

## **Spiritual Nurture in the Pandemic**

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### **Introduction**

The pandemic is an unprecedented phenomenon that has affected most people, families, communities, and countries. When my husband, youngest daughter, and I were positive for COVID-19, we experienced a lot of physical pain. Emotionally, we had a lot of stress, fear, and worries. Socially, we needed to be wiser with our relationships with others. Spiritually, we were challenged many times because we could not join in worship at the church. During the long period of quarantine at home, we felt isolated and missed our worship and social interaction with our relatives and friends. Nevertheless, we could still develop our resilience through familial love, faith in God, unceasing emotional support of church members, and God's provision in a season of need. Though we have suffered from post-Corona symptoms, we remain resilient. Reflecting on my experiences, I have thought about children around the world. I imagine how children in dysfunctional homes have few opportunities to get good quality nurture during the pandemic. I ponder how their challenges have affected their development. I wonder how the church can contribute to creating a better family environment for COVID-19-affected families for the sake of the holistic development of children.

Children are born and grow up in various forms of families, depending on their primary caregivers (usually parents). Thus, children can experience social interaction and learn basic life skills and information in the family. In line with this function within the family, many studies attest that the influence of family upon a child, especially in developmental aspects, is significant (Roostin 2018, 1-2; de Figueiredo and Dias 2012, 703; Guralnick 2006, 46-50; Wong, Chen, and Wu 2010, 75).

However, children are not isolated from various environmental influences on their development. Children grow in the “immediate environment” (family, surrounding of the house, school, church, and parental influence) and “broader environment” (community and culture; Greener 2003, 42). Interaction within these contexts will produce different results for the development of children. Also, the growth of children does not merely indicate physical development but a holistic one. Kathryn Copsey describes a child as a whole person born and growing in multiple contexts (Copsey 2003, 3-4). To achieve the holistic development of a child, the family needs to understand a child as a whole person, not the generation of tomorrow. Also, a family should be empowered to nurture a child as a resilient person in his or her challenging context.

### **A Child as a Whole Person in Multiple Contexts**

The Bible depicts children from a multi-dimensional perspective. A child in the Bible is God’s gift, the blessing of each family, and a source of joy (Ps 127:3-5). A child is also a sinful creature like adults but innocent and pure in loving God and his or her neighbors (Matt 20:12-15; 2 Kings 5:2-4). A child grows under parental instruction and guidance (Prov 4:1; 6:20-21). However, this view cannot undermine the fact that a child is also a full human with dignity embedded in the image of God (Gen 1:27). Children need to mature in the course of their growth (Prov 7:1-5), but they have the competence and potential of spiritually influencing adults and community as a model of faith and source of revelation (1 Sam 17:12-51; Matt 18:1-5). However, children are vulnerable to social injustice and dangerous environments, like wars and famine (Exod 1:8-22; Isa 10:2; Matt 2:13-18). Thus, they need the nurture of their family and a safe community (Bunge 2006, 563-68). To empower children to grow to their God-given potential, they need a safe environment where they can flourish fully in every aspect. These diverse perspectives indicate the complexity of the definition of a child as a whole person. Also, children fulfill their role as influencers as well as influence recipients in both micro and macro social systems. The multi-dimensional perspective of children acknowledges their wholeness and the importance of their holistic development.

Erna Roostin explains that “the development of children is a pattern of change that begins from the conception and continues throughout the life cycle. Child development patterns are complex because they involve biological, cognitive, and socio-emotional processes” (Roostin 2018, 5). A child’s growth is a complex and continual process of diverse development. The Bible includes stories related to child development. For example, Jesus grew in wisdom (psychological), in stature (physical), and in favor with God (spiritual) and people (social) (Luke 2:40; 52; Athriba 2016, 45). The report of his growth was a positive example of holistic (physical, social, mental or cognitive, emotional, moral, and spiritual) child development. Also, the Bible affirms the complexity of the growth of a child and has much diversity in seeking the integration of genuine child development. Jesus grew up holistically and fulfilled his mission as the Savior of the universe (John 14:6). His life testifies to the positive consequence of the integration of child development and how each child can reach his or her unique potential.

However, some children in the Bible were exposed to traumatic experiences as interpreted from the viewpoint of modern psychology. For example, the daughter of Herodias requested the head of John the Baptist, as her mother urged her to do (Mark 6:18-28). She would grow physically, but her emotional and moral development would be challenged more than other children who did not see a head on a platter. Isaac was laid on the altar to test the extent of Abraham’s faith (Gen 22:1-11). Isaac would witness Jehovah-jireh through his experience. However, it might interrupt his mental health regarding his secure attachment to his father and his trust in him. Jacob showed his favoritism to Joseph. His favoritism provoked the jealousy of his brothers and caused them to sell Joseph as a slave (Gen 37:4, 18-28). Jacob seemed to focus on loving Joseph and neglect the emotional wellness of his other sons. The Bible remains silent about the mentioned assumptions. However, these three cases can be interpreted as a negative parental influence on the holistic development of the children involved.

### **Child Developmental Theories**

To experience holistic development, children need physical (size of their body, motor skills, brain development, and body health), socio-emotional

(their relationship with others, attachment, and emotional changes), cognitive (how to think, communicate, and solve problems), and spiritual (knowing God and restoring relationship with God) development (Greener 2002, 2-3; Copsey 2003, 4-10).

### **Socio-emotional Development**

By the 1930s and 1940s, many parents turned to the psychoanalytic perspective for help with their children's emotional stress and behavioral problems (Berk 1996, 15).

#### *Psychosexual Development (Sigmund Freud)*

Sigmund Freud explained the relationship between a child's biological instincts and his or her development and emphasized that the parental responses to a child's instincts can influence the formation of the child's personality in the course of developing stages (Balswick, King, and Reimer 2016, 77-78). The theory has five stages: "oral stage, anal stage, phallic stage, latency, and genital stage" (Freud 1963, 45-59; Garcia 1995, 498-99). First, in the oral stage, infants do "thumb-sucking" (also called "sensual sucking") at their mothers' breast (or substitutes), and their lips function as their "erotogenic zone" (Freud 1963, 45-47). Freud states that the erotogenic zone is the attached part of the body where individuals attain the feeling of satisfaction by repeatedly and habitually stimulating it (Freud 1963, 47-50). Second, during the anal stage, children (mid-infancy to four-year-old) will experience a sensation of pleasure after releasing their fecal masses by controlling their anal zone (Freud 1962, 46-47; Freud 1963, 55). The oral and anal stages are categorized as the pregenital phases (Freud 1962, 57-58). The third is the phallic stage after the pregenital phases. Acknowledging only male genitals differentiates this stage from the later genital stage. At this point, children give up seeking "more mature object relationships" (Freud 1953, 1517; Freud 1961, 165; Garcia 1995, 499). Fourth, before adolescence, children are in the stage of latency when "sexual inhibitions" seek to control sexual impulses in culturally and socially acceptable ways (Freud 1963, 43-44). Fifth, the genital stage is the final part to form and has an adult-like sexual aim toward an "extraneous sexual object" (Freud 1963, 53, 63). This stage starts with puberty (Freud 1963, 55).

*Psychosocial Development (Erik Erikson)*

Erik Erikson is the theorist of the Psychosocial Development Theory. This theory describes a child as a “seeker” who achieves or fails in his or her developmental tasks in relationship with various significant people at different ages: birth to one year (trust vs. mistrust; relationships with mother), one to three years (autonomy vs. shame/doubt; with parents), three to six years (initiative vs. guilt; with family), six to 12 years (industry vs. inferiority; with neighborhood, teacher, and school), 12 to 17 years (identity vs. role confusion; with peer groups and heroes), young adulthood (intimacy vs. isolation; with the opposite sex and friends), adulthood (generativity vs. stagnation; with spouse and children), and old age (ego integrity vs. despair; with others) (Erikson 1985, 247-69; Richards 1983, 93-94).

First, a mother is a significant figure to infants (birth to one year old). Infants either build trust or mistrust depending on the quality of maternal sensitivity and responsive care. Second, parents are the significant figures to toddlers between one to three years old. Toddlers who achieve “a sense of self-control without loss of self-esteem” develop autonomy, while those who lose “a sense of self-control and experience foreign overcontrol” feel shame and doubt (Erikson 1985, 254). Third, the relationship between family and preschoolers at age three to six is important for determining whether they will develop either initiative or guilt. Experiences in which preschoolers actively plan and fulfill their tasks allow them to develop a sense of initiative. However, the deprivation of experiences of initiation because of oppression and control results in an “energetic halt” and a sense of guilt that makes preschoolers avoid exploring with their newly developed competent skills and actions (Erikson 1985, 255-56). Fourth, the extended interpersonal relationships with neighborhood, teacher, and school are important factors to achieve the fourth developmental task of the industry for children ages six to 12. Children utilize their tools and skills to complete their tasks. Successful accomplishment with their initiative leads children to develop a sense of industry, while discouraging experiences result in a sense of inferiority (Erikson 1985, 259).

Fifth, peer groups and heroes are significant figures for adolescents ages 12 to 17. Youth think about who they really are and how others perceive

them. In wrestling with those thoughts and integrating them, youth discover their genuine identity or “ego identity.” Erikson defined ego-identity as “the accrued confidence that the inner sameness and continuity prepared in the past are matched by the sameness and continuity of one’s meaning for others” (Erikson 1985, 261). However, an ambiguous understanding of the ego identity may cause youth to feel role confusion.

Sixth, during young adulthood, people of the opposite sex and friends are important figures. According to Erikson, intimacy refers to “the capacity to commit himself to concrete affiliations and partnerships and to develop the ethical strength to abide by such commitments” (Erikson 1985, 263). Successful identity formation leads young people to develop intimacy in interpersonal relationships, especially with their opposite-sex partner. However, young adults with an insecure ego-identity tend to resort to isolation and find it difficult to develop intimate relationships with others.

Seventh, spouses and children are important to individuals in middle adulthood for accomplishing their developmental tasks. Generativity means “the concern in establishing and guiding the next generation” (Erikson 1985, 267). Feeling helpful and productive to younger generations and caring for them help adults in this stage to achieve generativity. However, lacking a sense of helpfulness and productivity leads adults to stagnation.

Eighth, individuals at old age will achieve “ego integrity” through their “ego’s accrued assurance of its proclivity for order and meaning” (Erikson 1985, 268). The ego integrity helps individuals perceive their lives as valuable and meaningful and form “the patrimony” of their souls (Erikson 1985, 268). The absence of ego integrity develops a fear of death and despair about their short life (Erikson 1985, 247-69; Richards 1983, 93-94).

**Table 1: Erikson's Psychosocial Development** (Erikson 1985, 274)

<b>Age</b>	<b>Prosocial Developmental Tasks</b>	<b>Basic Virtues to Achieve</b>
Infant (birth to one year)	Basic Trust vs. Basic Mistrust	Drive and Hope
Toddler (one to three years)	Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt	Self-control and Will power
Preschoolers (three to six years)	Initiative vs. Guilt	Direction and Purpose
Childhood (Six to twelve years)	Industry vs. Inferiority	Method and Competence
Puberty and Adolescence (twelve to seventeen years)	Identity vs. Role Confusion	Devotion and Fidelity
Young Adulthood	Intimacy vs. Isolation	Affiliation and Love
Adulthood	Generativity vs. Stagnation	Production and Care
Old Age	Ego Integrity vs. Despair	Renunciation and Wisdom

Psychoanalytic theory pays attention to the physical instincts and advocates the importance of the immediate and correct parental response to a child's physical instincts in order to achieve a positive personality. The Freudian theory states that early childhood experience shapes human behaviors (cause and effect), but it does not examine the case thoroughly that a child may exhibit undesirable behaviors regardless of a parent's good personality (Rosemond 2007, 32-36). While Freudian theory tends to focus on early childhood, Erikson has an overview of life-long development and analyzes the different developmental tasks from the relational perspectives. Expanding social interactions from a mother to others is helpful for understanding a growing child in context.

### *Object Relations Theory (Donald Winnicott)*

This theory highlights the relationship between a child and a “good enough mother” (Balswick, King, and Reimer 2016, 82). It affirms the positive role of a good enough mother in the formation of a child’s personality. This theory is helpful for understanding how God as the good Father reflects for children the “good enough mother.” However, it has some limitations for explaining other parts of holistic child development.

### **Cognitive Development**

#### *Operant Learning Theory (B. F. Skinner)*

According to this theory, children modify their behavior by experiencing positive or negative reinforcement (rewards and punishment, respectively) and by observing the consequence of others’ behaviors (Skinner 1984, 219). Like the video clip “Children See. Children Do,” this theory advocates the significance of modeling for the sake of a child’s development (Child Friendly Australia 2006). Thus, parents’ modeling is important to develop positive learning and behaviors through reinforcement and observation (Skinner 1984, 221; Balswick, King, and Reimer 2016, 86-87). However, from the biblical understanding of sinful human nature and free will, children need to be trained in wisdom, virtue, and self-control through parental discipline and modeling, not merely reinforcement (Rosemond 2007, 200-07; Morgan 1996, 88). Thus, the disciplinary aspect is missed from the behavioristic learning theory, though it takes an essential position in parenting styles for a child’s spiritual and moral development.

#### *Social Cognitive Learning Theory (Albert Bandura)*

According to this theory, people are “agentic operators in their life course” and “sentient agents” (Bandura 1999, 155). “Triadic reciprocal causation” describes an interplaying relationship among personal factors (cognitive-affective and biological events), behaviors, and environmental factors (Bandura 1999, 156; Nabavi 2012, 14-15). Bandura states that individuals learn something by “experiencing the effects of their actions and through the power of social modeling” and values the cognitive capacity (Bandura 1999, 170). In this theory, learning occurs by observing modeled behaviors and

their consequences (either reward or punishment), anticipating the outcomes (forethought), and deciding their direction by self-regulation (Bandura 1999, 173-75). Self-efficacy—“people’s beliefs in their capabilities to perform in ways that give them some control over events that affect their lives”—is the significant factor in the self-regulation to develop problem-solving strategies and increase active social participation (Bandura 1999, 181-82).

### *Symbolic interaction theory (George Herbert Mead)*

According to this theory, social symbolic interactions (language, gesture, play, and game) with caregivers and others in their social group shape children’s self-concept and help them become human from the social perspective (Balswick, King, and Reimer 2016, 89-91). It affirms their ongoing growth. However, it is inconsistent with the biblical understanding of a child’s dignity as fully human with dignity embedded in the image of God (Gen 1:27).

### *Cognitive Development Theory (Jean Piaget)*

This theory views a child as an “independent explorer” (Balswick, King, and Reimer 2016, 97). According to this theory, children go through four stages in the development of their thinking: the first stage is the sensory-motor stage (birth to age two); the second is the pre-operational stage (ages two to seven); the third is the concrete-operational stage (ages eight to eleven); and the fourth is the formal operational stage, which is age eleven and above (Copsey 2003, 6-7; Richards 1983, 100). This theory respects the uniqueness and difference of each child and trusts that a child develops the ability to reason logically. Thus, Jean Piaget’s research encourages educating children according to their cognitive stage (Copsey 2003, 6-7). This means that the varied readiness and ability of the individual child are more valued than the generalized standard of academic competency.

### *Socio-Cultural Theory (Lev Vygotsky)*

This theory applies the notion of scaffold to the theory of child development. In this theory, children are described as collaborators, which enhances their ability more than their biological competence through the scaffolds in learning (Balswick, King, and Reimer 2016, 96-97). This theory

stresses that children should interact and learn in their social contexts to learn socially acceptable actions as citizens in their community (Greener 2003, 41). It is also applicable to parenting. Parents, as spiritual education teachers, lay the scaffolds (faith practices like praying, reading the Bible, and acting the faith out in reality in this context) so that their children can step on them for the sake of their ongoing transformation and for understanding abstract meanings in the Bible and their lives.

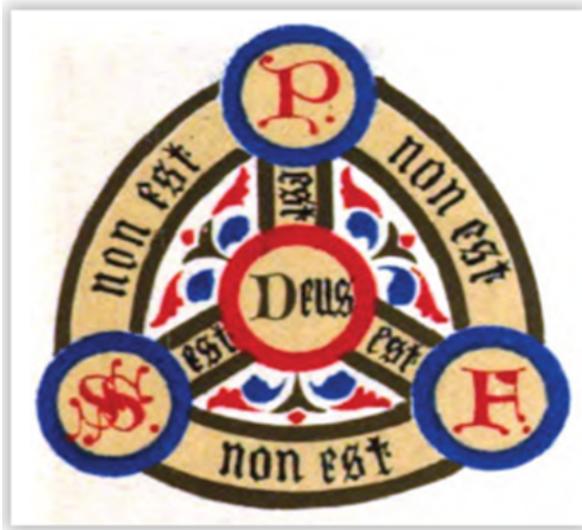
The developmental theories discussed above represent the transition from observing children in isolated circumstances, like a laboratory in their contexts. Also, these theories contribute to understanding children and their growth. However, though they inspire the church and parents to discover the insights applicable to a child's spiritual development, they do not intend to achieve those goals. Spirituality refers to "a relational connection to the living God that is beyond our understanding and reality" (Csinos and Beckwith 2013, 43). Katheryn Copsey regards it as "an innate or inborn, part of the humanness of each child" (Copsey 2005, 26). Based on their explanation, I understand spirituality as an indescribable and unique experience of the presence of the invisible God in our reality. Copsey advocates a child's spirituality and the necessity to restore a child's damaged spirituality caused by harmful circumstances (Copsey 2003, 8-10).

### **Needs of a Child at Risk**

A child at risk struggles with emotional issues when he or she is vulnerably exposed to traumatic experiences from risky situations such as war, abuse, child labor, natural disasters, etc., and these experiences influence emotional health (expressing true emotion in a healthy way) and even his or her social skills in social relationship with others (Kilbourn 1995, 133-43). Also, a child at risk is challenged to build an intimate relationship with God. Thus, he or she needs to restore the reciprocating self for his or her holistic development. This is necessary in order to transform the wounded child into a restored, resilient child.

To answer the definition of the reciprocating self, it is necessary to understand the triune God in relational aspects. Oden states that the characteristics of the Triune God are "unity, equality, and distinguishability" (Oden 2009, 108). A diagram (see Figure 1) symbolizes his statement

clearly. According to Audsley, the circular aureoles at each angle of the equilateral triangle indicate the three Persons of the Trinity: P is equal to *Pater* (Father), F to *Filius* (Son), and SS to *Spiritus Sanctus* (the Holy Spirit). The central aureole means *Deus* (God) (Audsley 1865, 60). Though they are different from one another, all of them are God. It means that they work together with perfect unity as revealed in creation, baptism, and redemption. Unlike the ordinary view of human beings, there is no hierarchy system in the Trinity, but the Persons are all equal in glory. In addition, three Persons—P, F, and SS—are not only one God but also independently divisible deity. In short, the Trinity reveals the unity as well as the uniqueness in the relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.



**Figure 1: Audsley's Diagram of the Triune God**

This is applicable to the relationship between the triune God and human beings. The Bible clearly says that God created human beings in his image (Gen 1:26-17). If the triune God has unity in the relationship of the Persons while maintaining uniqueness, it may be possible for humans to build not only a united but also a unique relationship with God and with others. This is because God embedded his own image in humans. Balswick, King, and Reimer stated that to be human is to live in unique quantities whose product is unity and who bear the image of God, living as unique

individuals in reciprocating relationships with others (Balswick, King, and Reimer 2016, 41-42). This means that we, as selves bearing the image of God, can establish uniqueness as we form a unity in a relationship. In other words, the reciprocating self refers to the “cohesive self,” which guarantees both individuals’ boundaries and openness of mutual relationship with God and others (Balswick King, and Reimer 2016, 84). In a relationship with others, if a child at risk recovers his or her reciprocating self, he or she can express his or her genuine emotion in a healthy way and develop a genuine relationship with God and with others as he or she develops his or her unique boundary. In this aspect, a child at risk needs transformational intervention to restore his or her reciprocating self and to strengthen his or her resilience in the family and community of faith.

### **Strategies to being a Resilient Child**

The key components of a child’s development include “spiritual life, nutrition, health, intellectual inquiry, socially acceptable behavioral responses to emotional feelings and stimuli, and morally upright society” (Tomkins 2003, 165-67). To achieve these holistic developmental goals and restore “high self-esteem, empathy, autonomous responsible attitude, coping skills, social competence, communication skills, and emotional regulation skills,” children need not only safe and healthy environments but also securely attached figures that can demonstrate unconditional love and care (Greener 2003, 42-46). However, in the fallen world, there seems to be no perfect place to raise a child for the sake of holistic child development. Thus, a child should learn how to be resilient in stressful situations.

Resilience refers to the ability to live and cope in difficult circumstances, the ability to regain strength and normal life after traumas or crises, and the ability to handle stress (Gunnestada and Thwalab 2011, 169). Resilience strengthens the self to be well emotionally and to sustain the dignity as a human even in risky, overwhelming circumstances. Since children cannot help facing hardship in their reality, Susan Greener exhorts caregivers to “eliminate unmanageable stress when possible” and to “promote resilience in individual children so that they are better able to cope” (Greener 2003, 44). This means that caregivers, especially parents, should do what they can in their given situation to raise resilient children. Also, children need to

learn how to acknowledge the source of stress to avoid hurting others and regain the resilient competence to overcome overwhelming stressors by activating the extended families, such as relatives and the faith communities (Arellano-Carandang 1987, 3-5).

### **Shalom to Be the Resilient Child**

For children to develop their spiritual resilience, they need salvation and to have *shalom* (peace) restored in aspects of relationships for biblical transformation as children of God. Hiebert views peace as a “proactive process,” not the conflict-vacuum state (Hiebert 2008, 294). The concept of peace as a proactive process includes loving our enemies, seeking justice, forgiveness, and reconciliation for “restorative justice” (Hiebert 2008, 294). This peace leads humans to develop a harmonious relationship with other humans and genuine belongingness to empower the community for mutual growth. So, as Bryant Myers states, *shalom* is the biblical ideal for human well-being and flourishing (Myers 2011, 97). When humans have *shalom* in their hearts, they can achieve well-being in their lives.

In the relation of *shalom* to the gospel, Padilla states that preaching the good news of *shalom* by Jesus Christ indicates the inauguration of a new era (Padilla 2010, 95). The proclamation of the good news of *shalom* by Jesus Christ, Padilla continues, brings about a community that embodies the blessings of the new age of the church (Padilla 2010, 95). It means that individuals can achieve *shalom* through Jesus and attain peaceful human relationships and a Kingdom-value-laden community in the church.

Children also need to restore *shalom* in their relationship with God and others. This can be on the micro-level of transformation. Myers points out that transformation in the Christian perspective seeks “changed people” and “changed relationships” (Myers 2011, 202). For this transformation, children also should learn how to forgive their pain-givers. Forgiveness means “a legal act, releasing the offender and the offended from the bond of the wound, enabling both parties to let go of the burden” (Miles and Houlihan 2003, 202). It does not mean to erase the sin of the wound-giver. Instead, it breaks the oppressing chain in order to enjoy the freedom given by God and to refuse the secondary wounds caused by the primary wounds. When children acknowledge their pain and the causes of their struggles

with the help of holistic caregivers, they can promote their resilience enough to embrace another wounded heart with deeper empathy and practical methods by their experiences. In this aspect, resilience functions as the strategy to develop wounded healers.

Through the gospel, people can reconcile with God, restore their dignity as God's image-embedded creation, and become liberated from all the oppression (Wink 1992, 74). People can be changed when they realize their true identity and vocation as children of God. These changed people can be empowered to restore just and harmonious relationships. God wants us to be transformed in three ways: 1) to change our distorted identity into our true identity (God's children embedded with his image); 2) to discover our original vocation as his productive stewards; and 3) to restore the broken relationship with God's creation so that we can accomplish right and just relationships with his creation (Myers 2011, 75; 82). However, this is not a simple event. It is an ongoing process to change choices according to the understanding of our transformed identity, vocation, and relationships (Myers 2011, 3-4; 22). In that aspect, biblical transformation is parallel to the course of sanctification.

In the macro aspect, resilient children in *shalom* can fulfill their mission. To seek this restoration-focused transformation, as converted Christians, they should fulfill their vocation as a "Christian witness by life, word, and deed." In the course of a lifetime of transformation, all people, regardless of their economic status, age, or social position, can experience God, recover their true identity (children of God), and restore their true vocation (productive stewards in God's creation). This transformational experience will shape Christian witnesses, who maintain an intimate relationship with God and reveal their faith by their lives and deeds (Myers 2011, 316-17). If changed, children can work to seek the transformation of others; children can have a great ministry in the church.

### **The Faith in Writings of Wisdom and Psalms to Be a Resilient Child**

The writings of Wisdom and the Psalms can empower children who have faith in God to remain faithful and hopeful in their daily lives. All the Wisdom writings proclaim that fearing the Lord and turning away from evil are the beginning of wisdom and understanding (Job 27:28; Prov 1:7; 9:10).

Also, fearing the Lord refers to hating evil things, pride, arrogance, and perverted speech (Prov 8:13). Thus, the author of Ecclesiastes defines the duty of humans both to fear God and keep his commandments (Eccl 3:11). The book of Proverbs values wisdom and understanding because wise action produces the “well-being” of humans, but foolish conduct results in “failure, misery, and death” (Brueggeman 1999, 255). This means that the child who values wisdom will do wise behaviors and avoid doing foolish actions (spiritually doing evil). Such behavior of self-control can be helpful to form the child’s resilience.

Exceptional to the causal structures (cause-effect between obedience and blessing and between disobedience and destruction) in the Old Testament is the book of Job, which attests that Job’s suffering (effect) had no relation with sin (cause) because Job was blameless and upright and did not commit any sin before God (Job 1:1-12). Instead, his faithful response to his suffering was the means to glorify and exalt God (Longman and Dillard 2006, 235). Looking at Job’s case can help children understand that all suffering is not the curse of God. Realizing this can help children be set free from false guilt when they encounter distress and overwhelming stressors. They can imagine how God will change their sorrow into joy, and they will pray at that moment, glorifying God after overcoming their hardship.

Building on this understanding of Job’s exceptional suffering, Psalms instructs faithful attitudes during suffering unrelated to sin. Psalms consists of three main genres: “hymns of joy, laments, and thanksgiving” (Longman and Dillard 2006, 246). Life is made up of ups (peaceful, prosperous, and happy states) and downs (facing hardship and distress). When the faithful are in the ups, they will sing hymns of joy to praise God. During the downs, they will sing laments with faithful endurance for an uncertain period. Then when they experience another up after deep downs, they will replace their songs with thanksgiving (Longman and Dillard 2006, 249). The cycle of these three genres is called “orientation-disorientation-reorientation” (Longman and Dillard 2006, 246; Johnson 1990, 33).

For example, Job’s peaceful, faithful, and wealthy life (Job 1:1-5) belongs to the state of orientation. If he were a psalmist, he would sing hymns of joy. His afflicted life of suffering (Job 1:13-41:34) is the course of disorientation, when there may be lots of laments. His restored life after extreme

suffering (Job 42) can be categorized as reorientation during which he might express thanksgiving in his praise. During disorientation, our responsibility is to put our hope in God and praise him (Ps. 42:9-10) because he is our Savior and God (Ps 42:11; 43:1-5), Creator and Sovereign (Ps 89:6-14), and our Father and faithful to his covenant (Ps 89:26-28). Therefore, the faithful, even in the disorientation period, should fear and praise God because he will protect them (Ps 89:20-24). Charles Stanley affirms that the way to be resilient in suffering is to choose the way that benefits from difficulties, not the path that seeks to escape difficulties, because this can increase dependency upon God, build a more intimate relationship with him, strengthen faith, and help Christians be wounded healers with empathy (Stanley 2015).

When children understand orientation-disorientation-reorientation, they can acknowledge that God trains them to surrender everything to him and trust in him in any situation. They can be resilient to remain calm and look around to discover the light—Jesus Christ—in the darkness, like the pandemic. Also, they can be hopeful, dreaming a bigger picture of the good and faithful God who protects them. All these practices will make them spiritually resilient to grow in faith and empathy.

### **Transformed Identity to Be the Resilient Child**

Crocker states that a child is not only the object of God's mission but also its carrier and partner, like Joseph, Samuel, David, a boy offering five loaves and two fishes, and Jesus (Crocker 2007, 266-72). He explains that children could 1) transform their family and communities through education and discipline, like Joseph, 2) be involved in the evangelism ministry like Samuel, 3) lead the community with justice like David, 4) work as the resource of the community with what they have, like a boy who offered the resources—five loaves and two fishes—for the community, and 5) participate in “the redeeming mission of God” like Jesus (Crocker 2007, 266-72). If the church and parents regard children as only the object of ministry, they will limit the potential of children and fall into a spiritual Kangaroo syndrome. Children need to grow up as we do. It is not desirable for leaders to keep children inside their pouches. When children are ready through enough nurture, they will fly in the air like eagles. The purpose of ministry is to

help them grow up to be Christlike adults.

### **Empowering Families to Nurture the Resilient Child**

Home, church, and Christian schools are basic social and environmental units that take care of children. These three units should integrate to seek holistic development. As we know and have experienced, no child grows without stress. However, adults, especially caregivers like parents, teachers, and pastors, should develop the resilience of children to help them cope with stressful and traumatic environments (Greener 2003, 44). To develop resilience, first of all, children need role models who can teach them problem-solving skills and nurture them with high support (Greener 2003, 44; White and Wright 2003, 121). This need emphasizes the importance of caregivers at home, church, and Christian schools.

Moreover, religion, especially faith in God, can enhance the resilience of a child. Home, church, and Christian schools should try to help children pray as a positive religious coping skill, support their spiritual development, offer counseling (helping children understand the situation and find the meaning in it), link the truth of the Bible with their daily issues through instruction-as-interpretation-of-life, and guide them to forgive their wound-givers (Gunnestada 2011, 173-83; Richards 1983, 248). This should be followed by careful guidance. Moreover, faith in God can gently lead children to be resilient wounded healers. The video, “Children See. Children Do” (Child Friendly Australia 2006), advocates that parents need to be good role models in behavioral and moral aspects. Parental modeling is important for nurturing resilient children. However, the video seems to dismiss the influence of God’s sovereignty over the life of every child. Faith is like a scaffold for a child’s spiritual development. When parents discipline and train their children to acknowledge God’s presence and his action in their lives, children can understand the abstract image of God. When parents act out their faith in their lives, especially during the pandemic, children will observe their activities and learn how to act as faithful believers in any circumstance. Parents have the responsibility to visualize divine influence on their children’s lives through parental discipline and action in faith and to put God in the center of their family. To help parents fulfill this

parental responsibility, the church can empower them to conduct empowering leadership at home.

### **Empowering Leadership in the Parenting**

Balswick and Balswick state that empowering is “building up” of one another in the community of faith through loving, serving, and helping each other mature in the faith (Balswick and Balswick 1989, 36). There are many empowered believers in the Bible like David, Stephen, Paul, and Peter. David could solve the problem of Israel against Goliath because he believed God would give him the strength to defeat Goliath (1 Sam 17: 26, 32-47). I can see his spontaneous participation in the conflict. Stephen could be peaceful in the stoning situation and generous to his persecutors because his intrinsic motivation of faith made him manage the risky situation (Acts 7:56-60). The dramatic empowering incident transformed Saul totally into Paul, who dedicated his life to God and explained heavenly things to the world (Acts 9:3-7; Rom 1:1-2). Peter was a very impulsive man but changed into a faithful, influential apostle and died for the sake of the gospel because Jesus empowered him (Acts 4:13; John 21:18).

Tomi Järvinen notes that there are two components of empowerment: one is the intrinsic factors of motivation, volition, self-image, efficacy beliefs, self-authorization, and self-determination, and the other is external factors like leadership styles, organizational structures, restructuring public sectors, and legal advice access to information (Järvinen 2007, 174). He explains that empowerment develops the ability to solve problems, make decisions, and manage stressful situations, thus creating the belief in problem-solving competence, which activates intrinsic motivation, autonomy, and spontaneous participation (Järvinen 2007, 174-77).

Arnold et al. interviewed 195 team members and leaders through three different groups: “a clothing retailer, a building products supplier, and a telecommunication corporation,” and clarified the behavior of national leaders (Arnold et al. 2000, 253-54). They concluded their research with eight kinds of characteristics of empowering leadership: “Leading by example” (being role model), “coaching” (teach for the self-reliance of the followers), “encouraging” (acknowledging the effort of the followers to promote high performance), “participative decision-making” (let the followers

express their ideas or opinions), “informing” (presenting goals, mission, philosophy), “showing concern” (regard on the well-being of the followers), “interacting with the team” (as a whole, treat the follower with respect), and “group management” (helping followers have a good relationship; Arnold et al. 2000, 254-55). These characteristics of empowering leadership are applicable to Jesus’ leadership, such as the following:

1) Leading by example: Jesus washed the feet of his disciples to help them follow what he did (John 13:14-15).

2) Coaching: Jesus gave his disciples the mission to preach the gospel (Mark 16:15) and taught them how to pray (Luke 11:1). He taught them the value of God’s kingdom with parables (Mark 4). He also exhorted them to forsake the desire of seeking a reputation (Matt 23:8-12).

3) Encouraging: Jesus encouraged his disciples to follow him (Matt. 4:19).

4) Participative decision-making: Jesus gave his disciples the chance to make a decision rather than displaying a list of do’s (Matt 14:15-17).

5) Informing: Jesus informed them what would happen to believers and unbelievers (Mark 16:16-18).

6) Showing concern: Jesus healed the woman who had been bleeding for 12 years. She was in the crowd, and he was busy on his way to visit the sick daughter of Jairus. However, he did not disregard the needs of this lady and confirmed, affirmed, and comforted her (Mark 5:21-34).

7) Interacting with the team: Jesus answered those who wondered about his intention, whether their questions were verbal or nonverbal (Mark 2). He fed around four thousand to five thousand people with two fish and five loaves of bread (John 6).

8) Group management: Jesus explained to people why he was with tax collectors (Mark 2). He dealt with the conflicts of disciples (Mark 9:35).

In parenting practices, parents need to empower their children as Jesus did for his disciples. Jesus used his power to serve others, to forgive others, and to empower the weak (Balswick and Balswick 1989, 39). Parents need to use their power to serve their children for their maturity rather than to

reign over them, to forgive their faults with love, and to empower them to be mature, faithful, and independent Christians who can delegate their discipline responsibilities for others. This is the reason why parents need to dedicate their lives to loving their children and discipline them with patience and God's guidance.

Empowering leadership is the way to help followers participate in the vision with a spontaneous heart, to motivate them to move toward the goal or vision, and to internalize the appropriate behavior of followers, whether they are with their leader or not. Jesus empowered his disciples since he would soon go back to the kingdom of God after he completed his mission. Although the disciples were not with him physically, they could dedicate their lives to fulfill their mission with confidence and faith. Just as Jesus is an empowering leader, parents should also follow what Jesus did so that their children can be resilient children who are faithful and obedient to God.

### **Spiritual Nurturing Application I: Read the Bible as the Whole Story**

Horace Bushnell exhorts parents to teach and train their children to transmit their beliefs, thoughts, and life testimony (Bushnell 1916, 55). According to him, parents should fulfill their mission to conduct Christian nurture with gentleness and patience because children are not too young to be Christians and because they can pray to God at any age. Moreover, children can learn the Bible through memorization, participating in Christian practices, and modeling according to their cognitive development (Bushnell 1916, 318-27). Richards calls it "situation-specific-instruction" (Richards 1983, 127). Children need to learn the abstract teachings of the Bible through their living role models, such as faithful parents and adults in the community of faith. For example, modeling is an example of situation-specific instruction that actualizes God's story in reality and witnesses the living God. It aims for children to be able to understand the right and wrong behaviors for Christians (an abstract concept and conduct) through concrete visual actions. That is a "situational approach to teaching moral behavior" for children in the concrete period of Piaget's framework (Richards 1983, 115-126). Also, praying together and using the Bible (godly play) are helpful practices to form children's spirituality (Nye 2009, 58-68). Through these parental efforts, children can participate in faith-enhancing practices

at home for the sake of their spiritual formation.

Anthony and Marshman state that spiritual formation is “the daily renewal of inner selves to become more like Christ through the love of the Father and the power of the Spirit” (Anthony and Marshman 2015, 67). Spiritual formation seeks with a daily effort to achieve Christlikeness by the love of God the Father and the help of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit helps humans both understand knowledge about God and encounter the invisible God as a real experience. Spiritual formation is the process of seeking “*Christ formed in you*” (Anthony and Marshman 2015, 68; 85). It is a process rather than a one-time achievement. Related to this insight, Catherine Stonehouse and Scottie May mention the concept “life-forming and life-transforming faith” (Stonehouse and May 2010, 104). They did not use this term to define spiritual formation itself. However, it is a relevant phrase to understand spiritual formation as continuing development.

Parents have the holy parental responsibility to nurture the resilience and spirituality of their children. Modeling is an important parental practice that includes reading the Bible together, not merely telling children to read it. Since the Bible is inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16), its remarkable characteristic is its inerrancy. In this aspect, the Scripture is the truth about God (Anthony and Marshman 2015, 99). When parents read the Bible together with their children, they need to seek “unitary reading” to create the space for “intertextuality,” which refers to the ability to synthesize each part of the Bible to draw its main biblical themes (House 2002, 270-78). It reminds us that it is proper to read the whole book, not only favorite parts of the Bible. Gerald Bray regards unitary reading as one of the main tasks of biblical interpretation to show the inner consistency and spiritual relevance of the entire text—a matter to which we must now turn our attention (Bray 1996, 33). Köstenberger also attests to the benefit of unitary reading: “The diversity and unity of the NT present the reader with the rich legacy of the faith of the first Christians, in which various perspectives of the same Christ and of the same gospel mutually complemented one another” (Köstenberger 2002, 157). When Christians read the whole Bible, they can discover the main integrated message. Anthony and Marshman note that the Bible is “God’s grand redemptive story” that can create the transformation of its readers (Anthony and Marshman 2015, 151-58).

The church can provide parents with materials and resources to empower them to read the Bible with their children at home. Video clips that show the whole story of the Bible can be the starting place, such as “The Story Rewind of the Bible” (Waters 2014) so that they can preview the whole story of the Bible. Also, the church can send the summary series of each chapter of a target book through a messenger or other communication tool. The church can create a visualized summary of each chapter so that children can concentrate on reading the Bible and enhance their understanding. Also, the church can create a YouTube channel to share the resources. The parents read the chapter and give summaries in advance to understand it and be ready to read it with their children, like a teacher at school or church. Then they create the space to read the Bible with their children at home. They should do their best to do it with a consistent commitment to their family’s spiritual formation, not only that of their children. After reading the assigned chapter, the whole family can share the insight and application to their lives and discuss some issues related to its content.

### **Spiritual Nurturing Application II: The Child-Inclusive-Conversation**

Children in a contemporary age suffer from the consequence of the fall of humanity. Every child has the right to survive with his or her name in a healthy condition, to be protected from harmful environments, and to participate in making his or her voice known (Athriba 2016, 63). Unfortunately, the corrupted power of the world and irresponsible parents challenge these rights in forms of physical abuse (e.g., corporal punishment), child labor, sexual abuse (rape and incest), psychological abuse (damage immediately and ultimately the behavioral, cognitive, affective or physical functioning of the child), family violence (disturbance in education, adjustment problems in schools, bullying, and low academic performance), media and technology (boundary and instruction needed), and armed conflicts and terrorism (Athriba 2016, 30-39). In this child-unfriendly world, the church and parents should consider the nurturing system in the Bible and discover interventions applicable to the current season, especially during the pandemic.

Lawrence Richards states that there is no standardized universal formula regarding how to nurture children in the Old Testament (Richards

1983, 18; 31). However, this does not mean that the Israelites forsook nurturing their children. They had various systems to help their children in growing in faith, such as seasonal ceremonies, worship-centered institutions, and historical memorials (Richards 1983, 21-22). Children in the Mosaic community had enough opportunities to affirm their faith in God in these systems and to observe how to act out their faith in daily life, which echoes the application of situation-specific instruction. The whole community reared children together, but most responsibilities rested on the parents (Richards 1983, 23-24). Through God's ways, parents instructed their children how to live as God's children.

In the context of the New Testament, Jewish children received pagan education but were able to grow up in a loving and transforming community, with the faithful discipline of parents and the shared experience of faith in their daily lives (Richards 1983, 41-43; 47). Their nurture systems were not as strong as the Mosaic community in the Old Testament. However, children grew up in faithful communities that conducted unconditional love and mutual respect and valued one another (Richards 1983, 47).

The church and parents need to cooperate as partners for the sake of the resilience and holistic development of children. Richards states that Scripture is God's truth and his revelation that we can experience in our reality (Richards 1983, 64-67). The church empowers parents to nurture their children at home as a faithful and secure environment. Also, the church can include children in online platforms like a messenger group chat where inter-generational members share their prayer requests and support one another emotionally and spiritually. Thus, children can pray together and contribute to the faith community as members of the church and not only as children of church members. The church can include children in online worship as partners, such as opening prayer, a special presentation, or a testimony. The church can invite children to speak their thoughts so that the adult members can hear the voice of the children. Children need spiritual development and not just moral development. As the church embraces children in the faith community and ensures the opportunity of their participation, children can learn the whole Bible as God's truth and walk together with God and other church members. Then children can experience God's story in their daily lives and realize that they are also an active

part of God's story.

### Conclusion

In Figure 2, the Taekwondo player in the green circle symbolizes the child in his or her context, the man in the red circle symbolizes the youth minister, and other players symbolize the community of faith. To jump high enough to kick the board in the air is not something ordinary humans can do. They need training and practice to do it successfully during an adequate period. However, though they are talented and trained, they cannot do it if no one supports them to jump high like the man in the red circle. If there are no players in the yellow line, they will have fewer opportunities to prove their potential. To jump beyond the limit, the three components need to cooperate with harmony.



Figure 2: Taekwondo Picture

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