the subsequent sending of the Spirit, God has made evident His “desire and intention to pour himself into us and draw us into himself” (Seamands 2005, 145).

This is the reality of John 14 that this resource will be built upon, the abiding reality of the mutual indwelling we now experience with God. “The Trinitarian circle where the Father, Son and Holy Spirit indwell and are indwelt by one another is open, not closed. We have been invited into the circle to participate in the divine dance” (Seamands 2005, 145). Jesus, fully alive in the Father, made accessible through the Holy Spirit, still bids us “Come.”

## Theological Foundation

There is a common pitfall within the body of Christ concerning children. They are approached as things to be changed, molded, formed rather than as human beings who fully bear the *imago Dei* in every stage. The image that humanity aborted through sin in the garden was replanted within humanity, according to John 14, through the person of the Holy Spirit. Through Him a great mystery occurs within the human soul, God receives them into His own being while also inhabiting that same being with His own life. This is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Children, just like any who follow the way, have embarked on a threefold journey of reconciliation to God, themselves, and all of creation. In creating spaces to be with children in the presence of God that are expressive, creative, and wrapped in story, we help them unlock the power of the imagination through which they can encounter, in meaningful ways, the living God.

## Theology of Childhood

In forming a true theology of childhood two extremes must immediately be abandoned. Augustine's theology of original sin became a mirror dimly lit through which the body of Christ gazed upon and presupposed inherent evil upon every child. According to this pervasive belief "even a newborn child is not only infected with the sin of Adam, but liable for condemnation for it" (Konz 2014, 29). The problem with this understanding is not the nature of original sin, or rather the potential for good and evil within every child, but that it conflicts greatly with the Jewish belief about the nature of children in which our Lord was raised, which He emulated in the gospel narratives report of His interactions with children.



The promise God made to bless Abraham and make him a great nation, was in effect a promise to bring forth many children (Gen. 12:2; 15:5; 17:2, 16; 22:17). Children were desired. “Their birth was the cause of great celebration (Gen. 21:6-7)” (Carroll 2003, 620). According to Judith Gundry-Volf, unlike the Greco-Roman culture which viewed children as “fundamentally deficient and not yet human in the full sense . . . Jews distinguished themselves from many of their contemporaries by rejecting brutal practices towards children” (Gundry-Volf 2001, 32-35). Children were undoubtedly viewed as a blessing and proof of God's divine favor. Jesus illustrates this belief in His treatment of children in the gospel narratives. This is the first step in developing a biblical theology of childhood. Children, as all humans, have value simply in being.

The other slope of Romanticism also must be avoided a genuine biblical theology of childhood. Rousseau was correct in identifying the pitfalls of an Augustinian belief. “If we teach them [children] that corruption lies within; indeed, we instruct them to loathe themselves” (Jensen 2005, 7). However, if children never come to understand the cost of evil how will they develop their potential for empathy? “Innocence alone is too simplistic a read on children's lives...Children are capable of boundless openness to the world and others, just as they are capable of injuring others” (Jensen 2005, 7). The bullying epidemic in America is proof enough that children are not inherently good any more than they are inherently bad. They are simply what they are, human beings capable of good and evil, loved nonetheless by God.

In considering a theology of childhood one must consider God's stance

towards humanity. God loves humanity and gave Himself to restore humanity, which He created in His own image and likeness, to Himself. Nowhere in the gospel does it indicate that cognition saves. Jesus saves. Nowhere in scripture does it indicate that the ability to reason draws us closer to God. Scripture points to faith, belief, trust in the person of God. According to John Wesley, “a child can 'know God” (Heitzenrater 2001, 295). They are skilled in the one thing necessary to come to Jesus. Children are good at trusting because they have to trust. They are vulnerable, incapable of meeting their own needs. They must depend upon others to care for them. Jesus was just as fully God and man in the manger as He was on the cross. He models the truth for us in His life. Genuine spirituality comes from knowing the one who makes us human and calls us child.

#### Theology of Reconciliation

Children, as all humans who come to the cross, are reconciled to God through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord. Scripture indicates that this reconciliation, in trifold. This is the mystery of transformation. Through Christ we have been saved (Eph. 2:5), We are being saved (1st Peter 1 8:19), and we shall be saved (Col. 1:20; 2 Cor. 5:19). Through the tri-fold nature of salvation, known as “the growth process, God is reconciling things, bringing them back to the way they should be” (Cloud and Townsend 2001, 27). This is God's work. We must reject “attempts to mold children in *our* image” (Jensen 2005, 43). This recourse presumes God's willingness to draw children into Christ's ministry of reconciliation. It is grounded in the ongoing process and promise “that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to

completion by the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6). This includes children.

In the process of reconciliation God is not only reconciling us to himself, but to ourselves and all of creation. Children, as finite beings, “need an infinite reference point outside of themselves in order to find themselves” (Kirwan 1984, 29). God is this reference point. Humanity is the “that which was lost,” that Jesus came to find (Luke 19:10, Matt. 18:11). Through the ministry of reconciliation, he re-gathers what was lost to the Father and restores to humanity the divine image that is our birthright in Christ (Genesis 1:27).

Gregory of Nyssa believed “the fall did not eradicate the divine image but instead . . . covered it with dirt and rust” (Harrison, 2010, 33). The Apostle Paul calls Jesus sacrificial death by which we are made holy “the washing of water by the word” (Eph. 5:26). Dr. Terry Wardle refers to Christians in the caring profession as “gold miners” (Wardle 2015, Lecture). This resource will be designed to draw children near to the truth of the person of Christ, into the ministry of reconciliation. In His presence the living waters flow washing away the dirt and rust that the world cakes upon all of us, revealing the true God-given image within each child. In His presence our heart testify that we are restored.

This is the beauty of reconciliation, as we draw near to God, beholding Him in the stories of scripture, in creation, in our senses and in one another, we become more of who we are. We are made free. Children need a sense of themselves in relationship to God if they are to resist the temptation to self-actualize through other means. In walking with children to the feet of Jesus we discover “something magnificent exists beyond the cross and gives it its glory”

(Anyabwile 2014, 65). Christ lives not in a throne far removed, but by some great mystery we who believe have become the place in which His beauty dwells (Psalm 27:4). Helping children recognizing and connect to Christ's presence within awakens them to God's heart of reconciliation for the world.

A friend who had learned the prayer models that will be demonstrated in this resource called to tell me of her five years old daughter's latest encounter with Jesus. After her time with the Lord she told her mother "You know what held Jesus on that cross Mommy? It wasn't nail. It was love." Over the next few weeks her mother watched as her daughter made sacrificial choices to serve others. She was compelled not by theological understanding; she was compelled by a recognition of greater love.

This was the actualization of a love so rich that it "does not permit the lover to rest in himself . . . [but rather] draws him out of himself, so that he may be entirely in the beloved" (Seamands 2005, 163). I was one of the lucky recipients of the outpouring of love that came through this little girl's encounter with Jesus. She sowed little flowers and glued them to a bobby pins, finishing with a button sowed in the very center. Mine is brown with pink flowers and a pink button. Tied to it was a homemade card that said, "Jesus love you," with a person smiling under a rainbow. Her eyes sparkled as she gave me this gift. She experienced her own magnanimity in that moment. The maker and the blesser, "the artist and the priest are brought together in us" (Payne 1989, 76). This is the fullness of reconciliation here and now and children are qualified participants.

## Theology of the Imagination

Jesus instructions to his disciples at the last supper was “remember me” (Matt. 26:26-28; Luke 22:19-20). He promises the disciples in John 14 that the Holy Spirit will assist them in this remembering (John 14:26). Remembering is a process of imagining. It is the regrouping, re-collecting of sensory instantiations into a new image or thought. A child in Africa and a child in America are going to imagine two very different things if instructed to imagine a cat. They will imagine from what they have experienced in a sensory manner. “Nothing exists in the intellect that was not first in sense, except for the intellect itself” (Sartre 2012, 33). In order to empower little children to “come to Him” we must fill them with story comprised of sensory symbol in order that they can remember Him rightly.

Scripture presents God first and foremost as a Creator (Genesis 1). In other images or identifying traits, Creator is still implied. As Savior He creates a redemptive plan and purpose. As Healer He creates wellness and stability. As Provider he creates provision through mercy. All that He is can be summed up in Creator. It is from this understanding I am sure that Coleridge stated “The primary imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM” (Coleridge 1956, 279). The act of creating whether internally or externally causes our hearts to testify to the reality that we come from God, that we mysteriously bear within us something unique that is of His essence.

According to Gary Moon “our true home, the kingdom of God, is generally beyond the boundaries of our awareness . . . Authentic transformation requires a

vision of the invisible . . . and a belief that we can live there, both here and now *and* then and later” (Moon 2004, 35-36). Garrett Green argues persuasively that we must consider the divine image in terms of a system of patterning rather than a substance as “sin removes nothing from the human 'substance' yet is able to destroy the image of God” (Green 1989, 90). Green's theory concludes that the damaging of our imaginative is what hinders humanity from being able to rightly image God. This inability keeps us from being able to enter into the kingdom of God, our true home. Jesus comes to humanity as “a window into the character of the Father” (Anyabwile 2014, 11). We are not left to guess, to have to image our own God. Jesus comes to re-image the Father (John 14:9, 17:26).

This resource will advocate creating space for children to encounter the stories and person of Jesus with their senses that their imaginations would be awakened to the glory of God in all creation. Jesus, through parable, was able to pull on familiar sensory instantiations, which enabled a persecuted, oppressed people to envision a kingdom imperishable all around them! Somehow, we have lost this ability. N.T. Wright grieves, “our Christian tradition has not given us the means to cope with being creatures who live in a world achingly beautiful and awesomely ugly . . . You need imagination to cope with that” (Wright 2005, 1). Athanasius blames this loss of imagination on the fall. “Sin dehumanizes us, and the mind can no longer function in such a way as to enable our perception of God (Harrison 2010, 55). In this light “the *imago Dei* texts [are read] as a Christian doctrine of the formation, deformity, and reformation of the religious imagination” (Green 1989, 99). Our awakening as sons and daughters allows us to see again,

to rightly image our God, ourselves, and others. This is the essence of hope.

The religious imagination, awakening us to the reality of God and ourselves in relationship to Him, compels us to reach beyond self in response to the groanings of creation (Romans 8:22). “The *imago Dei*, 'image of God,' is restored to its full splendor in the freedom of God's children,” and the liberation of all creation (Martin 1986, 203). The wonderful promise of scripture is that we, as the Apostle Paul can become, even post-ascension the “one who was with Jesus,” not as Peter or John were, but “representatively as one who saw the glory of God *not with his eyes* but 'in heart'” (Barrett 1997, 206).

The Apostle Paul encountered what Leanne Payne calls the “unseen real,” with his “true imagination” (Payne 1989, 26, 164). According to Payne's understanding, Paul's “intuition of the real” on the road to Damascus, Acts 9:3-9, would be classified as the “highest level [of] the truly imaginative experience...the experience of receiving from God, whether by word or vision, or greatest of all an infilling of Himself” (Payne 1989, 164). All genuine religious experiencing occurs through our sensory perception and is interpreted imaginatively. God communes with us symbolically and we interpret symbolically with our imaginative faculties through previous sensory instantiations.

Jürgen Moltmann attests that “dehumanized humanity is incapable of receiving true insight apart from Christ as the drive for self-glorification, or deification is so strong that all things are viewed and sorted according to the drive for self-promotion” (Moltmann 1991, 71). Reconciled humanity has no need for self-promotion as it joyously imagines the fullness of its inheritance in the

glorified Christ. We are free to imagine the fullness of God and ourselves alive in Him. His presence meets these true imaginings and awakens our senses to his life in us, around us and beyond us.

Gregory of Nyssa speaks of the cross as limbic space, a threshold place, through which things above and below are somehow conjoined. He affirms that it is precisely because of the nature of salvation through the cross “that we should not be brought to a knowledge of the Godhead by hearing alone; but that sight should be our teacher” (Oden 1992, 332). Gregory's birth, estimated by his death, is approximately 335 C.E. He was therefore not speaking of a literal seeing, but an internal seeing happening within the imagination. These “seeings,” are often aided, or initiated by outside objects such as scripture narratives, icons, or creation itself. In this way we clothe “ourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its Creator” (Col. 3:10).

### **Historical Foundation**

The historical foundations for this resource are the wholistic spirituality of the Celtic Christians whose perception of God as immanent allowed for a lived theology. Their belief in the God's inescapable presence created a people who knew how to find God in all things. Ignatian Spirituality, the second historical foundation for the recourse, also focuses upon learning to perceive God in all things. While the Celts did this organically, Ignatian developed a system of heightening sensory perception of God through imaginative contemplative practices known as the *Spiritual Exercise*.



## Celtic Christianity

Historically speaking, this resource is rooted in the wholistic spirituality of the Celtic Christian Tradition. The Celtic Christians demonstrated in their rhythms and traditions the heart of a reconciled life. In developing prayer models that create space for children to experience themselves, others, and God, invite them into the tri-fold journey of reconciliation discussed in the theological section. A wholistic spirituality must include focuses that are upward, as pertaining to God, inward, as pertaining to self, and outward as pertaining to others and the whole of creation. The Celtic tradition nurtured all three journeys, producing a deep sense of self, community, and connectivity with God and all of creation.

The Celtic Christian communities embraced children and women, treating them as equal and important members. This receptivity and deference to one another regardless of age or gender is connected to the Celtic's understanding of God as Creator. Celtic Christianity is anchored in the Triune God who is both transcendent and intimately present. Worship for these people was demonstrated with a “sacramentality not limited to the symbolic actions of the church's liturgy but open to the whole created universe. All the world was holy, and so was all the body” (Calhill 1995, 135). Their stance was one of celebration as they believed that all creation, the entire universe was in Christ and therefore redeemed. So deep was this belief that “in Welsh, the ordinary word for universe is *bydysawd*, which means *that which is baptized*” (Earle 2004, *Celtic Christianity*).

The dividing line between secular and holy did not exist in the world of the Celtic Christians. Life was communion with God. It was precisely “this sense of

the 'eternal now' [that] gave Celtic Christian a belief in the sacredness of all living things . . . Every-one and everything was created with a sacred purpose and understood as a purposeful and meaningful additions to this present life” (Crabtree 2007, 240). Due to this the Celtic Christian community did not related to children as “adults in training,” but rather as valuable members of society in their own right.

Children, and all of creation were understood as “theophanies of God himself, for God speaks in them and through them” (Calhill 1995, 209). This approach to caregiving allows children to be celebrated as they are. It keeps us from repeating the error of Roman philosopher Cicero who taught of children that only their potential deserved praise (Gundry 2008, 163). To understand children as “theophanies,” is “to understand children in God's image, moreover, [it] is to reject the multiple attempts to mold children in *our* image” (Jensen 2005, 43). Children bear God's image as they are in every stage of life, completely.

The inclusivity of the Celts created space for children to express themselves through prayer and participation. “Prayer shaped the lives of Celtic Christian children since they heard prayer and participated in prayer very often” (Crabtree 2007, 242). Prayer for the Celts was a way of life rather than a part of life. It permeated every aspect of being. Work was prayer. Creating was prayer. Prayer was life and life was communion with God.

Celts were basically illiterate prior to the arrival of Christianity; therefore, they placed a great deal of importance upon sensory learning. As they embraced literacy, they incorporated these aspects into it producing incredible works of art,

such as the *Book of Kells*. Symbolism still lines the county side of these isles with massive stone crosses bearing the sign of God's immanence in the circle that wraps them proclaiming in the tradition of St. Patrick, "Christ beside me, Christ in me, Christ behind me, Christ within me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ within me" (St. Patrick's Breast Plate). These aspects of Christian life among the Celts created a reality in which children, surrounded with images and whisperings of God's eternal presence, could imagine and live into a reality within the context of a God that bids the little children "Come."

### Ignatian Spirituality

This creative expression of worship is not limited to the Celtic tradition. God in all things is a foundational aspect throughout much of Catholic history, particularly in the lives of the saints. Francis of Assisi communed with wolves and fish, calling the moon his sister. John of the Cross found God in the darkest of nights. Julian of Norwich had an epiphany of the grandeur of God while contemplating a hazelnut. Theresa of Avila saw the majesty of God enthroned in every soul. Terese' of Lisieux recognized the mercy of God in small acts of kindness. Brother Lawrence, probably the most recognized, practiced God presence constantly, discovering the heart of worship in even the most mundane acts. The figure whose spirituality has historically provided a framework for a wholistic spirituality both within and beyond the walls of the Catholic church is St. Ignatius of Loyola.

One of the reasons for the impact that Ignatian spirituality has achieved, is the practical manner in which Ignatius documented and designed several

spiritual practices that are fundamental to this spirituality. Ignatius had a gift in that he recognized that all aspects of the human experience must be included in one's spiritual practice. Ignatian spirituality allows an individual to engage God intellectually, emotionally, and imaginatively, allowing for a sensory engagement with God that is episodic. It awakens our sense to God in all things.

Ultimately, the way that we know, and can measure historically the validity of spiritual practice is by considering the affects that it had regionally, or even globally. Did it produce lasting change that is reflective of the life of Christ? Were the participants transformed by intimate connection to God? Were they able to honestly embrace themselves and others? Were they compelled beyond themselves towards the good of all creation? Was there a legacy left for God?

The society formed through Ignatius called the Society of Jesus, commonly referred to as Jesuits, grew to be one of the largest missionary forces the world has ever seen. Ignatian, "Black Rims," were a conquering power for Christ as waves of missionaries flooded the new world and the far east (Gonzalez 1985, 117-118). Still today they are renowned for their mastery of the educational process. Jesuit institutions educate students worldwide with excellence through universities as noted as Georgetown. Ignatian spirituality has been producing fruit globally since the official papal approval of the Jesuit order in 1540 (Gonzalez 1985, 117). This is the fruit of abiding that Jesus promised would come from those that remained in Him (John 15:1-11).

The heart of Ignatian spirituality has always been to come to a place where one lives as the Celts lived, in constant awareness and communion with

God. “Sadly, sometime between Ignatius' writing of the *Spiritual Exercise* in the mid-1500's, and the 1950's the purpose of the examen got somewhat warped” (Blackie 2013, 56). The focus was placed on the examination of conscience only, to basically list one's sins, rather than on the examination of consciousness. This exercise looks back over the day searching not for fault, but for presence.

Focusing on sin alone rather than God's inescapable presence removes our eyes from the provision of God all around us and fixes our eyes on the perceived lack we find within. It feeds the ravaging performance mentality of the Pelagian heresy that is actively devouring many within the walls of Christendom today. True Ignatian spirituality is rooted in the awareness of humanity as the recipients of God's unending mercy. This is fundamental because mercy begets mercy.

Ignatius taught prayer as an active time of communion with God.

Communion occurred through the engaging of sensory perceptions through the power of the imagination. This was true whether meditating upon the gospel narratives of Christ or reflecting upon one's day. This can be best understood in considering the fifth contemplation of week two in the *Spiritual Exercise*:

*The First Point.* By sight of my imagination I will see the persons, by meditating and contemplating in detail on all the circumstances around them... *The Second Point.* By my hearing I will listen to what they are saying or might be saying... *The Third Point.* I will smell the fragrances taste sweetness and the charm of the Divinity, of the soul, of its virtues, and of everything there, appropriately for each person who is being contemplated... *The Fourth Point.* Using the sense of touch, I will, so to speak, embrace and kiss the places where the persons walk and sit. (Ignatius 1991, 151)

Ignatius goes on to explain that in reflecting in a sensory fashion through the imaginative faculties the soul with profit.

The historical significance of this type of sensory prayer for this resource is multifaceted. Children are still building a symbolic framework through which to interpret their story within the story of God. This combined with their natural inclination towards exploration and wonder, makes cataphatic prayer models more appropriate than apophatic models, such as centering or breathe prayers. “Ignatian spirituality uses images and lived experiences as a way into encounter with God...it allows us to begin to see Jesus less as a mythical figure, and more as a person” (Blackie 2013, 60-61).

Ignatian spirituality is not about transcending the human condition as in eastern prayer models which promote “emptying”. These prayer models encourage the use of the imagination with all its instantiations in order to “enter 'the valley of the human' so as to find God there. Imagination is not primarily geared to help us escape from reality. On the contrary, it orients us to reality” (Burke 2009, 99). It builds our symbol base thus allowing us to interpret life through the truths we have embedded through our internal experiences with God.

Prayer models that use sensory perception, like the Spiritual exercise have a natural byproduct. They tap into the empathy potential that is innate within each bearer of the *imago Dei*. Mary Gordon has proven through *Roots of Empathy*, that allowing children to identify with and express personal emotions in relation to the emotional response of others helps them to grow in empathy and self-awareness. This is what transpires in Ignatian practice when children are given opportunity to place themselves inside the gospel narratives in order to relate to the characters' interactions with God and others. Ignatian practice then

provides a framework for emotional growth that enables people to walk in relationship with God, self, and others more harmoniously.

### **Contemporary Foundations**

Rebecca Nye, after interviewing theologians, educators and psychologists concerning the definition of spirituality, presents her own definition of spirituality as it relates to children: Children's spirituality is "God's way of being with children and children's way of being with God. For Christians, this definition helps us to remember that children's spirituality starts with God- it is not something adults have to initiate" (Nye 2009, 5). She identifies six criteria that are essential for genuine spirituality in children through the acronym S.P.I.R.I.T. They are respectively space, process, imagination, relationship, intimacy, and trust.

Nye's speaks of physical space, emotional space, and auditory space. Children need space to be, to feel and perceive feeling, to listen and to be heard. Nye believes that one of the most basic problems in the children's spirituality is that the spaces sent apart for children do not communicate God's presence. There is no sense of "sacred space" (Nye 2009, 42-45). Scottie May tells of moving away from a highly active, camp style environment of play and excitement to a more contemplative model with children. He was compelled to do so after an observe approached him saying "Scottie, the children are having a wonderful time. They are learning. They have fun and enjoy themselves. But Scottie, when do they meet God?" (May 2006, 73). This is startling to consider.

The shift May made was to move away from entertaining children towards inviting children through sacred space and story to be with God. Each week the

staff would screen off all distractions and dim the lights and fill the room with symbols and toys relevant to the aspect of God they were focusing on in story. They did not only provide a communal space to engage God corporately, but also individual space for response time during which children were encouraged to engage God individually through a variety of creative stations.

Describing the children's participation May states "the attentiveness of the children to their work during this extended response time was remarkable. Occasionally younger children meeting at the church on the level above would run noisily overhead. The children never looked up" (May 2006, 77). These children were actively responding to God. Response denotes a previous action by another. They were responding to something, to someone, to God's presence and action. This is a genuine demonstration of a child's natural inclination towards God when given space and freedom to engage and respond to God's presence. I could not state it any more clearly than Catherine Stonehouse.

A child's encounter with God is not in the control of parents or teachers...Their relationship with God will not be a cookie-cutter version of ours, because God initiates the experiences with children, and they process experience and respond uniquely. (Stonehouse 1998, 181)

Christian Caregivers must remember at all times that they are truly the teacher's assistant. Christ himself is present in the person of the Holy Spirit to teach, remind, and illuminate if room is made. Andrew Ervin asks a powerful question to this end, "What would happen if leaders got really honest about ministry and their leadership influence and focused more on the transference of story through the work of the Holy Spirit" (Ervin 2010 103). Jesus came as a



storyteller and revealed the heart of the father and the reality of the kingdom. He did not stop there. He died upon the cross releasing a wave of glory through His suffering that swept those who dare to imagine He is the Son of God into the greatest story ever told, the story of redemption.

Children need story that invites them into a life with God more than they will ever need instruction in godly behavior. Great stories, like the ones that Jesus told, like the ones that capture the attention of children globally, “avoid didacticism and supply the imagination with important symbolic information about the shape of our world and appropriate responses to its inhabitants” (Guroian 1998, 18). G.K. Chesterton who frequented the company of such fantastic storytellers as Tolkien and Lewis explained, “I am concerned with a certain way of looking at life, which was created in me by the fairy tales, but has since been meekly ratified by mere facts” (Chesterton 1959, 50). Reading and interacting with the stories of Christ opens the door for true moral development, which comes from relational interaction, not from performance-based behavior modification techniques.

Margaret Blackie reminds her readers of a portion of Ignatian practice that is often overlooked. “We are not simply asked to feel God's presence, but we are encouraged to consider *how God is looking at us*. The underlying premise is that God is responsive” (Blackie 2013, 63). Cheri Fuller indicates that in teaching children how to interpret emotional response we open them to imagine the response of God (Fuller 2001, 72). In sensing the love Zacchaeus must have felt when single out by Jesus they can begin to anticipate not only Jesus response

towards them but their proper response to being acknowledged. In teaching children to engage scripture as story that can be explored in a sensory capacity, we empower them to image God's response, His smile towards them.

Replacing the wonder of story with facts is one of the ten factors Esolen notes through which a child's imagination is destroyed. "Fairy and folk tales are for children and childlike people, not because they are little and inconsequential, but because they are as enormous as life itself" (Esolen 2010, 97). Sara Arthur indicates that the "facts," of the Bible are far outweighed proportionately by the narrative components (Arthur 2010, 41). It takes away the heart of the word of God. "To reduce the Bible story to nothing but a moral lesson limits the hearer's engagement with it on an imaginative level. It keeps them from stepping inside the story and walking around" (Arthur 2010, 43). How our children learn to walk inside the gospel narratives will directly determine how they walk outside in their daily interactions with God, themselves, and others.

Vernie Schorr gives a helpful index in *Compass: A Guide for Character and Spiritual Formation in Children*, filled with age appropriate stories illustrating different character virtues (Schorr 2008, 163-196). Although I disagree with Schorr's adverse opinion of the incorporation of symbols into children's spiritual practice, I agree that story as the best avenue to illustrate and empower children adopt good character. *Philosopher* Alasdair MacIntyre states that through story,

children learn or mislearn...what the cast of characters may be in the drama into which they have been born and what the ways of the world are. Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted, anxious stutterers in their actions as in their words. (MacIntyre 1984, 216)

Karen Marie Yust identifies five ways in which children need to interact with story. She says they need receive and hear “the spiritual story of love and redemption” in the context of family and community which both tell and illustrate this story through proclamation and demonstration. They need to understand story in the context of celebrations such as Christmas and Easter. They also need the opportunity to tell the story themselves, which is response. They can do this through prayer, creative arts, or play. Finally, children must be awarded opportunity to become the story.

Children do not need merely to enter into the gospel narratives imaginatively but must be awarded the opportunity to become a gospel narrative themselves. Children need to be able to serve the poor and reach out in kindness. They must understand that as image bearers they are capable of creating hope and joy. This solidifies the reality that they are actors in the story of God's redemption (Yust 2004, 43). Valerie Hess points out that in addition to teaching children how to serve in the context of family and the poor, “we also can teach our children, no matter their age, that prayer is a form of service” (Hess and Garlett 2004, 132). God hears them and moves in mercy towards others.

Learning through sensory input is natural for children. They are “bottom-up” thinkers. They are experiencing the sensory input fully rather than filtering it through previous experiences. Children are present (Siegel 2011, 200-201). Children, however, do need help in connecting their story to “the story”. Appropriate questions can draw them into meaningful contextual conversation. This creates space for the children to process life experience in context of the

gospel narratives. Have they ever felt afraid like Peter walking on the waves? Have they ever felt bullied or ganged up on, or ashamed like the woman caught in the act of adultery? Have they ever felt special like the disciples when Jesus chose them? It must become personalized, integrated into their real lives. They too, just like these characters, live and interact with a merciful creative God.

“Children whose parents talk with them about their experiences tend to have better access to memories of those experiences. Parent who speak with their children about their feelings have children who develop emotional intelligence” (Siegel 2012, 8). They are better equipped to deal with their own emotions and behave appropriately in response to others emotional states. They develop empathy. An attuned caregiver creates space for triangulation to occur.

Meaningful experiences of joint attention between young children and adults serve an almost paradoxical function. While deepening the attachment relationships through the building of co-constructed, emotionally meaningful experience, joint attention opens the dyadic relationship to the world outside of the child/adult dyad.  
(Korn-Bursztyn 2012, 43)

Though creating space for children to encounter Jesus in the Gospels, connect their story to “the story” through attentive conversation, and allowing children to have personal time to respond creatively to God we help them enter into a reality in which they can live in awareness and harmony with God, themselves and others.

### **Context**

The title “Christian caregiver,” may seem abstract or vague in that it fails to exclude beyond the parameter of Christian and care. This is intentional. In the early church, and even half of a century ago in this very nation, it was understood

that spirituality was planted at home in the family unit and strengthened within the context of community. We now live in an age where children are lucky if they spend two or three years at home before beginning eight-hour school days five days a week. Most begin some sort of childcare program in order to accommodate their parents work schedule at just a few months old.

Our culture demands that childhood be cut short. Parents relinquish their role of primary influence in the lives of their children very early. The term Christian caregiver allows for all of those who serve these children including, but not exclusively, parents. Therapists, teachers, children's ministry directors, homeschooling parents, those in the church who feel the conviction of the Holy Spirit over the state of these little ones, these are the ones that this resource will benefit.

How will they benefit from the resource? They will benefit both personally and professionally. Personally, in that children that are given room to create and explore God, themselves and others, challenge the status quo that "snuff out the fires of the imagination...Children, still partly independent of the technocratic machine, remind us of a life with genuine sorrows and joys" (Esolen 2010, 65). This resource will give them tools that will inspire and empower them to engage children in meaningful ways that will connect them to God, the source of all joy.

Personally, in that there is no possible scenario in which we create space and invite God to encounter us that He fails to do just that. When we draw near to God He responds likewise (James 4:8). There is also no scenario in which we encounter God and are not changed (2 Cor. 3:18). This resource will empower

the caregiver as well as the child to position themselves for transformative, episodic encounters with the Living God.

N.T. Wright, as stated previously, bemoans the fact that within the current Christian context we are not being equipped to live in this world. He believes that only the power of an unlocked imagination can do that. The current crisis in America, the exodus from the church, is because we have killed the poets and stoned the artists. We have devalued all that is beautiful and applauded all that is productive. The children are in school five days a week doing rote memory exercises and busy work. They are required to sit still and scolded for lack of focus. Sunday morning worship is not so different.

I have spoken to Christian caregivers in various lines of care. They all genuinely want the children they work with to encounter God and be filled with life. They also acknowledge that this is not what is happening. They are learning about God, they are singing songs about God, they are memorizing scripture verses about God that they seem to have no context for. They are performing, not thriving.

Many Christians working with children feel a calling to this work, but curiously are dissatisfied with what they actually do...And despite all the effort the leaders put in, a lot of children seem to grow out of faith rather than into it...It is as if Christian faith has failed to engage children on a deeper level-yet that ought to be its strength.  
(Nye 2011,13)

In talking with these same caregivers about their own spirituality their answers were very adult. They have devotional time each day in which they read the Bible and journal. They connect through the liturgy and their weekly Bible study. Ideas like praying with your imagination, *visio* and *lectio divina* or the

sacrament of the present moment were foreign to the majority of them. They wanted to lead children into genuine faith, but they only understand faith in adult terms.

When people rely heavily upon intellect in their own spirituality, they tend to believe that children are not capable of genuinely spirituality. In fact, children of all ages are perfectly equipped to have genuine relationship with God right now. “To proclaim the reign of God is to see the world through children’s eyes” (Jensen 2005, 25). Most caregivers have forgotten the incredible amount of imagination that faith requires. This resource to awaken them to the potential of every child, indeed every person, to encounter God creatively. It will call them back into the fatherly embrace of the Creator from whose arms we are compelled to embrace the world in empathy as His image bearers.

The beauty of this resource is that it will provide the practical knowledge that the caregiver needs to overcome preconceived ideas about childhood. It will invite them to discover again what it means to live and breathe as a creative being. It will instruct them in forms of prayer that can be used corporately within a church setting or privately within a home or therapeutic setting. This resource is so desperately needed in order to remind the caregiver to the reality that God, not knowledge of God, saves. My hope is that they will be empowered through the realization that God is working with them. As they learn to create space and invite God with the children into life giving moments, I feel confident that they will find themselves also experiencing a renewed sense of intimacy with God and sense of wonder at His good creation.

## Definition of Terms

**Apophatic Prayer:** has no content. It means emptying the mind of words and ideas and simply resting in the presence of God. Centering prayer is an example of apophatic prayer. (<http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/2026/kataphatic-or-apophatic-prayer#sthash.dfv74l0x.dpuf>)

**Attunement:** refers to the ability to connect with the internal state of another person (Wardle 2015, Lecture).

**Kataphatic Prayer:** has content; it uses words, images, symbols, ideas. Ignatian prayer models are examples of Kataphatic prayer.

(<http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/2026/kataphatic-or-apophatic-prayer#sthash.BODfV9ag.dpuf>)

**Empathic Potential:** refers to the inherent ability within all children to develop empathy through forming and experiencing healthy attachment. Both Mary Gordon in *Roots of Empathy: Changing the World Child by Child*, and Daniel Siegel in *The Whole-Brained Child: Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind*, as well as *Mindsight: The New Science of Personal Transformation*, elude to this innate potential. (Gordon 2005; Seigel 2012; Seigel 2011)

**Episodic Prayer Models:** refers to models of prayer that leave the individual with a sensory memory of personal interaction and engagement with God Dr. Terry Wardle uses the term “episodic” in reference to sensory encounters with God. (Wardle 2015, Lecture).

**Instantiations:** are symbols, or abstract representations of concrete instances



(Miriam-Webster). These are formed through sensory experience and recalled imaginatively, during the process of memory or intentional visualization techniques.

**Relational/Emotional Literacy:** relies upon empathic potential being realized and refers to the ability to relate in healthy ways to self, others, and the world around us (Gordon 2005, 8 & 100).

**Tri-Fold Journey:** refers to the inward (relating to self), outward (relating to others) and upward (relating to God) journeys, promoting a wholistic and balanced spirituality. These terms were originally coined by Henri Nouwen but have in recent years become common language within Christendom.

### **Project Goals**

The purpose of this project is to create a resource for Christian Caregivers that will educate them concerning formative spiritual practices for children. **The research question is: In what ways will this resource educate Christian Caregivers concerning formative spiritual practices for children? The goals of this project are:**

1. This resource will establish the biblical foundation for the use of imagination in Christian spirituality.
2. This resource will establish the imagination within the theological foundation of the *imago Dei*.
3. This resource will provide prayer models based upon historical forms of Christian spirituality.
4. This resource will integrate insights from neurobiology as relating to

children.

5. This resource will introduce concepts concerning a child's capacity to grow in relational literacy.
6. This resource will instruct readers in the role of communal storytelling in the spirituality of children.
7. This resource will present a wholistic view of spirituality in children.
8. This resource will provide practical ways to integrate the use of the imagination in spiritual practices for children.
9. This resource will provide spiritual models that create space for children to have episodic encounters with God.

### **Design, Procedure and Assessment**

The purpose of this project is to create a resource for Christian Caregivers that will educate them concerning formative spiritual practices for children. The research question is: In what ways will this resource educated Christian Caregivers concerning formative spiritual practices for children? The panel of experts that will be evaluating this resource are from several caregiving fields within the Christian body.

The panel of twelve is comprised of individuals in the field of Christian psychology, education, spiritual formation, and ministry who will be working on a volunteer basis. They will be given two months in which to absorb and assess the resource. A self-addressed, stamped envelope will be included with each transcript as the option of a response letter is offered but not required. The assessment tool will be created through Survey Monkey. It will a Likert Scale 1-7

raging from agree strongly to disagree strongly. There will be two to three questions per project goal. It will be anonymous and accessible online for the volunteer to complete electronically.

### **Personal Goals**

I came to know Jesus when my children were very small. I was in an abusive marriage with a drug addict who was not particularly happy with my decision to walk with Jesus. My only friends were my two little girls. They loved to take long walks and play make believe. I wanted to share Jesus with them. I had begun reading my Bible every night after they went to bed. I read for hours, mesmerized as the gospel came alive. I remembered how my dad used to tell me stories every night when I was small, stories about Bobby Bullfrog and all the animals of Misty Acres. They were interwoven with the heart of the gospel. The lessons dad taught me through those stories are hidden in my heart to this day.

One day as they were painting each other rather than the paper in front of them, I read in John that God would make His home in us. That night I had the girls close their eyes and using guided imagery I narrated them to the castle of their soul. They loved praying this way, so we continued the practice, going to different rooms and spending time with Jesus. They each experienced what Leanne Payne refers to as “the truly imaginative experience” (Payne 1989, 164).

In dark times they have expressed how these episodic encounters that they had over the years helped them find the light of joy again. They are women now, about to start their adult lives. I want to remember, to hold close to me the gifts that came through being their mother. The prayer models within this

resource are some of the greatest gifts. For me, this resource is an altar of remembrance that I hope will draw me time and again into the creative awareness that I experienced while rearing my children. To this end my personal goals for this project are:

1. To implement these prayer models regularly into my own prayer life.
2. To focus daily upon becoming more “childlike” in openness, receptivity, and presence.
3. To dig deeply in order to grasp more fully Christ's admonition to “become like a child.”

### **Calendar**

Receive Final Proposal Approval	April 5, 2016
Attend DMN 9997 Writing Class	April 11, 2016
Develop Resource	July 1, 2016
Receive Approval of Resource	August 1, 2016
Edit Resource	September 1, 2016
Develop Assessment Tool	September 1, 2016
Approval of Assessment Tool	September 1, 2016
Mail Resource	September 1, 2016
Gather and Analyze Assessment Tool Results	November 1, 2016
Write Chapter 2/Submit to Advisor	October 1, 2016
Write Chapter 3/Submit to Advisor	November 1, 2016
Write Chapter 4 and 5/Submit to Advisor	December 1, 2016
Write Chapter 6 and 1/Submit to Advisor	January 1, 2017

Write Preliminaries and Reference List	February 1, 2017
Submit Reference List to Advisor	February 1, 2017

### **Core Team**

Advisor-TBD

Field Consultant-Jodi Horn. Founder of Horn of David Ministries in Stryker, Ohio. Director of creative arts and worship for Emerging Streams Church. Founder and director of a children's camp (Stryker, OH; Bahamas; Ghana, Africa).

Resource Persons

Owen O'Donnell. Eucharistic minister with the Catholic Church. Writer and Researcher.

Mary Darling. Professor at Spring Arbor University and co-author of *The God of Intimacy and Action* with Tony Campola.

Brian Morykon. Songwriter and Worship leader for Renovare'. Author of articles on spiritual formation.

Will Hernandez. Founder of Centerquest School of Spiritual Formation and Direction. Expert and author of Nouwen spirituality.

Editor-TBD

### **Support Team**

Jonathan Schafer- husband and friend

Constance Bounds- formational counselor and friend

Carol Schuster- intercessor and friend

Katie Butler- intercessor and church secretary

Barbara Rogers-intercessor, counselor, and godmother

My team has agreed to meet monthly for coffee in order to connect and pray over me. I am going to e-mail them weekly to update them on my progress, as well as share struggles and points of prayer. My team members have agreed to listen for me at least once a week, during which time they will inquire of the Lord in a listening stance. They have also agreed to imagine me each morning being lifted before Jesus. My husband and Kate will be my most direct accountability. Jon will ask me daily concerning my progress and Kate will be helping me edit.

### **Life Management Plan**

My life will be changing drastically throughout this process as my children are both scheduled to leave for six months next January on internships, one abroad and the other with my Field Consultant, Jodi Horn, to Ohio. It is very important to me that I manage the next six months well so that I can both complete my work and enjoy this special time with my children and husband. I use a daily schedule. Although I have to remain flexible with teenagers, I do a reasonably good job normally of living by this schedule.

Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday I drop the kids off at school and am back home by nine. I have found that attending to chores from nine to noon works best for me. When I say chores, I am including personal choices. The mornings are the block of time in which I take a walk, pray, watch the cows and birds from the sunroom. It is also the time I clean and pay bills. The time is usually evenly divided but I give myself the freedom to go either way. I have

found over the years that if I do not have adequate time alone, I will stay up too late in order to get it. I need this time to think and to have a sense of myself. I am sure without it I would quickly become overwhelmed. I pick my oldest up at noon. Then I work on research or writing from twelve thirty to five thirty.

Wednesdays are different as this is my husband's day off. He normally drives the kids to school and then we spend a couple hours chatting and reconnecting before we go separate ways. This is my shortest workday. We eat early. Then both girls have youth at separate places. My youngest gets her license next month and will begin driving both herself and her sister. This will give me a block of time between six thirty and ten thirty. Once she begins driving, I plan to shift my Wednesday schedule and take my three hours for self, God and family responsibilities in the afternoon and work instead during the six thirty to ten thirty block. I want to keep my weekends completely free during this season.

We host a Thursday night dinner for student in our church community. This takes up my afternoon work time. I have to give up Saturday mornings in order to make up the time. This works okay now as the girls normally sleep in on Saturday. Jon does his tinkering in the yard and garage in the morning. Noon on Saturday to Sunday evening after dinner belong to my family. After dinner on Sunday after dinner I like to review my schedule for the following week. It helps me to be more productive if I know what I am working on academically that week and have a plan in place each week. I also review in order to decide which days I will pay bills and do laundry, etc.

I am not sure what more I could relinquish. When I first began this

program, I made a decision to not take any more formational prayer or spiritual direction clients. I recently graduated one client from prayer to direction which reduces the frequency with which I see her to monthly. That leaves me with only one client whom I meet with for two hours each Monday evening. Jon and I have maintained healthy margins and boundaries since I began this program. It was very difficult during the period of time that we were dealing with my daughter's illness, but she has recovered amazingly. I feel that I can accomplish what is necessary both professionally and personally while maintaining this schedule



APPENDIX TWO

**ASSESSMENT TOOL: CHILD OF WONDER**

Please provide the following personal information:

**Demographics:**

Present Age:

- 18-24
- 25-32
- 33-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60-69
- 70-79
- 80- up

Gender:

- M
- F

Years in your present Faith Community:

- Less than 3
- 3-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- More than 15

Years working in ministry:

- No experience in ministry
- Less than 3
- 3-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- More than 15

Years working in the field of Psychology:

- No experience in Psychology
- Less than 3
- 3-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- More than 15

Years working in the field of Education:

- No experience in Education
- Less than 3
- 3-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- More than 15

### **Assessment of Resource**

Please highlight or mark the number that pertains to your level of agreement on the statement. See scale below.

Likert Scale

- 1- Strongly Disagree
- 2- Moderately Disagree
- 3- Slightly Disagree
- 4- Neutral
- 5- Slightly Agree
- 6- Moderately Agree
- 7- Strongly Agree

1.This resource demonstrates how the incorporation of the imagination into spiritual practice increases a child's ability to exercise empathy.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2.This resource establishes the biblical foundations for the use of the imagination in Christian spirituality.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Please highlight or mark the number that pertains to your level of agreement on the statement. See scale below.

Likert Scale

- 1- Strongly Disagree
- 2- Moderately Disagree
- 3- Slightly Disagree
- 4- Neutral
- 5- Slightly Agree
- 6- Moderately Agree
- 7- Strongly Agree

3. This resource discusses the role of spirituality in forming healthy thought patterns in children.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. This resource provides a prayer model that is based upon Ignatian spirituality.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. This resource instructs readers in the role of communal storytelling in the spirituality of children.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. This resource integrates insights from neurobiology as relating to children	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. This resource establishes the use of imagination within the theological foundation of the <i>imago Dei</i> .	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. This resource establishes the role of the imagination within a holistic model of children's spirituality.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. This resource links the biblical foundation for the use of the imagination to historical practices within Christian spirituality.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. This resource provides a prayer model that is based upon Teresian prayer.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. This resource gives a historical model of holistic spirituality within Christendom.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please highlight or mark the number that pertains to your level of agreement on the statement. See scale below.

Likert Scale

- 1- Strongly Disagree
- 2- Moderately Disagree
- 3- Slightly Disagree
- 4- Neutral
- 5- Slightly Agree
- 6- Moderately Agree
- 7- Strongly Agree

12.This resource uses the biblical texts contextually when establishing the use of imagination within the biblical text. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

13.This resource discusses the role sensory learning plays in the development of a child's mind. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

14.This resource introduces the concept of empathy potential in relation to children's Spirituality. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

15.This resource provides a prayer model that is based upon Brother Lawrence's model of practicing the presence of God. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

16.This resource provides spiritual models that create space for children to have episodic encounters with God. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

17.This resource outlines the necessary components in the development of a holistic children's spirituality within current culture. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

18.This resource establishes the role of the Imagination in empowering children to live into the *imago Dei*. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

19.This resource discusses the importance of children recognizing their story as within the overarching metanarrative of the biblical story. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Please highlight or mark the number that pertains to your level of agreement on the statement. See scale below.

Likert Scale

- 1- Strongly Disagree
- 2- Moderately Disagree
- 3- Slightly Disagree
- 4- Neutral
- 5- Slightly Agree
- 6- Moderately Agree
- 7- Strongly Agree

20. This resource establishes that age is not a determining factor in having episodic encounters with God. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

21. This resource provided practical ways to integrate the use of the imagination in spiritual practices for children. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

22. This resource establishes how living into the *imago Dei* through an awakened imagination empowers children to live out the promise of reconciliation. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

23. This resource presents a holistic view of children's spirituality. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

24. This resource outlines spiritual practices which integrate the use of the imagination into children's spirituality. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

25. This resource introduces concepts concerning a child's capacity to grow in emotional intelligence. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

26. This resource establishes the legitimacy of children's capacity to have episodic encounters with God. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

27. This resource establishes the importance of story in the establishment of Christian identity. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

**Please take a moment to complete this last section. Your answers are very important.**

1. How has this resource challenged your current ideas concerning children's spirituality?

2. What is the current model of spiritual practice in place for children within your care?

3. What are a few ways you could incorporate the ideas in this resource into the spiritual lives of the children in your care?

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