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EQUIPPING VOLUNTEERS AT TENDING THE VINE IN  
LITCHFIELD, ILLINOIS, TO EFFECTIVELY TEACH  
UNDERSERVED CHILDREN

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A Project  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Educational Ministry

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by  
Jason Lee Plumer  
December 2023

**APPROVAL SHEET**

EQUIPPING VOLUNTEERS AT TENDING THE VINE IN  
LITCHFIELD, ILLINOIS, TO EFFECTIVELY TEACH  
UNDERSERVED CHILDREN

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Defense Date: October 24, 2023

For the glory of God

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## PREFACE

I am forever indebted to my wife, Stacy, and my five children (Naomi, Ethan, Abigail, Abram, and Elias) for the completion of this project. Thank you, Stacy, for carrying the brunt of our family responsibilities while I was away researching and writing or in class. To my children, your support and sacrifice did not go unnoticed. I cannot express how grateful I am for the countless hours of volunteering you graciously gave to the underserved children at TTV.

I deeply appreciate my church family, First Baptist Church Litchfield, for their prayers, time, and financial support. I am especially grateful for Sonny and Audra Barrett and Michael and Marie Koen. Without the support of these two families stepping in to lead, guide, and direct the church when I was away or distracted with my studies, FBCL could not have continued to minister in our community with the excellence we expect from each other. Both families are pillars in my growth as a Christian and the church's growth in serving underserved children.

God has richly blessed me through The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Dr. Matthew Haste's wise counsel and guidance have shaped my project into the vision I had for my church when I began the project. I am beyond grateful to both SBTS and Dr. Haste for discipling me into the student and pastor I am today.

With a great deal of humility and gratitude, I must acknowledge my mentor, friend, and brother, Dave Futral, and his wife Tracey. Both of you are instruments of grace in my life from the very beginning until now. With your lives and ministry, as well as with your family, you have disciplined me and made the truth of the gospel tangible to my faith. Thank God I have eternity with you to express my gratitude.

Finally, to my God and my King, Jesus, I give you all honor and glory for this project. My heart is overwhelmed by the magnitude of grace and wisdom you have worked out for the completion of this project. You have answered every prayer and have ensured the good work you began three years ago is completed now and will bear fruit that glorifies you in the future. May your great name increase, and my name decrease as we serve underserved children well in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Jason Plumer

Litchfield, Illinois

December 2023

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

First Baptist Church Litchfield (FBCL) exists to joyfully advance the kingdom of God by making much of Jesus in the church, community, and home (John 15:1–16). FBCL accomplishes its vision by serving one another in unity and love, encouraging, equipping, and admonishing each other in the faith so that our hearts will be set on fire with a deeply rooted love for Jesus that shines in the church, community, and home.

#### **Context**

Tending the Vine (TTV) in Litchfield, Illinois, is a children’s ministry that seeks to use Christians to empower children to be successful in school. The program was born out of a need revealed by COVID-19. The Litchfield School District was forced to implement a fully remote educational strategy for K-12 students in the spring of 2020. In the following school year, the school district implemented a hybrid learning schedule. Half the student population received in-class instruction on Mondays and Wednesdays, while the other half participated in in-class instruction on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Fridays were left open for remote learners.

First Baptist Church of Litchfield recognized that the hybrid schedule burdened on some families who did not have the support system to help their children be successful in the COVID-19 learning environment. The church developed TTV specifically to support those learners.

Litchfield, Illinois, is a rural community of approximately seven thousand residents. Farming used to be the main source of income for most of the residents. Over time, farming was surpassed by three industries. According to Data USA, a website that

organizes census data for communities in the United States, “The economy of Litchfield, IL employs 3.1k people. The largest industries in Litchfield, IL are Health Care & Social Assistance (570 people), Retail Trade (402 people), and Manufacturing (386 people).”<sup>1</sup>

Despite appearing relatively stable and quaint, Litchfield has five significant hardships that impact the children we serve: poverty, substance abuse, dysfunctional family dynamics, impaired learning, and being unchurched.

## **Poverty**

Poverty can be defined as “the extent to which an individual does without resources.”<sup>2</sup> The community of Litchfield sits inside Montgomery County, one of the poorest counties in Illinois. The median income for a household in the county is \$40,864, with the average revenue per family being \$56,945. The income per capita stands at approximately at \$21,700. Families living below the poverty line constitute roughly 10.9 percent of the population, with those living under the poverty line at 14 percent. Children under the age of eighteen make up 22 percent of those living beneath the poverty line.<sup>3</sup>

Households in Litchfield, Illinois, have a median annual income of \$45,000, which is less than the US median annual income of \$61,937.<sup>4</sup> Around 16.6 percent of Litchfield’s total population live below the poverty line, with 15.7 percent of family households sitting below the poverty line. In comparison, the national poverty rate for children under eighteen years of age is 14.4 percent.<sup>5</sup> The Montgomery Health

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<sup>1</sup> Data USA, “Litchfield, IL,” accessed June 18, 2021, <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/litchfield-il>.

<sup>2</sup> Ruby K. Payne, Philip E. DeVol, and Terie Dreussi Smith, *Bridges Out of Poverty: Strategies for Professionals and Communities*, rev. ed. (Highlands, TX: aha! Process, 2009), 24.

<sup>3</sup> United States Census Bureau, “DP03 Selected Economic Characteristics Montgomery County, IL,” February 3, 2020, <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=ACSDP5Y2010.DP03&g=0500000US17135&tid=ACSDP5Y2010>.

<sup>4</sup> Data USA, “Litchfield, IL.”

<sup>5</sup> United States Census Bureau, “Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2019,” Press Release CB20–145, September 15, 2020, <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2020/income-poverty.html>.

Department stated in its community health plan that 47 percent of Litchfield students are considered low income.<sup>6</sup>

Every child who participates in TTV qualifies for the free and reduced lunch program offered to low-income families. Of the forty children we serve, thirty-nine qualified for the Angel Tree program, which provides Christmas presents for impoverished families. Approximately 15 percent of our children are considered homeless by the Litchfield School District. Furthermore, roughly 12 percent of our children live in some form of government-subsidized housing. An overwhelming majority of our students are part of the 22.9 percent living below the poverty line.<sup>7</sup>

### **Substance Abuse**

In *Children of Substance-Abusing Parents*, authors Shulamith Lala Ashenberg Straussner and Christine Huff Fewell paraphrase the DSM-5 definition of substance abuse and dependence as

the continued use of a substance despite experiencing social, occupational, psychological, or physical problems; recurrent use in situations in which use is physically hazardous, such as driving while intoxicated; and a minimal duration of disturbance of at least 1 month. “Substance dependence,” which is synonymous with the term “addiction,” may vary in severity from mild to severe, and refers to compulsive and continued use despite adverse consequences. Depending on the particular substance, it typically implies the existence of an initial increase of tolerance to the drugs, that is, that more and more of the substance is required to achieve the same effect. Once dependence or addiction develops, the individual cannot wait too long between doses without experiencing craving and symptoms of physical withdrawal (Doweiko, 2009).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Montgomery County Health Department, “2015 Montgomery Health IPLAN,” accessed January 26, 2021, <https://montgomeryco.com/health/Public%20Health/2015%20IPLAN%20-%20Montgomery%20County%20Health%20Department.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> This data is taken from applications to TTV and informal conversations with the school’s liaison to truant families with at-risk children.

<sup>8</sup> Shulamith Lala Ashenberg Straussner and Christine Huff Fewell, *Children of Substance-Abusing Parents: Dynamics and Treatment* (New York: Springer, 2011), 3. See also American Psychiatric Association’s *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR)*.

According to the Illinois Department of Health, as of 2017, Montgomery County is in a region of the state that has seen the highest growth of opioid abuse/dependency.<sup>9</sup> The Montgomery County Health Department supports this finding in its health assessment plan using data from other service agencies, such as Learning Express, an education program that works with children 0 to 3 years old. The assessment found that 21 percent of children 0 to 3 years old had a parent struggling with substance abuse.<sup>10</sup> According to the chief of police, most arrests for domestic abuse, assault, and robbery stem from drug-related activities.<sup>11</sup>

The reality of substance abuse affects every child at Tending the Vine. Six children currently have fathers serving prison sentences for drug-related matters. Seven children are estranged from their mother and living with a guardian because of methamphetamine addiction. Two of our children have had parents die from a drug overdose. Unfortunately, drug overdose is a common trend in the city of Litchfield. Most TTV children have suffered the loss of a family member because of drug addiction.

### **Dysfunctional Family Dynamic**

TTV volunteers regularly work with children from homes with dysfunctional family dynamics. June Hunt offers a helpful three-pronged description of a dysfunctional family dynamic:

A dysfunctional family is one in which improper and immature behavior of at least one parent damages the growth of individuality and the development of healthy relational skills among family members, is one in which family members are impaired emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually, and is one in which all members are so emotionally and psychologically connected to one another that

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<sup>9</sup> Illinois Department of Health, “The Opioid Crisis in Illinois: Data and the State’s Response,” accessed January 26, 2021, [https://www.dhs.state.il.us/OneNetLibrary/27896/documents/SUPR\\_Opioid\\_State\\_Response\\_2017.pdf](https://www.dhs.state.il.us/OneNetLibrary/27896/documents/SUPR_Opioid_State_Response_2017.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Montgomery County Health Department, “2015 Montgomery Health IPLAN.”

<sup>11</sup> This information was obtained in an informal interview with the Chief of Police in the early stages of implementing TTV. I asked him to describe the effects of drug addiction on community crime.



everyone is negatively impacted when only one family member experiences harm or encounters a problem.<sup>12</sup>

When a family suffers from a dysfunctional family dynamic, divorce is one of the tragic results. Though Illinois is one of the states with the lowest divorce rate, divorce still plays a significant factor in the Litchfield community. It is estimated that the divorce rate in Litchfield is 14 percent.<sup>13</sup> Coupled with the lack of commitment to continue marriage is the disinterest in beginning a family with a marriage covenant. Litchfield has a large percentage of families who cohabitate, a trait common among communities where substance abuse is a problem. Raheem Paxon, Robert Volois, and J. Wanzer Drane explain, “Caucasian adolescents living in cohabitated family households were more likely to report substance use, when compared to those living in intact two-parent households.”<sup>14</sup>

Another consequence of a dysfunctional family dynamic is a parent or parents who suffer from the trifecta of minimal education, mental illness, and a history of sexual abuse. The Montgomery Health Department reported in its assessment survey with Learning Express that 30 percent of these children had at least one parent struggling with a mental illness. It was also reported that 37 percent had a parent with no GED or high school diploma. Sadly, 26 percent of the families were homeless, and 23 percent had a parent who had been a victim of some form of sexual abuse.<sup>15</sup>

Most of the children served at TTV experience a dysfunctional family dynamic. We have three or more children whose parents cohabitate. Just under half of the

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<sup>12</sup> June Hunt, *Biblical Counseling Keys on Dysfunctional Family: Making Peace with Your Past* (Dallas: Hope for the Heart, 2008), 2.

<sup>13</sup> Chris Kolmar, “The 10 Cities in Illinois with the Highest Divorce Rates for 2021,” RoadSnacks, December 30, 2020, <https://www.roadsnacks.net/illinois-divorce-rates/>.

<sup>14</sup> Raheem J. Paxon, Robert F. Volois, and J. Wanzer Drane, “Is There a Relationship between Family Structure and Substance Use among Public Middle School Students?,” *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 16 (2007): 595.

<sup>15</sup> Montgomery County Health Department, “2015 Montgomery Health IPLAN.”

program’s children live in a single-parent home, with mothers the predominant single parent. Divorce and incarceration are the two primary reasons for absent parents, and it is not uncommon for program participants to have a guardian or an extended family member as the primary caregiver.

### **Impaired Learning**

Underserved children with impaired learning difficulties struggle to learn and understand. The National Center for Education Statistics says that a specific learning disability is “a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using spoken or written language that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations.”<sup>16</sup>

The National Center for Education Statistics reported for the 2019–2020 academic school year that 14 percent of students in the United States received special education services. Of those 7.3 million children receiving services, the most common category was learning disabilities.<sup>17</sup>

Approximately 5.2 percent of all children who attend Litchfield public schools have a recognized disability. Twenty percent of students who attend school in Litchfield have an Individual Educational Plan (IEP).<sup>18</sup> According to the Illinois State Report Card for Litchfield school district, only 10 to 14 percent of students are proficient at math and reading, and 63 percent of students who graduated from Litchfield High School required remedial education in at least one or more subjects (e.g., math, reading, or science).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, “Students with Disabilities 2019–2020,” last modified May 2023, <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cgg>.

<sup>17</sup> National Center for Education Statistics, “Students with Disabilities 2019–2020.”

<sup>18</sup> Illinois Report Card, “Litchfield CUSD 12 Academic Progress 2019–2020,” Illinois State Board of Education, accessed March 1, 2021, <https://www.illinoisreportcard.com/District.aspx?source=trends&source2=postsecondaryremediation&Districtid=03068012026>.

<sup>19</sup> Illinois Report Card, “Litchfield CUSD 12 Academic Progress 2019–2020.”

All of TTV's students, save one, have an IEP. Three of our students are diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. Over half of our children are on prescription medicine for ADD and ADHD.

## **Unchurched**

The unchurched are those families who do not regularly attend any religious service. As Bobby Jamieson notes, "They are unfamiliar with Christian churches, have little or no personal ties to Christian churches, and may feel distant or alienated from Christian churches."<sup>20</sup> Ed Stetzer says that the unchurched believe the church is too critical about lifestyle issues, full of hypocrites, and unnecessary for spiritual development.<sup>21</sup>

A recent survey by Pew Research Center recorded that 34 percent of Illinoisans attend church once a week, 33 percent attend once or twice a month, and 32 percent seldom or never attend church. These numbers would appear to be normal for our community. We have seventeen churches in Litchfield, and I would contend that most average under one hundred in Sunday morning attendance.

Many of the youth we serve on Wednesday nights are unchurched. We have children in our TTV program who had never heard the name of Jesus and were unaware that there is a God until we told them. It would not be an exaggeration to say that three-quarters of the population of Litchfield are either disgruntled former church members or unchurched altogether.

The combination of poverty, substance abuse, dysfunctional family dynamic, impaired learning, and being unchurched have had a traumatic effect on children, especially in a learning environment. One study by the National Institutes for Health

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<sup>20</sup> Bobby Jamieson, "Book Review: *Lost and Found: The Younger Unchurched and the Churches That Reach Them* by Ed Stetzer," *9Marks Journal* 6, no. 6 (November/December 2009): 31.

<sup>21</sup> Ed Stetzer, Richie Stanley, and Jason Hayes, *Lost and Found: The Younger Unchurched and the Churches That Reach Them* (Nashville: B&H Books, 2009), 66.

suggests that the stress of poverty leads to impaired learning ability.<sup>22</sup> Aside from the biological effects of substance abuse, children living in homes plagued with substance abuse tend to suffer negative environmental effects, including malnutrition, abandonment, and low social skill development.

Additionally, without the guidance and boundaries provided by both parents, children with learning disabilities struggle to find consistency and direction in a dysfunctional family dynamic. Children living under these circumstances suffer from trauma that stunts healthy emotional growth. Coupled with impaired learning, the instability of poverty, erratic lifestyle of substance abuse, and severing of family ties overwhelm the child's heart and instigate unwise behavior patterns that impair success in the classroom and community.

### **Rationale**

Children who suffer from poverty, substance abuse, a dysfunctional family dynamic, impaired learning, and a lack of church support often fall into a group of people society calls the “underserved population.” The Federal Emergency Management Agency defines the “underserved population” as

groups that have limited or no access to resources or that are otherwise disenfranchised. These groups may include people who are socioeconomically disadvantaged; people with limited English proficiency; geographically isolated or educationally disenfranchised people; people of color as well as those of ethnic and national origin minorities; women and children; individuals with disabilities and others with access and functional needs; and seniors.<sup>23</sup>

The Litchfield school district recognizes many of the obstacles these children must overcome to be successful in the classroom. Schools offer underserved children an

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<sup>22</sup> Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, “Stresses of Poverty May Impair Learning Ability in Young Children,” National Institutes of Health, August 28, 2012, <https://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/stresses-poverty-may-impair-learning-ability-young-children>.

<sup>23</sup> Federal Emergency Management Agency, “Glossary: Underserved Populations/Communities,” accessed April 17, 2023, <https://www.fema.gov/about/glossary/u#:~:text=Underserved%20Populations%2FCommunities,or%20that%20are%20otherwise%20disenfranchised.>

array of solutions from free lunch programs to individual education plans to alleviate the burden these children carry into the classroom. I can appreciate our community's effort to help the suffering of these children, but their plans and resources inevitably fall short of addressing the heart of underserved children's complicated issues. Their solutions fall short because they lack a holistic approach to education that incorporates the kingdom of God. Although society provides partially helpful secular strategies for educators to teach underserved children, God has provided Christians with sufficient spiritual resources to disciple underserved children holistically through the ministry of teaching.

### **Trauma and Underserved Children**

Underserved children who suffer from poverty, substance abuse, a dysfunctional family dynamic, and impaired learning frequently suffer trauma from maltreatment. Underserved children suffer trauma when they experience the intense consequences of the brokenness that threatens or causes harm to their physical or emotional well-being. Traumatic events can have a ripple effect on everything from personal involvement to observing their loved ones suffering.<sup>24</sup> It is estimated that four out of six children will experience at least one adverse childhood experience (ACE) before age eighteen. One out of six will experience four or more ACEs before they reach adulthood.<sup>25</sup>

### **The Impact of Trauma on Underserved Children**

The spectrum of trauma impact on underserved children can be as subtle as a child quietly crying herself to sleep at night to violent erratic behaviors. Between these two extremes lies two overarching behaviors that describe the turmoil swirling in

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<sup>24</sup> Robert G. Crosby and Lori A. Crosby, *Trauma-Informed Children's Ministry: A Practical Guide to Reaching Hurting Kids* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2022), 4.

<sup>25</sup> Crosby and Crosby, *Trauma-Informed Children's Ministry*, 5.

underserved children: a lack of intrinsic and self-transcendent motivation and anti-social behavior.

### *Underserved Children Lack Intrinsic and Self-Transcendent Motivation*

Underserved children are known to exhibit a lack of intrinsic and self-transcendent motivation. Intrinsic motivation is an internal sense of doing whatever it takes to improve oneself. A person who is intrinsically motivated exercises a strong work ethic because they inherently understand that the outcome is worth the work. This person does the right thing because it is the right thing to do. Self-transcendent motivation, as James Lang describes, “is the motivation that expresses a desire to help other people, to change the world in some positive way, to make a difference.”<sup>26</sup>

This is the case with children at TTV. When they are faced with practicing “extra” math or reading skills, they do not see the long game. Many TTV children will “shut down” emotionally and physically, explaining that they have no desire to do the work, nor do they know its point. When they are asked to help other struggling students, volunteers are often met with a lack of empathy and a refusal to cooperate.

### *Underserved Children Exhibit Anti-Social Behavior*

Underserved children will also exhibit signs of anti-social behavior. *The Encyclopedia for Children’s Health* defines anti-social behavior

as disruptive acts characterized by covert and overt hostility and intentional aggression toward others. Anti-social behaviors exist along a severity continuum and include repeated violations of social rules, defiance of authority and the rights of others, deceitfulness, theft, and reckless disregard for self and other.

Anti-social behavior may be overt, involving aggressive actions against siblings, peers, parents, teachers, or other adults, such as verbal abuse, bullying and hitting; or covert, involving aggressive actions against property, such as theft, vandalism, and fire-setting. Covert anti-social behaviors in early childhood may include

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<sup>26</sup> James M. Lang, *Small Teaching: Everyday Lessons from the Science of Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2016), 175.

noncompliance, sneaking, lying, or secretly destroying another's property. Anti-social behaviors also include drug and alcohol abuse and high-risk activities involving self and others.<sup>27</sup>

Anti-social behavior may consist of hostility toward persons of authority or isolation from their peers, causing support systems to fracture or never develop. Having no support to help guide and guard their decision-making, many of these children turn to destructive behaviors. If these children are not supported early in their adolescent years, they are more disposed to continue to live the same broken life cycle as their parents.

### **Underserved Children Feel Unsafe, Dysregulated, Disconnected, and Devalued**

Robert Crosby and Lori Crosby offer a fourfold framework for understanding the impact of trauma on underserved children. First, underserved children often live in unsafe situations that expose them to child maltreatment, including child abuse and child neglect.<sup>28</sup> Research shows that children who live in poverty, substance abuse, a broken family dynamic, and poor education are more likely to suffer child maltreatment. Connie Tang, author of *Children and Crime*, notes,

The probability of maltreatment was two to three times higher for children with unemployed parents than those with employed ones (Sedlak et al., 2010). Children from families of low socioeconomic status had more than five times the rate of maltreatment than other children. Children living with a single parent and the parent's cohabiting partner had more than eight times the rates of maltreatment than those living with married biological parents.<sup>29</sup>

The trauma of these living conditions causes the child to see the world around them and the people who engage them as unsafe. The lens through which they view the world is ominous, sinister, and depraved. These children are naturally suspicious of anyone who enters their social sphere.

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<sup>27</sup> Encyclopedia of Children's Health, "Antisocial Behavior," accessed July 20, 2021. <http://www.healthofchildren.com/A/Antisocial-Behavior.html>.

<sup>28</sup> Connie M. Tang, *Children and Crime* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 34.

<sup>29</sup> Tang, *Children and Crime*, 35.

Underserved children often feel dysregulated. When someone feels dysregulated, it means that they are having trouble controlling, or regulating, their mind, body, or emotions.<sup>30</sup> Thinking through problems rationally is foggy at best. They frequently fidget with nervous energy. Both good and bad stress can cause them to have an emotional meltdown or shut down altogether.<sup>31</sup>

Underserved children feel disconnected. Many of these children are not nurtured well from birth to early adolescence. Therefore, they do not develop strong emotional attachments to caring adults, nor do they appreciate what a healthy support system of friends and family offers them. Furthermore, many of these children play the part of poverty, substance abuse, a broken family dynamic, and impaired learning to a degree that society stigmatizes them. These children feel unwanted both in their community and home.

Finally, underserved children feel devalued. Growing up in a home where your basic needs for survival are ignored at best and intentionally neglected at worst forms the belief that your needs do not matter. Furthermore, these homes have very little religious worldview or concept of God. Many of them functionally operate with a nihilistic worldview. Consequently, the child is left to believe that he is left to the forces of nature or fate; he has little to no control over his life and so his life does not matter.

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<sup>30</sup> Crosby and Crosby, *Trauma-Informed Children's Ministry*, 6–7.

<sup>31</sup> Crosby and Crosby describe two reasons why this happens to maltreated children:

There are two main reasons for this. First, when children are neglected, it negatively affects their brain development. Young children need someone to feed them, talk to them, and play with them. When this doesn't happen, the part of the brain that helps them think clearly and exercise self-control doesn't develop properly. This makes it harder for them to regulate their minds, bodies, and emotions. They get distracted, fool around in church, or lose their cool when something upsets them. Second, when children are abused, they become hypersensitive to any kind of threat. You have probably heard of the "fight or flight" response. It's an automatic reaction to perceived danger. It helps us react quickly, and it gives us the boost of energy we need to survive. When children experience frequent abuse, their fight or flight response gets stuck in the "on" position. Even something little can make them feel like they're under attack, and they lose control of their minds, bodies, and emotions. (Crosby and Crosby, *Trauma-Informed Children's Ministry*, 6–7)



## **Underserved Children Need the Abundant Life Offered by the Gospel**

Underserved children who suffer from poverty, substance abuse, broken families, and impaired learning are to be pursued by the church in fulfillment of the Great Commission. God has revealed himself through his spoken and written Word (Exod 3:1–22; John 1:1–3; 14–15; Heb 1:1–14). God has commanded his people to know and obey his Word (Deut 6:3–6; Ps 119; John 14:15, 23). God’s Word brings wisdom to the foolish (Ps 19:7; Prov 15:14), healing to the broken (Prov 4:22), and life to those who are perishing (Prov 19:23; John 14:6). If children have an impaired ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations, they will struggle to understand the abundant life Christ offers them in the gospel. How traumatic would it be to simply hear the sounds of the syllables of the good news of Christ’s abundant life but not be able to comprehend the length and width and height of Christ’s love for these children who are the least of these?

Thus, it is necessary for the church to seek, support, and serve the underserved children of Litchfield through holistic educational ministry. The church has been commanded, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you” (Matt 28:19–20).<sup>32</sup> The Great Commission includes underserved children.

The Litchfield community recognizes that TTV offers real solutions for these children and their families. Because we have been effective in helping underserved children experience success socially and academically, the Litchfield Chamber of

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<sup>32</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the Holman Christian Bible.

Commerce awarded Pastor Jason Plumer and FBCL the “Citizen of the Year Award” for 2021.<sup>33</sup>

FBCL exists to joyfully advance the kingdom of God by making much of Jesus in the church, community, and home. We see TTV as an opportunity to fulfill this mission. FBCL desires to train up TTV volunteers to teach underserved children.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to equip volunteers at Tending the Vine in Litchfield, Illinois, to teach underserved children.

### **Goals**

The following four goals were established to determine the completion of this project.

1. The first goal was to assess the perceived teaching ability of the TTV volunteers via a pre-project survey.
2. The second goal was to create a six-session curriculum to equip volunteers to teach underserved children.
3. The third goal was to improve the volunteers’ teaching aptitude by delivering the curriculum on teaching underserved children.
4. The fourth goal was to develop a strategic plan for implementing a parental involvement framework at TTV.

A specific research methodology was created to measure the successful completion of these four goals.<sup>34</sup> The research methodology and assessment tools used to ensure the success of equipping TTV’s volunteers are detailed in the following section.

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<sup>33</sup> Bethany Martin, “Pastor Plumer Recognized for Dedication to Youth,” *The Journal-News*, July 29, 2021, <https://www.thejournal-news.net/stories/pastor-plumer-recognized-for-dedication-to-youth,74035>.

<sup>34</sup> All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

## Research Methodology

Successful completion of this project depended upon the completion of these three goals. The first goal was to assess the perceived teaching ability of the TTV volunteers via a pre-project survey.<sup>35</sup> This goal was considered successfully met when fourteen volunteers took the survey and analysis yielded a clearer picture of their perceived teaching aptitude before training.

The second goal was to create a six-session curriculum to equip volunteers to teach underserved children. The curriculum covered recognizing the broken context of the children we teach, biblical foundations for a discipleship ministry of teaching, a philosophy of education, classroom management, and parental involvement in the education process. This goal was measured by a panel that utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum.<sup>36</sup> This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criteria met or exceeded the sufficiency level.

The third goal was to improve the volunteers' teaching aptitude by delivering the curriculum on teaching underserved children. This change in aptitude was measured by readministering the survey in goal 1. This goal was considered successfully met when fourteen TTV volunteers participated in all six sessions and when the *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-project survey scores.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> See appendix 1.

<sup>36</sup> See appendix 2.

<sup>37</sup> See appendix 4.

The fourth goal was to develop a strategic plan for implementing a parent involvement framework at TTV. This goal was successfully met with the development of a strategic plan for implementing a parent involvement framework at TTV.<sup>38</sup>

### **Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations**

The following definitions of key terms were used in the ministry project:

*Underserved population.* According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency, underserved populations are

groups that have limited or no access to resources or that are otherwise disenfranchised. These groups may include people who are socioeconomically disadvantaged; people with limited English proficiency; geographically isolated or educationally disenfranchised people; people of color as well as those of ethnic and national origin minorities; women and children; individuals with disabilities and others with access and functional needs; and seniors.<sup>39</sup>

*Pedagogy.* Art, science, practice, or profession of teaching, especially systemized learning or instruction in principles and methods of teaching.<sup>40</sup>

*Temperament classroom management.* Temperament-based classroom management is recognizing the temperament of students; creating a classroom community that is responsive to individual differences; and matching teacher management strategies to students' temperaments. Implementing temperament-based classroom management includes the 3 Rs followed by the 2 Ss: recognize child temperament, reframe one's perceptions, respond in ways that enhance environmental fit, and scaffold and stretch one's students.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> See chapter 4, "Developing a Strategic Plan to Implement a Parent Involvement Framework at TTV."

<sup>39</sup> Federal Emergency Management Agency, "Glossary: Underserved Populations/Communities," <https://www.fema.gov/about/glossary/u#:~:text=Underserved%20Populations%20Communities,or%20that%20are%20otherwise%20disenfranchised.>

<sup>40</sup> Michael J. Anthony, *Evangelical Dictionary of Christian Education*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 528.

<sup>41</sup> Sandee Graham McClowry, *Temperament-Based Elementary Classroom Management* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 2.

Two limitations applied to this project. The first limitation was the school calendar year, as TTV's calendar corresponds to the academic year. To mitigate this limitation, the training was conducted within the school year as volunteers served TTV children. The second limitation concerned potential issues with limited volunteer availability. To mitigate this limitation, the training was offered both in person and online.

Two delimitations applied to this project. First, participants were required to be approved volunteers for TTV. Accepted volunteers were those screened and approved to be the primary mentors for our children. Second, although the fundamentals of teaching underserved children can be explored in ten sessions, it was understood that TTV volunteers would need further training to sufficiently apply these principles in our ministry context.

### **Conclusion**

Although society provides partially helpful secular strategies for educators to teach underserved children, God has provided Christians with sufficient spiritual resources to disciple underserved children holistically through the ministry of teaching. Underserved children do not have sufficient resources to succeed in the community, especially in their education. These children come to the table with significant obstacles, including the trauma of maltreatment that stems from the instability of poverty, the erratic lifestyle of substance abuse, and the severing of family ties coupled with impaired learning and no exposure to the gospel. These obstacles may seem overwhelming to the community and even the state, but they do not limit the Lord our God, for what is impossible with man is possible with God (Luke 18:27). Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension have made it possible for these children to experience his abundant life (John 10:10), and he offers it to all who will call upon his name to be saved.

The church must seek out the underserved children of Litchfield. FBCL must serve these children and their families, giving its life as a ransom so that these children “may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the length and width, height and depth of God’s love, and to know Christ’s love that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph 3:18–19). And may his fullness make these children feel safe, regulated, connected, and valued in his church and kingdom.

CHAPTER 2  
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS  
FOR THE PROJECT

Although secular strategies can be helpful in equipping educators to teach underserved children, only Christians possess the necessary spiritual resources to disciple underserved children holistically through the ministry of teaching. God’s resources come in the form of a framework of discipleship, the power of his Holy Spirit, and the community of his church.

**Discipleship as a Ministry of Teaching**

God’s Word provides a framework of discipleship that can be deployed to equip teachers to holistically educate underserved children. Discipleship is the lifeblood of the church (Col 1:10; 1 John 1:3–4).<sup>1</sup> It is the lifeblood because it is the framework by which God transforms his people into the image of his Son. Just as blood is made up of many elements including red and white blood cells, plasma, and minerals, so too is discipleship made up of the work of the Spirit, the community of faith, the Word of God correcting and reproofing, and educational ministry.

Discipleship is, as Chris Byrley notes, “the process of devoting oneself to a teacher to learn from and become more like them.”<sup>2</sup> Historically, discipleship has involved a peculiar hierarchical relationship structure in which a teacher who is typically older, wiser, and knowledgeable agrees to instruct a naturally younger, inexperienced,

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<sup>1</sup> Johnny Lithell, “Why Swedish Churches Need Membership,” *9Marks Journal* (May 2019): 41.

<sup>2</sup> Chris Byrley, “Discipleship,” in *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, ed. Douglas Mangum, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), 175.

and unknowledgeable student. The goal of this relationship is for the student to be transformed into the likeness of his teacher. Imitation as the goal of discipleship was common in Greek antiquity.

Hans Weder explains,

In Greek culture, the phenomenon of discipleship appears in a number of forms (philosophy students, religious scholarship, and mystery cults). The teacher-student relationship is predominantly characterized by the concept of *mimēsis*. Teachers and students are bound together by a certain teaching and practice of life, and the student is recognizable in his imitation of the teachings and life of the teacher.<sup>3</sup>

The idea of imitation in Greek discipleship is consistent with how the Torah was taught to children and students in Old Testament antiquity. Students received instruction from family members and formal instructors.

### **Discipleship as a Ministry of Teaching in the Old Testament**

In the Old Testament, discipleship is often characterized as the idea of formal and informal training with the goal of mimicking the obedience of the teacher. Although one will not find the word “discipleship” in the Old Testament, the idea is conveyed through Hebrew terms such as “instruction” and “discipline.” These terms are used to describe the process of learning the Torah with the intent to obey it with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. Byrley explains,

Discipleship in the OT is fundamentally about learning what is required from the Torah and submitting to it in obedience. The Hebrew terms *יָסַר* (*yāsar*, “to instruct”) and *לָמַד* (*lāmad*, “to teach”) fit the idea of discipleship well, as they both strongly imply a change in behavior as a result of the instruction. . . . The overlap between “instruction” and “discipline” in the Hebrew terms *יָסַר* (*yāsar*, “to instruct”) and *מוֹסָר* (*mūsār*, “instruction”) illustrate this purpose well. Several terms that can be used to describe punishment or chastisement can also be used to describe the process of instruction. To be disciplined is to learn how to act properly (Psa 94:12–15). The verb *לָמַד* (*lāmad*, “to teach”) and its relatives share an overlap in meaning

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<sup>3</sup> Hans Weder, “Disciple, Discipleship,” in *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, vol. 2, D-G, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 209.



with “training,” where the emphasis is a change in behavior as well as growth in knowledge (Judg 3:2; 1 Chr 5:18).<sup>4</sup>

The instruction and learning usually took place in two contexts: the family and (later) the synagogue.

### **Familial Discipleship**

The instruction of the Torah primarily took place in the home. Moses exhorted Israel to inculcate (גנן) their children to God’s commands and ways through everyday life as a family in the land (Deut 6:4–9; Ps 78). Leland Ryken writes,

If in the modern world the presumed locus of formal education is the school, in the world of ancient Israel the normative locus of education is the home. In Deuteronomy 6:20–25 parents are to be prepared to answer their children’s questions about the meaning of the law and its origin. And in an even more colorful passage (Deut 6:6–9), parents are instructed to speak of these commandments throughout the day: “Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up” (Deut 6:7 NIV).<sup>5</sup>

Although the Torah respects the role mothers play in the discipleship of their children, preeminence is given to the fathers as the primary teachers in the home. A litany of Old Testament Scriptures and apocryphal and extra-biblical writings convey the father’s preeminence in teaching the Torah. For example, in Proverbs 4:3–4, the father instructs his son based on the tradition handed down by his father with the expectation that the son will model his father’s obedience: “For I, too, was once my father’s son, tenderly loved as my mother’s only child. My father taught me, ‘Take my words to heart. Follow my commands and you will live.’”<sup>6</sup>

The Talmud says to the reader, “Our Rabbis taught: A father has the following obligations towards his son—to circumcise him, to redeem him, if he is a firstborn, to teach

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<sup>4</sup> Byrley, “Discipleship,” 176.

<sup>5</sup> Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 844.

<sup>6</sup> Tremper Longman III, *How to Read Proverbs* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002), 24.

him Torah, to find him a wife, and to teach him a craft or a trade. And there are some who say that he must also teach him how to swim.”<sup>7</sup>

Moses made clear that the teaching of the law was meant to result in obedience rather than just intellectual acceptance (Deut 4:5).<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the family was the primary context in which discipleship took place, and the father was the primary teacher. Understanding that the father was the primary disciple-maker in the home helps establish the teacher-student relationship in the formal learning environment that would emerge in Hebrew culture.

### **Formal Discipleship**

After the destruction of the temple in 70 BC, the traditions of Israel, as well as its Scriptures, were kept alive from the first century onward by scholars and teachers called rabbis.<sup>9</sup> Rabbis were gifted scribes who were not only guardians of the law and values of Israel but were also sought by young men who wanted to be trained in the Torah. It was not uncommon for a rabbi to have several students who followed him in every capacity to learn from him and observe his behavior. They were given the freedom to ask questions and confront any perceived inconsistencies. These relationships lasted over long periods of time, well into adulthood.

Even though families were given specific responsibilities for educating their children, the educational tasks of family and rabbi met and merged in the synagogue.<sup>10</sup> Boys would attend “school,” studying the Scriptures until the age of thirteen. By then, boys would be considered well-versed in the Scriptures and would then move on to an

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<sup>7</sup> Talmud, Kiddushin 29a.

<sup>8</sup> Byrley, “Discipleship,” 176.

<sup>9</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica, “Religious Education,” in *Compton’s Encyclopedia* (Chicago, IL: Compton’s Encyclopedia, 2015), 173.

<sup>10</sup> Encyclopædia Britannica, “Religious Education,” 173.

apprenticeship. For some, however, at fifteen years of age, they would attend the bet Midrash (house of study), which was a rabbi school. The rabbis were always older, wiser men who invited the younger, unknowledgeable boys to learn from them.

### **Discipleship as a Teaching Ministry in the New Testament**

Byrley previously defined discipleship as the process of devoting oneself to a teacher to learn from and become more like them. He further clarifies discipleship in the New Testament, saying, “For the Christian, this refers to the process of learning the teachings of Jesus and following after his example in obedience through the power of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>11</sup> Likewise, Jesus has provided his church as a community and context for discipleship to take place in a teacher-student relationship.

Although one will read of Jesus being called rabbi on occasion in the New Testament, the notion of discipleship is conveyed more by being a disciple of a teacher. The Greek term μαθητής (*mathētēs*), is a commonly used word that describes “one who engages in learning through instruction from another, like pupil or apprentice.”<sup>12</sup> This word is used in the Gospels to describe those who followed John the Baptist (Matt 9:14a; 11:2; 14:12; Mark 2:18; 6:29; Luke 5:33; 7:18; 11:1; John 1:35, 37; 3:25).<sup>13</sup> Some of the religious leaders reviled Jesus, claiming to be disciples of Moses (Matt 9:28b). On occasion, the Pharisees would send their disciples to question Jesus (Matt 22:16).

*Mathētēs* is the word most used to describe Jesus’s disciples. Weder notes,

All 261 references to “disciple” in the NT are found in the Gospels and Acts. The emphasis clearly lies in the Gospels, inasmuch as only 10 percent of the references occur in Acts. The case is like that of the word *akolouthein* “to follow after.” Of the 90 occurrences, 79 are found in the Gospels, the rest in Acts (4), Revelation (6), and

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<sup>11</sup> Byrley, “Discipleship,” 177.

<sup>12</sup> Frederick W. Danker et al., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 609.

<sup>13</sup> Danker et al., *Greek-English Lexicon*, 609.

1 Corinthians (1). This discovery already indicates that discipleship is a phenomenon which demonstrates a close association with Jesus himself.<sup>14</sup>

Jesus used *mathētēs* when he called his disciples (Mark 1:17; 2:14). In his final exhortation before he ascended into heaven, he used a verb form of *mathētēs*, *μαθητεύω* (*mathēteuō*, “to make a disciple”) to command his disciples to fulfill the Great Commission by making more disciples (Matt 28:19–20).

Outside of the Gospels, the authors commonly used words like *παιδεύω* (*paideuō*, “to instruct”) or *ἀκολουθέω* (*akoloutheō*, “to follow”) to describe discipleship. *Paideuō* can be used to describe punishment or discipline, but it often communicates the idea of education or training. The central idea of *paideuō* revolves around behavior and customs resulting from education. For example, Stephen refers to Moses as being educated (*paideuō*) in the culture of the Egyptians (Acts 7:22). In Acts 22:3, Paul uses *paideuō* to describe his upbringing as a Pharisee under the authority of Gamaliel.<sup>15</sup>

The literal translation of *akoloutheō* means to physically follow someone. Although Jesus’s disciples did literally follow him for three years throughout the land of Israel, the term describes the act of becoming a disciple. The reader sees this when Jesus said to Matthew, “Follow me” (Matt 9:9), when Andrew and Simon immediately left their nets and “followed him” in Mark 1:18, and again with Peter, Simon, and John in Luke 5:11.

Much like discipleship in the Old Testament, discipleship in the New Testament is a peculiar hierarchical relationship in which a teacher who is typically older, wiser, and knowledgeable agrees to instruct a naturally younger, inexperienced, and unknowledgeable student. The student immerses his life into the life of the teacher to be transformed into the likeness of the teacher. Weder explains the commitment of discipleship in the New Testament:

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<sup>14</sup> Weder, “Disciple, Discipleship,” 2:207.

<sup>15</sup> Byrley, “Discipleship,” 177.

Discipleship means entering into a lifelong relationship with Jesus (cf. Mark 3:14, where the meaning of discipleship is given: “That they be with him”). This includes the participation in the uncertain life of a traveling preacher and then also in the suffering and death of the teacher (cf. Mark 10:39; 8:34). The disciple is not there merely to learn from the teacher but to share his whole life with him without reservation.<sup>16</sup>

With this in mind, we turn to the primary source of wisdom, God’s Word, from which the teacher drew to instruct his young pupil.

### **Discipleship as a Ministry to Teach Biblical Wisdom**

As a ministry of discipleship, teaching is concerned with biblical wisdom. Biblical wisdom involves understanding the paths that lead to life, shalom (peace), and flourishing, whether among humans, creation, cities, farms, families, schools, governments, or whatever else we can imagine.<sup>17</sup> The common word for wisdom in the Old Testament is *ḥokmâ*. It carries a range of meanings from knowledge and discernment to justice and social order. It can be used to describe moral judgment and skillful work. Teaching biblical wisdom seeks to instruct underserved children in how to be wise both morally and in developing tangible skills applicable to God’s created order. Biblical wisdom is an all-encompassing concept that intertwines itself in every aspect of life. Craig Bartholomew and Ryan O’Dowd explain, “Hebrew wisdom is not just about activities like sewing, farming, building or reasoning on their own. It is about how all such activities find their meaning in the whole of God’s created order. Mending a garment, cooking a meal and plowing a field are wise when they are in harmony with God’s order for the world.”<sup>18</sup>

Raymond Van Leeuwen gives four helpful categories that shape Hebrew wisdom. Hebrew wisdom is first and foremost grounded in the fear of the Lord (Job 1:1;

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<sup>16</sup> Weder, “Disciple, Discipleship,” 2:208.

<sup>17</sup> Craig G. Bartholomew and Ryan P. O’Dowd, *Old Testament Wisdom Literature: A Theological Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 23.

<sup>18</sup> Bartholomew and O’Dowd, *Old Testament Wisdom Literature*, 24.

28:28; Ps 111:10; Prov 1:7; 9:10). All of life is worship and service to Yahweh. The fear of the Lord is the key to knowing the Creator, who puts his image-bearer in the right position to know his creation and others with their divinely given possibilities and limits.<sup>19</sup>

Second, Hebrew wisdom is concerned with creational order. Wisdom is always aware of Yahweh's sovereignty as the wise Creator. God set the patterns of the planets, animals, and seasons as teaching examples for the pathways of wisdom he has built into the world order. Life has places for us to walk and ways for us to live just as much as there are places and ways that must be avoided.<sup>20</sup> Wisdom helps people to walk wisely and be fruitful in the world.

Third, Hebrew wisdom provides moral discernment for particular circumstances. Wisdom provides knowledge and discretion for circumstances or situations that creation or other sinful human beings create. Once again, Bartholomew and O'Dowd explain,

God has given wisdom to us to guide us through the unique challenges facing each of us each day of our lives—what we could refer to as historical particularity. Old Testament wisdom provides a bridge between the general order and the particular order for every event and every created object. Wisdom is both for kings, to lay down laws, make treaties and care for the oppressed; and it is also for individuals: where to go to school, who or whether to marry, what profession to seek, when to have children, whether to buy a house, how to love my neighbor.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, Hebrew wisdom is rooted in tradition. Wisdom is something that has been tested over time and found to work in the real world. It is a special knowledge that has been mediated generationally. Van Leeuwen clarifies,

Knowledge of generic patterns and their re-cognition in particular situations is mediated generationally, whether in a profession or the general affairs of life. Traditions permit humans to discern and deal with the “new” in terms of what was

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<sup>19</sup> Raymond Van Leeuwen, “Wisdom Literature,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 849.

<sup>20</sup> Bartholomew and O'Dowd, *Old Testament Wisdom Literature*, 25.

<sup>21</sup> Bartholomew and O'Dowd, *Old Testament Wisdom Literature*, 28.

learned in the past, and to relate particulars to the generic patterns within which they fall. The biblical image for tradition is the “way” or the “path” (Ps. 1; Prov. 1–9). A “way” is an enculturated means of negotiating the human journey through created reality. “Ways” have traditional staying power because they seem to work; they effectively get us from point A to B, sparing those who come later the onerous task of clearing a path for the first time.<sup>22</sup>

Children are to be taught biblical wisdom that is rooted in the fear of the Lord and concerned with God’s created order while providing moral and practical discernment that has been proven over time. Jesus provided the church a diversity of gifts for the purpose of unifying, equipping, and maturing the church into Christlikeness. Christian education desires to facilitate learning unto Christlikeness in the church, community, and home. To do this well, the church must orient its teaching ministry and content toward four educational discipleship aims: (1) equip the saints for the work of ministry; (2) edify the church body; (3) unify the church in the faith and knowledge of Christ; and (4) mature the church in discernment and proclamation.

### **Equip the Saints for the Work of Ministry (Eph 4:12)**

To equip the saints for the work of ministry is to prepare, condition, and train learners for service in the church, community, and home. The work of ministry here refers to gifted activity by Christians to build up the church. The church’s aim is to equip the saints in a way that helps them manifest their gifts and to offer guidance in how to use their gifts effectively in the church, community, and home (1 Cor 12:4–6; 1 Tim 4:14).<sup>23</sup>

### **Edify the Church Body (Eph 4:12)**

Spiritual edification is to build up and strengthen the faith of believers. God expects the church to strengthen and build up one another (Rom 15:2; Eph 4:29). God edifies his people by strengthening them through his Spirit and his Word (Acts 20:32;

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<sup>22</sup> Van Leeuwen, “Wisdom Literature,” 849.

<sup>23</sup> Charles H. Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians*, Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 114.

Eph 3:16). The church is also edified through the proper use of spiritual gifts (1 Cor 14:26), appointed church ministries (Eph 4:11–12), mutual love (Eph 4:1-516; 1 Th 5:11), and encouragement in the life of the church (Rom 1:12).

### **Unify the Church in the Faith and Knowledge of Christ (Eph 4:13)**

Catholicity (universality), holiness, apostolicity, and unity are the church’s four ancient attributes.<sup>24</sup> Unity in faith and knowledge expresses love for one another through commitment, mutual concern, concerted action, and harmony within the believing community. Knowledge comes from experiencing Jesus in the church, community, and home. The aim of educational ministry is to help the church maintain the unity of the faith in humility and love for one another as we seek to experience Jesus in the church, community, and home.

### **Mature the Church in Discernment and Proclamation (Eph 4:14–16)**

Equipping, edification, and unity are to move the church toward maturity in discernment and proclamation. When the church matures, it will be able to enjoy transparent relationships that speak truth in love to one another. Moreover, the church will be able to discern truth from error, wisdom from foolishness, and function in harmony together as it navigates our beautiful yet broken world.

## **Educational Discipleship Curriculum**

Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6a). For centuries, the church has used these words to represent three critical strands of biblical teaching found in both Old and New Testaments.<sup>25</sup> Discipleship is a Christian’s ongoing, ever-

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<sup>24</sup> Christopher W. Morgan, Stephen J. Wellum, and Robert A. Peterson, eds., *ESV Systematic Theology Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 1459.

<sup>25</sup> J. I. Packer, and Gary A. Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel: Building Believers the Old-Fashioned Way* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010), 89.



deepening response to the gospel: the Christian way of life in response to the truth (John 14:6).<sup>26</sup>

### **Truth (Believing)**

Truth is the way God has revealed himself in Jesus Christ. Truth is revealed in the Scripture and organized into sound doctrines and right theologies. Truth is to be taught so that it can be received, believed, and obeyed. Because man's heart is deceitfully wicked and hard with unbelief, the truth is easily rejected and man is lost. Man needs the Holy Spirit to remove the heart of stone and the veil of unbelief, regenerating the heart and giving it spiritual eyes through the new birth to Jesus as the truth.

### **Life (Abiding)**

Jesus is the only way that we have life with the Father. Jesus offers life to us by faith in his salvation work. When he ascended into heaven, he poured out his Spirit to commune with his people, empowering them to enjoy abundant life today. We first experience life through the gift of new birth, as wholly by grace we are made the children of God (John 1:12).<sup>27</sup>

### **Way (Being)**

Having our being in Christ is living in a manner worthy of the gospel and walking in a way that pleases him. Love for Jesus is expressed in obedience to his commands. Obedience to Christ ensures we keep fellowship with the Father as we joyfully advance his kingdom by making much of Jesus until the church, community, and home joyfully abide in Jesus.

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<sup>26</sup> John David Trentham, "Mere *Didaskalia*: The Vocational Calling and Mission of Christian Teaching Ministry," *Christian Education Journal* 18, no. 2 (March 2021): 225.

<sup>27</sup> Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 91.

According to Jesus, the greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your mind, heart, soul, and strength. The second is to love your neighbor as yourself (Matt 22:36–40). J. I. Packer and Gary Parrett write,

As with the Truth and the Life, Jesus incarnated this Way—he, and he only, fully, and consistently lived in obedience to these two greatest commandments. Furthermore, by walking in this Way faithfully, he has become for all who believe in him a new and living way into the Holy of Holies (Heb. 10:20). It is through the obedience of this one man (Rom. 5:19), in life and in death (Phil. 2:8), that we are enabled to know the Father and be in right relationship with him (John 14:6–9).<sup>28</sup>

In its scope and sequence, a Christian educational curriculum provides theologically robust content that communicates a clear vision of the worth of Jesus and inspires the heart toward joyful obedience. Christian educational curriculum seeks to help underserved learners believe the truth of Christ, as they learn to abide in the life of Christ, while they have their being in the way of Christ.

### **The Role and Nature of the Holy Spirit in Education**

God’s Spirit can equip teachers to apply pedagogical wisdom to instructing underserved children. The only way their hearts can be regenerated is through his Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the life source in the living work of teaching God’s inerrant and fully sufficient Word. Human teachers are merely vessels of opportunity for God to speak and communicate his lesson. In his sovereign power and wisdom, God uses redeemed, broken image-bearers to proclaim his Word.<sup>29</sup> Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for a student to graduate from a Christian school with a robust secular education but lacking God-honoring convictions. It is as if the Christian education offered to the learner is one of secularism with a veneer of Christianity.

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<sup>28</sup> Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 91.

<sup>29</sup> Michael J. Anthony, “Pneumatology and Christian Education,” in *A Theology for Christian Education*, ed. James R. Estep, Michael Anthony, and Gregg Allison (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), 171.

Christian educators who believe they can produce disciples of Christ under such a flawed philosophy of education have obviously lost sight of the role of the Holy Spirit in Christian education. The role of the Holy Spirit is to regenerate the heart, illuminate the mind, and transform the will of the learner. Apart from the Holy Spirit's work, there is no Christian education. However, before a learner can experience the grace of Christian education, the teacher must be equipped to teach God's revealed truth.

### **The Role of the Holy Spirit in Equipping Teachers**

In the Gospel of John, Jesus told his disciples that his hour had come and that he had to go away to the Father. One fear the disciples may have had was the loss of their rabbi, the one who taught them the truth of God. Jesus encouraged their hearts with the promise that he would send another teacher who would lead, guide, and direct them. In John 14:25–26, Jesus says, “I have spoken these things to you while I remain with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have told you.” Jesus promised his disciples that his Spirit would come with his authority to “teach them all things,” and remind them of the things Jesus taught them in his earthly ministry. What Jesus meant by “all things” was not the infinite knowledge of God but the full truth of the gospel centered in Jesus's life, death, and resurrection.<sup>30</sup> Although Jesus's promise of his Spirit was first given to his disciples, it was also promised to all who would put their faith in him.

Jesus promised his disciples in Acts 1:8 that the Holy Spirit would be poured out on them to empower them to testify. In fact, at Pentecost, one reads that all the

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<sup>30</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary*, vol. 4, *Peace in Storm (John 13–17)* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 1150.

disciples gathered in the room were baptized with his Spirit and proclaimed truth (Acts 2:4–6). The Spirit empowered people to proclaim the truth about Jesus to the nations.

Furthermore, in his letter to the Corinthian church, Paul speaks of the Holy Spirit equipping believers to teach. He explains that no one in their natural fallen state can understand spiritual truth even if it is staring them in the face (as Jesus was with Pilate) or written on the pages of Scripture. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 2:9–13,

As it is written, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him”—but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man’s spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is why we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.

Paul declares that God has revealed his truth by his Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a teacher. The Holy Spirit equips people to understand “what God has freely given us” and “spiritual truths.” Just as he equipped Jesus’s disciples and the human authors of the Scriptures to create a written account of God’s truth, so he equips all believers to understand and teach God’s truth as revealed in the Bible. Paul says we speak these truths so that others can know and understand through the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. Once again, James Montgomery Boice writes,

Here the ministry of the Holy Spirit as teacher is explained. It was exercised, in the first instance, when God revealed truth to the apostles, and they recorded it in what would later become canonized as the pages of the New Testament. It is then exercised, in the second instance, when this same Holy Spirit teaches us from the truths that they have recorded.<sup>31</sup>

The Holy Spirit equips the teacher to instruct students in God’s truth from the Scriptures and equips the students to understand the truth as it is taught.

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<sup>31</sup> Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 4:1159.

## **The Role and Nature of the Spirit-Empowered Teacher: Authoritative Guide**

The Spirit-empowered teacher is both an expert authority figure who commands the attention of his students and simultaneously is a multi-faceted guide who uses his knowledge and experience to direct the learner toward wisdom. Christian educators derive their authority from their knowledge of biblical wisdom and their ability to communicate that wisdom effectively. Daniel Estes notes, “The teacher in Proverbs 1–9 can speak with authority, because his superior knowledge of wisdom establishes his reliability. He does not claim authority based on his position, but his authority is derived from his expert knowledge of the tradition which he transmits to the learner.”<sup>32</sup>

There are several benefits to the teacher as an authority in the classroom. First, as an authority in the classroom, the teacher can discern what is to be taught and when it should be taught and protects those who are relatively elementary in their understanding of doctrine.<sup>33</sup> Second, the teacher establishes proper boundaries for students to explore understanding by discerning the needs of the learner and tailoring content appropriately. Finally, as an authority, the teacher is the primary active force in the classroom who can be trusted by the leadership and the church to teach appropriate doctrine and truth.

Christian teachers, however, are not just authoritative teachers in the classrooms. They are also trusted guides. The teacher cannot be the only active participant in the classroom. Effective teaching must allow the learner to actively engage in the learning process. Estes posits, “As a guide, the teacher has experience in life. The teacher communicates this superior understanding to the learner, but at the same time the

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<sup>32</sup> Daniel J. Estes, *Hear, My Son: Teaching and Learning in Proverbs 1–9*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 4 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 126.

<sup>33</sup> Estes, *Hear, My Son*, 127.

learner is given freedom to investigate life and to make decisions. The teacher provides a framework within which the learner can independently evaluate life's decisions."<sup>34</sup>

The wise teacher comes alongside a learner to guide them in the way of wisdom and lead them on straight paths (Prov 4:11). In Christian education, the teacher is an authoritative guide who is both an expert in biblical knowledge and a facilitator who can begin with a student as a novice and guide and even grow with the student as he or she becomes an authority. Therefore, if the teacher is a trusted authority who guides the learner in the classroom, then the teacher must also practice a virtuous life, living out that doctrine inside and outside the classroom.

Christian teachers must model Christian character by living exemplary lives of genuine Christian piety and faithfulness. Good Christian teachers communicate their seasoned knowledge of the Bible in humility, forsaking all arrogance (1 Cor 8:1). Christian teachers model for their students how all knowledge coheres to Christ (Col 1:17). They are undivided in their pursuit to help students understand how there is not a single fact, idea, or concept that escapes the Lordship of Christ or that is autonomous from the reality of Jesus. In submission to the Spirit, Christian educators must make it their aim to guide and direct students toward "taking every thought captive to the obedience to Christ" (2 Cor 10:5). Otherwise, Christian education becomes a means of creating learners with a veneer of Christian virtue or, in other words, idolaters (Rom 1:18–23).<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Estes, *Hear, My Son*, 130.

<sup>35</sup> Brad Green, "Theological and Philosophical Foundations," in *Shaping a Christian Worldview: The Foundations of Christian Higher Education*, ed. David S. Dockery and Gregory Alan Thornbury (Nashville: B&H, 2002), 68.

## The Role of the Holy Spirit in Regenerating Children

Christian education serves as one arm of God’s restorative and reconciling effort. It is a means by which the Holy Spirit uses the context of education to bring life via God’s Word to the heart of fallen learners. It may, therefore, be seen as a redemptive activity.<sup>36</sup>

George Knight contends that the most important component of the school is the learner.<sup>37</sup> The learner comes into the context of Christian education as an image-bearer whose heart is dead in its sin (Eph 2:1–3). In his fallen condition, he has no desire or ability to obey the commands of God fully. He is without hope and without God in this world.

God, however, promised through his prophet Ezekiel that he would give his people a new heart that would desire his ways and be able to obey him (Ezek 11:19–20). Jesus revealed to Nicodemus that one receives a new heart by being born again (John 3:3). Being born again is a work of regeneration. Gregg Allison defines regeneration as the mighty work of God through which unbelievers are given a new nature, that is, they are born again.<sup>38</sup> This new birth is a work of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5). The Holy Spirit gives spiritual life to a person, making them a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). As a new creation, a person is empowered to put off the old self and put on the new self, walking in a manner worthy of God (Eph 4:22–24).

For the learner to fully grasp the fruit of Christian education, the Holy Spirit must regenerate the heart, creating a solid foundation of spiritual growth. As Findley Edge states in Roy B. Zuck’s book, *Spirit-Filled Teaching*, “A personal experience of

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<sup>36</sup> George R. Knight, *Philosophy and Education: An Introduction in Christian Perspective*, 4th ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2006), 191.

<sup>37</sup> Knight, *Philosophy and Education*, 204.

<sup>38</sup> Gregg R. Allison, *50 Core Truths of the Christian Faith: A Guide to Understanding and Teaching Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2018), 226.

conversion is the only adequate foundation and the only significant motivation for Christian growth.”<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, if the teacher is not regenerated, then the instruction in the classroom is not particularly Christian. Zuck wisely notes, “Teaching, to be distinctly Christian, must be conducted by persons who have been redeemed through faith in Jesus Christ and thus have a personal relationship with him. Without the living reality of salvation through God’s grace, a teacher is not Christian, and his or her reaching is not Christian teaching in the truest sense.”<sup>40</sup>

The primary role of the Holy Spirit in Christian education is to regenerate the heart of fallen image-bearers. The Holy Spirit must work to make dead hearts alive in Christ so that they can have the appropriate desires and ability to receive God’s instruction for flourishing in this life and the life to come. Regeneration is the first step in Christian education to prepare the learner for illumination.

### **The Role of the Holy Spirit in Illuminating the Minds of Children**

The Holy Spirit not only regenerates the heart of the learner; he also illuminates the mind. Zuck defines illumination as “the work of the Spirit on the mind, enabling a person to understand the truth of God already revealed.”<sup>41</sup>

Jesus promised to send his Spirit to help the mind see the things of God. In John 14:26, Jesus says, “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have told you.” It must be noted that Jesus is speaking to his disciples, revealing that they will be equipped to tell

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<sup>39</sup> Findley B. Edge, *Teaching for Results* (Nashville: B&H, 1999), 10, quoted in Roy B. Zuck, *Spirit-Filled Teaching: The Power of the Holy Spirit in Your Ministry* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 5.

<sup>40</sup> Zuck, *Spirit-Filled Teaching*, 5.

<sup>41</sup> Zuck, *Spirit-Filled Teaching*, 42.



others the work of Christ and that this specific verse does not apply to all believers. The principles of illumination, however, apply to all believers.

Paul prays that the Father would give the Ephesians the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Jesus Christ and that the eyes of their hearts would be enlightened so that they may know the hope of his calling (Eph 1:1–18). To the Corinthian church, Paul says that only through the Spirit can we understand spiritual things (1 Cor 2:10–13). The Spirit of God was sent to testify of Jesus and guide us into all truth. Jesus promised, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth” (John 16:13).

To what, exactly, is the mind illumined? Sinclair Ferguson says that the mind can now grasp the kingdom of God. Ferguson explains that the Spirit’s work of radical renewal involves intellectual illumination: the kingdom of God, which before stood unrecognized, now becomes clearly visible.<sup>42</sup> The Spirit of God also illumines one’s mind to receive the Word of God as “wondrous instruction” (Ps 119:18) and as a light that brings understanding to the inexperienced (Ps 119:130). Regarding the Spirit’s role in illumination and the Word of God, John Calvin wrote, “Indeed, the Word of God is like the sun, shining upon all those to whom it is proclaimed, but with no effect among the blind. Now, all of us are blind by nature in this respect. Accordingly, it cannot penetrate our minds unless the Spirit, as the inner teacher, through his illumination makes entry for it.”<sup>43</sup>

Finally, it is the Spirit of God who opens the eyes of one’s heart to receive God’s truth and not see it as foolishness. Looking back at 1 Corinthians 1:18, Paul says that to those who are blind, the Word of God is foolish. One chapter later, he explains,

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<sup>42</sup> Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, Contours of Christian Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 121.

<sup>43</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1:541).

“But the person without the Spirit does not receive what comes from God’s Spirit, because it is foolishness to him; he is not able to understand it since it is evaluated spiritually” (1 Cor 2:14). But those who have the mind of Christ—his Spirit—can evaluate God’s truth and receive it (1 Cor 2:15–18).

The role the Holy Spirit plays in Christian education is to illuminate the mind of the learner to see the kingdom of God, understand his truth, and embrace it. Or, as Zuck eloquently states, “Illumination is the Spirit’s work, enabling Christians to discern the meaning of the message and to welcome and receive it as from God.”<sup>44</sup> With the heart empowered by the Spirit and the mind illuminated, the Spirit also works to transform the will of the learner through Christian education.

### **The Role of the Holy Spirit in Teaching Unregenerate Children**

In the parable of the wheat and the tares, Jesus reminds us that the unregenerate will mingle with the regenerate until the final judgment separates them (Matt 13:24–33). Although the field in this parable likely refers to the world, experience proves that the institutional church is filled with both believers and non-believers. Just as it is in the church, so it is in the Sunday school or the Christian educational classroom. Unregenerate children will gather with regenerate children in the ministry of Christian education. If the child is unregenerate, is there any value for them to be in a Christian educational ministry? If there is, what is the role of the Holy Spirit in teaching unregenerate children?

The value in unregenerate children being involved in Christian educational ministry is that they receive the Holy Spirit’s work of common grace. Common grace is the sovereign favor God grants to all his image bearers regardless of their election. It is

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<sup>44</sup> Zuck, *Spirit-Filled Teaching*, 44.

common in that it is universal and different from saving grace, which is God's particular favor granted only to believers for the purpose of their salvation.<sup>45</sup>

The Bible teaches that common grace is the gift of God's goodness to all his creation. The psalmist says, "The Lord is good to all, His mercy of over all he has made" (Ps 145:9). Jesus says the Father "makes the sun rise on the evil and the good, he sends the rain on the just and the unjust" (Matt 5:45). Jesus also says, "But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:35–36).

Louis Berkhof says that when we speak of common grace, "we have in mind, either those general operations of the Holy Spirit whereby He, without renewing the heart, exercises such a moral influence on man through His general or special revelation, that sin is restrained, order is maintained in social life, and civil righteousness is promoted."<sup>46</sup> Berkhof's definition is helpful in that it provides four benefits of common grace to natural man, benefits that are also found in the Christian educational ministry toward unregenerate hearts.

### **Common Grace and Moral Influence**

Common grace is the reason why the unregenerate can retain some sense of moral truth or appreciate what is good, right, just, and beautiful. Paul says that when natural man acts according to God's law, they show that man has the work of the law written on their hearts. Their consciences confirm this. Their competing thoughts either accuse or even excuse them (Rom 2:15). Although it does not lead them to salvation, the law that is written on their hearts can move the unregenerate to form good religious values. Paul stood among the Gentile pagan Athenians, observing they were

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<sup>45</sup> Allison, *50 Core Truths of the Christian Faith*, 204–7.

<sup>46</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1938), 442–44.

religious in every respect (Acts 17:22). By common grace, all of God's fallen image bearers know the rudimentary values of right and wrong and are held morally accountable to follow the directives of their conscience.<sup>47</sup>

Teaching an unregenerate child in a Christian classroom places the child in the general revelation of the Lord. They are exposed to morals and values that please God in the hope that that the Holy Spirit will awaken them to faith in Christ. Furthermore, although moral influence from Christian religion cannot transform the heart of stone into a heart of flesh by the renewing their mind, it can reform their life to be able flourish by living inside the boundaries of God's moral wisdom of right and wrong. Wayne Grudem rightly says, "This inward sense of right and wrong that God gives to all people means that they will frequently approve of moral standards that reflect many of the moral standards in Scripture. Even those who are given up to the most base sin, Paul says, 'Know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die' (Rom. 1:32)."<sup>48</sup> Unregenerate children will flourish in a Christian classroom because the Holy Spirit, through the means of common grace, exposes the conscience of the child to moral standards that help them flourish.

### **Common Grace and Restraining Sin**

Just as the Holy Spirit provides moral influence, he also restrains sin. God hates sin, and at times, as Genesis 6 proves, when sin runs rampant, he will put boundaries on sin, even flooding the world. Common grace keeps sin in check to preserve the common good of society. Berkhof notes, "Through the operation of common grace sin is restrained in the lives of individuals and in society. The element of corruption that entered the life of the human race is not permitted, for the present, to accomplish its

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<sup>47</sup> Allison, *50 Core Truths of the Christian Faith*, 204–7.

<sup>48</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 804–8.

disintegrating work.”<sup>49</sup> Karl Bauman elaborates on the effect of common grace in restraining sin:

Given the sin nature, any degree of human obedience to this command is predicated on the extension of common grace by God. Without the extension of common grace, human beings would be subject to the destructive consequences of sin. In essence, human beings, as children of Satan (cf. John 8:44), would seek to engage in the very processes of their father, the thief of John 10:10, who seeks to steal, kill, and destroy. The result would be behaviors, both individually and culturally, that would be divisive and destructive—to individuals, to nature, and to others.<sup>50</sup>

Children are born sinners. If they are left to themselves, they will seek behaviors, both individually and culturally, that will be divisive and destructive to individuals, nature, and others. Common grace helps unregenerate children receive some practices and influences of the Holy Spirit in connection with the gospel that result in experiencing the power and glory of the gospel that, on the one hand, restrains sinful behaviors in the classroom and, on the other hand, does not result in genuine and lasting conversion.<sup>51</sup>

### **Common Grace and Maintaining Social Life**

God gave man the right to subdue and have dominion over all the earth (Gen 1:27). With the right to subdue the earth, God grants a quantity of intelligence to grasp the wisdom of his creational order. Common grace allows all mankind to have the drive and ability to investigate, discover, and exploit the earth for the common good of humanity and maintaining social life. Wayne Grudem notes, “The common grace of God in the intellectual realm results in an ability to grasp truth and distinguish it from error, and to experience growth in knowledge that can be used in the investigation of the

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<sup>49</sup> Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 442–44.

<sup>50</sup> Eddie Karl Baumann, *Worldview as Worship: The Dynamics of a Transformative Christian Education* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 254.

<sup>51</sup> Richard C. Gamble, *The Whole Counsel of God*, vol. 1, *God’s Mighty Acts in the Old Testament* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009), 236–37.

universe and in the task of subduing the earth. This means that *all science and technology carried out by non-Christians is a result of common grace.*<sup>52</sup>

Common grace is a means God uses to build beautiful cultures even though they are inherently pagan. As Curt Daniel says, “God gives good talents to bad sinners.”<sup>53</sup> This is why an unregenerate artist can paint a beautiful portrait or an atheist scientist can discover a great wonder in medicine. Not all builders of the Old Testament temple were Israelites, nor were all Israelites regenerate. But God enabled both to do the job and to contribute to maintaining social life.

Unregenerate children are capable of being developed to provide good things for our culture. An unregenerate child brought up in a Christian classroom can be gifted a significant measure of skill in disciplines of art and music as well as athletics, cooking, writing, and so forth, all bringing beauty and honor while maintaining social life in the culture and the classroom.<sup>54</sup>

### **Common Grace and Civil Righteousness**

Finally, common grace promotes civil righteousness. All authority is God’s authority (Rom 13:1). All forms of human government are the fruit of common grace. Berkhof notes that “common grace enables man to perform what is generally called *justitia civilis*, that is, that which is right in civil or natural affairs.”<sup>55</sup> Civil Righteousness maintains law and order, providing justice for victims of evil. Human government is a gift of God that serves the good of people, as the avenger who carries out the wrath of God on the wrongdoer (Rom 13:4). Civil righteousness also includes corporations,

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<sup>52</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 804–8.

<sup>53</sup> Curt Daniel, *The History and Theology of Calvinism* (Darlington, Durham: Evangelical Press, 2019), 577.

<sup>54</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 804–8.

<sup>55</sup> Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 442–44.

educational institutions, nonprofit organizations, and countless other institutions that seek to promote justice, peace, and alleviate the burden of the consequence of sin on mankind. All of these function to bring some measure of good to human beings, and all are expressions of God's common grace.<sup>56</sup>

A Christian classroom endowed with the common grace of God allows the unregenerate child to not only learn of God's civility, justice, righteousness, peace, and commitment to help his image bearers flourish in a broken world, but they also get to experience it as the teacher instructs, manages her classroom, resolves conflict, and upholds the dignity of each student made in the image of God.

Herman Bavinck affirmed human responsibility for culture and creation in the context of the Creator's ultimate sovereignty and Christ's redemption of all things. Science and scholarship, art and politics, domestic and public life all have their basis in common grace. Such grace sustains the creation order even while all things await renewal by God's salvific grace in Christ.<sup>57</sup> Unregenerate children receive common grace from the Holy Spirit in Christian educational ministry whereby they experience his moral, social, and civil blessing and the granting of gifts and restraining of sin that help the child live wisely and flourish.

### **The Role of the Holy Spirit in Transforming Children**

Wayne Grudem defines sanctification as a progressive work of God and man that makes us more and more free from sin and more like Christ in our actual lives.<sup>58</sup> Over the course of one's new life in Christ, the Holy Spirit works to transform that person into the image of Christ (2 Cor 3:18). The Spirit is able, in cooperation with man,

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<sup>56</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 804–88.

<sup>57</sup> Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, "Herman Bavinck's 'Common Grace,'" *Calvin Theological Journal*, 24, no. 1 (April 1989): 35–65.

<sup>58</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 926.

to transform the way he thinks and feels, which leads to imitating Jesus (Phil 4:8–9; Col 3:18).

Jesus does not leave his disciples to conform to his image on their own. He provides the power of his Spirit to regenerate their hearts and sanctify their lives. He does this progressively over time, using, in part, relationships in the context of community.

Ferguson connects the act of regeneration to the necessity of the transformation of the will:

Regeneration involves liberation of the will from its bondage in a nature dominated by sin. Man is incapable of entering the kingdom of God without regeneration. It follows that a central element in regeneration must be the Spirit's empowering of man's will in a kingdom-orientated way. Before regeneration he *will not* come to the light (Jn. 3:5, 20). Now he comes to the light; indeed, he will not refuse it.<sup>59</sup>

The Spirit empowers the heart and illuminates the mind toward action. The Holy Spirit transforms the life of the learner by renewing his mind so that he can discern God's good and pleasing and perfect will (Rom 12:1–3). The fruit of the Holy Spirit governing the heart and mind of a learner is a transformed life that consistently engages love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control toward its neighbor. With the help of the Spirit, now the learner “meditates on the wonders of God” (Ps 119:27) and seeks to “keep his law” (119:34), obey it wholeheartedly, and “understand his statutes so that [he] can live” (119:125, 144).

The will of man is governed by the heart and mind. Once the will is free from the bondage of sinful nature, it is empowered to turn from sin and walk in a manner worthy of the gospel. Understanding God's Word helps the learner to live in the light and not fellowship in darkness. The transformed life of the learner is proof that the Spirit of God has empowered his heart and illuminated his mind toward a saving relationship with Jesus. As Paul says, “For as many as are led by the Spirit, they are the sons of God” (Rom 8:14).

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<sup>59</sup> Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, 123.



Apart from the regenerating, illuminating, and transforming work of the Holy Spirit, Christian education cannot exist. The role of the Holy Spirit in Christian education is to empower the heart of the learner to have life in Christ, for dead people can learn nothing. Once the heart is made alive, the Spirit illuminates the mind to see, understand, and receive God's inerrant, authoritative, and fully sufficient Word.

In this context, Christian education has the life it needs to instruct God's way of flourishing with the hope that it will be received and acted upon. Those who are led by the Spirit will prove they belong to God by the way they utilize their Christian education in the world, for those who say they walk in the light must shine in the darkness (1 John 1:6). Those who have regenerated hearts, illuminated minds, and wills transformed by the Holy Spirit will not settle for a veneer of Christianity but will use their Christian education as a means of worship as they fulfill their calling in work.

### **Role and Nature of the Spirit-Empowered Learner: Humble Receivers**

The Spirit-empowered learner is a humble receiver of wisdom who intentionally responds and values wisdom enough to integrate it into their everyday life. Without the regenerating, illuminating, and transforming work of the Spirit, the learner would not have the humility and open mind to receive, respond, and integrate wisdom in his life.

#### **The Humble Learner Is a Receiver of Wisdom**

Proverbs describes the learner as one who "receives prudent instruction in righteousness" (Prov 1:3). The learner also "accepts the words of the teacher" with the intent to store up his commands in his heart (Prov 2:1). The learner also values the words of the teacher as if they were gold or silver (Prov 8:10). Solomon commands his son to "pay attention to my wisdom, listen well to my insight" (Prov 5:1). To learn wisdom, the learner must be willing to receive wisdom with an open mind.

The learner must also have a humble heart. Solomon says to his son, “When arrogance comes, disgrace follows, but with humility comes wisdom” (Prov 11:2). He also says, “The fear of the Lord is the instruction for wisdom, and before honor comes humility” (Prov 15:33). To have an open mind, the heart must be humble enough to realize the need for wisdom. Humility is the right posture of the learner in his role in education. To become wise, individuals must have open minds; they must be able to stand before life and learn from it. Some people are incapable of learning, not because they lack intelligence, but because they lack humility.<sup>60</sup>

### **The Humble Receiver Responds with Wisdom**

The learner must process biblical wisdom and move to apply it to his life through obedience. The learner must discern how to turn his attention, obedience, love, and commitment away from folly and toward a philosophy of life that revolves around the fear of Yahweh. This requires the learner to be active, not passive. The learner intentionally responds to wisdom and truth as an active participant in the learning process, not simply a passive observer.<sup>61</sup> The teacher instructs the learner to “keep your father’s command, and don’t reject your mother’s teaching. Always bind them to your heart; tie them around your neck” (Prov 6:20–21). The expectation is that the learner will take responsibility, rightly receive the wisdom, and then act in accordance with the wisdom.

### **The Humble Receiver Integrates Wisdom**

The learner has competently embraced wisdom when he has been able to integrate it into his beliefs and value system. Wisdom has truly assimilated into the learner’s values when it is rightly applied to everyday life in the fear of Yahweh. The

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<sup>60</sup> Estes, *Hear, My Son*, 136.

<sup>61</sup> Estes, *Hear, My Son*, 138.

goal of wisdom is the fear of Yahweh. The good life is living in a way that pleases Yahweh. As Estes notes, “In order to assimilate wisdom, the learner must organize all of life according to the fear of Yahweh. This commitment integrates every aspect of personal existence into a coherent philosophy of life predicated on wisdom.”<sup>62</sup>

### **The Role of the Church in Education**

The church is the context for discipleship. An overhead view of the church’s ministry shows that discipleship is largely a community experience. Of the 262 times the word “disciple” occurs in the New Testament, 239 usages are in the plural form. Furthermore, Jesus disciplined his followers in community groups of three, twelve, seventy, and even five hundred.<sup>63</sup>

Paul assumed that individual Christians would grow in the context of the church community. Paul wrote to the Corinthian church that he hoped they would increase in their faith (2 Cor 10:15). To the Colossian church, he gave encouragement to bear good fruit and grow in the knowledge of God (Col 1:10). He desired that the Ephesian church “grow into the head of this Christ” (Eph 4:15). He assured them that Christ had gifted the church for the work of this ministry, building up the body of Christ, attaining the unity of the faith and knowledge of God, maturing to the measure of the fullness of Christ, and being able to speak truth in love as the church grew up in every way into Christ, who is the head (Eph 4:10–15). In short, the church is the place where believers would develop meaningful relationships and share in life’s experiences to disciple one another.

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<sup>62</sup> Estes, *Hear, My Son*, 141.

<sup>63</sup> Ed Smither, “The Church’s Work of Evangelism and Discipleship,” in *Lexham Survey of Theology*, ed. Brannon Ellis and Mark Ward (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), n.p., Logos.

## The Church Provides Meaningful Relationships

Being made in the image of God allows human beings to have meaningful relationships with him and one another. In Genesis 2, God made it clear that Adam was alone and needed someone like him. Taking a rib from Adam, God fashioned Eve, creating human relationship. Likewise, when God created Adam and Eve and told them to be fruitful and multiply (Gen 1:28), he desired to create community, not individual relationships connecting independently with himself.<sup>64</sup> The need for man to be in community expresses the need for meaningful relationships. Dru Johnson explains,

God does not “create” (bara) or “form” (asah) the woman, but rather “constructs” (banah) her from him. Like the dirtling who was taken from the dirt, the woman is referred to as the one taken “from the man” (Gen 2:23). . . . According to the story, the dirtling needed something more suitable to him than merely other “living creatures” that were also taken from the dirt. He needed a fitted mate and it seems that Yahweh Elohim wanted him to recognize that she was the suitable mate because she was taken from him. The tension in the story is thus relieved when we hear the man’s eureka, “At last! This one is bone of my bones” (Gen 2:23). . . . When he discovers her, he discovers community.<sup>65</sup>

The writer of Ecclesiastes makes the point that meaningful relationships are essential in living a meaningful life. The Preacher says in Ecclesiastes 4:7–12 (ESV),

Again, I saw vanity under the sun: one person who has no other, either son or brother, yet there is no end to all his toil, and his eyes are never satisfied with riches, so that he never asks, “For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?” This also is vanity and an unhappy business.

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

God made meaningful relationships to help his image bearers support one another in the fear of the Lord. According to the Preacher, meaningful relationships are

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<sup>64</sup> Dru Johnson, *The Universal Story: Genesis 1–11*, Transformative Word (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 39.

<sup>65</sup> Johnson, *The Universal Story*, 40.

productive, helpful, emotionally comforting, and protective.<sup>66</sup> It is not hard to see how meaningful relationships have an organic place inside instructing underserved children. Using Genesis 2:22–23 and Ecclesiastes 4:7–12 as a guide, we see that meaningful relationships are those that are communal in nature and exhibit characteristics of being productive, helpful, emotionally comforting, and protective toward one another.

The Bible commands us to love our neighbors. To love your neighbor is to invest in meaningful relationships experienced in the life spheres of the church, community, and home. God established the home in the garden of Eden with Adam and Eve and gave them the mandate to “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen 1:28). The church was later established at Pentecost when God poured out his Spirit (Acts 2). The community is simply life lived outside the institution of the church and the home, consisting of society and culture.

### **The Church Provides Shared Life Experiences**

When Jesus began his ministry, he immediately built a community of twelve disciples. He called them to follow him for three years of his earthly life. They walked with Jesus, had meals with Jesus, went to weddings and funerals with Jesus, and experienced his death and resurrection. In short, they shared life experiences with Jesus.

The Bible calls for Christians to share life together as they joyfully advance the kingdom of God by making much of Jesus (Matt 6:32; 28:19–20). In Acts 2:44–47, the church shared life together by “attending the temple together” and having “all things in common.” They sold their possessions and belongings and distributed the proceeds to all, “as any had need.” Luke also says, “Day by day they broke bread in their homes,” and the community looked upon the church with favor (Acts 2:47).

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<sup>66</sup> Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, New American Commentary, vol. 14 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 308.

In the life of the church, believers are to invest themselves into the lives of other believers. Paul shows this investment when he encourages the church in Galatia to share life together by bearing each other's burdens (Gal 6:2). Jesus does the same thing when he tells his disciples to take seriously their role in pursuing a straying brother from the faith (Matt 18:15–20). Stuart Weber explains that in the context of helping a brother who has strayed,

the relationship between the two brothers also implies that there is a prior history between the two, through which a spirit of trust and acceptance has developed. Therefore, effective church discipline requires an investment before the first step. We must be involved in one another's lives—sharing life experiences, showing trust and transparency, learning one another's nonverbal language, priorities, dreams, and fears. Our successful involvement in the Father's pursuit of the straying brother depends on our prior investment in the relationship.<sup>67</sup>

Shared life experience is inviting someone else into the sphere of your life, developing trust and transparency to live and help alleviate the burden of living in a broken world. For underserved children whose world is unstable and discombobulated, the church provides a stable community in which to develop meaningful relationships and have positive shared life experiences.

### **Conclusion**

Although secular strategies can be helpful in equipping educators to teach underserved children, only Christians possess the necessary spiritual resources to disciple underserved children holistically through the ministry of teaching. In the discombobulated world of underserved children, God provides a holistic solution to their complex needs. God provides his resources through a framework of discipleship, the power of his Holy Spirit, and the community of his church.

God's method of discipleship, the power of his Spirit, and the fellowship of his people offer underserved children clarity, stability, and an opportunity to flourish in the

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<sup>67</sup> Stuart K. Weber, *Matthew*, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 291.

abundant life of Jesus. To children who have felt unsafe, dysregulated, disconnected, and devalued, his Word, Spirit, and church offer them respite, routine, community, and the love of Christ that surpasses all understanding. Underserved children find the space and means by which Jesus fellowships with his people, and his people enjoy his affections through partnering together, bonding in unity and Spirit, and putting each other's interests above their own. Moreover, Jesus says that underserved children are to enjoy meaningful relationships and shared life experiences in the church.

Children have always held a place in Jesus's kingdom. When his disciples asked about the kingdom of God, Jesus called a child and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 18:1–3). When the disciples refused to let children come to Christ, Jesus rebuked his disciples and said, "Leave the children alone, and don't try to keep them from coming to Me, because the kingdom of heaven is made up of people like this" (Matt 19:14). When God fulfills the promised kingdom in Isaiah, he says, "All your children shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children" (Isa 54:13). Therefore, the church is to both train and equip Spirit-empowered teachers to serve underserved children through the discipleship of education and pursue underserved children with the mandate of the Great Commission to give them abundant life in Christ Jesus.

## CHAPTER 3

### THEORETICAL, PRACTICAL, AND HISTORICAL ISSUES RELATED TO THE PROJECT

Finding success in the classroom can be difficult for any child. But for the child who suffers poverty, substance abuse, a broken family dynamic, and/or a learning disability, success can seem almost impossible. The burden of their success does not lie solely on their circumstances. The progressive educational theory that dominates the landscape of public schools and after-school programs is proving to be too problematic for underserved children. Additionally, aside from its philosophical flaws, progressivism is not conducive to a working partnership with the parents and families who suffer from the above difficulties. That is why Christians who teach underserved children must embrace an ecclesiastical perennialism that utilizes differentiated learning strategies coupled with temperament-based classroom management and a robust parental involvement framework.

#### **Progressive Educational Theory**

Progressive educational theory is the dominant educational theory today in most educational settings, from public schools to after-school programs. It was heavily influenced by the major intellectual ideas of John Dewey, Sigmund Freud, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The theory came about as a response to traditionalism, which valued formal methods of instruction, mental learning, and the literary classics of Western



civilization.<sup>1</sup> In the opinion of a progressive, traditionalism stifled the learner's mind with rote knowledge that was abstractly administered by an authoritarian teacher.

There are six basic principles of progressive educational theory: (1) the classroom is child-centered; (2) children are naturally inclined to learn; (3) the teacher is a facilitator of the child's learning process; (4) the classroom is a microcosm of the world; (5) the daily instruction in the classroom needs to focus on problem solving versus rote learning; and (6) abstract teaching methods and promoting cooperation and democratic values are preferred over individualism and competition. Given that the school is a microcosm of the world, the teacher in the classroom is more of a guide, and because we live in a democratic society, the structure and atmosphere around the learning environment should reflect the same values.

### **Progressive Educational Theory Is Problematic**

Although there is value to some of the principles of progressive educational theory, there are some profound problems with the theory. First, the theory was born from humanistic naturalism. Humanistic naturalism denies the existence of God and views human beings as neutrally moral and the center of life. Second, its humanistic worldview has a skewed anthropology. According to progressive educators, human beings are morally neutral and basically good people with natural intrinsic motivation to learn. The theory succumbs to postmodern relativism, which leads to confusion and disorderliness. Progressivism offers no intellectual boundaries, nor does it provide a proper foundation to build one's intellectual house. Without the existence of God, man is left to conjure up his own truth that fits his reality with the goal of self-actualization. Underserved children do not need self-actualization. They need absolute truth to both

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<sup>1</sup> George R. Knight, *Philosophy and Education: An Introduction in Christian Perspective*, 4th ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2006), 115.

inform their identity as valued image-bearers and explain their broken but redeemable reality.

Progressive educational theory cannot offer a child a holistic education because it functions out of a worldview that denies God's existence and has a deficient view of mankind. In effect, progressives do not operate with a proper understanding of the world and will struggle to provide healthy robust education to children, especially those who are underserved. Ecclesiastical perennialism coupled with differentiated learning strategies provides the best opportunity for underserved children to enjoy a holistic education.

### **Perennial Educational Philosophy**

Perennialism literally means "everlasting." It holds that there are eternal absolute truths that must be searched for and understood if one is going to live the good life. Perennialism was the response to progressivism in America and was established in the 1930s by men such as Robert Maynard Hutchins and Mortimer J. Adler. Fearing the progressive movement was eradicating critical thinking and the moral fabric of society, perennialism sought to move education forward by looking to the past.

Perennialism finds its origins in Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. Aristotle was a realist, believing that everything that was real or not in the abstract of the mind nor ordered by the mind but in the world, could be known through the senses and through observation. Additionally, Aristotle sought to understand what all things have in common. He assumed everything had its own essence. Thomas Aquinas, on the other hand, was more curious as to how things existed. If one knows how they exist, one can learn more about who they are.

Although very different from each other, both men held a theistic worldview. Whereas Aristotle saw God as a supreme outside force, Aquinas believed in the one true God, the maker of heaven and earth. From the roots of Aristotle and Aquinas,

perennialism developed a metaphysical worldview that on one hand sees the natural world open to reason, but on the other hand recognizes the sub-realm that is experienced with intuition, revelation, and faith. One can explore the natural world with the scientific method but cannot use the scientific method to understand spiritual matters.

Perennialism holds that the nature of the universe is permanent and unchanging.<sup>2</sup> Through the lens of the scientific method, intuition, and revelation, we can know what is real. And because intuition can lead to ultimate truth, education must make the effort to properly develop right intuition.<sup>3</sup>

Thomas Aquinas believed that God has revealed himself to mankind through the intellect. Perennialism is concerned with learning how to flourish as a rational human being. To this end, perennialism views God as the source of all authority and discipline. God provides the wisdom needed to live the good life, a balanced life, and a flourishing life. Education is the means to obtaining that wisdom.

### **Six Principles of Perennialism**

George Knight organizes perennialism's core values into six core pre-suppositions about human learning.<sup>4</sup> First, in the same vein as Aristotle, perennialists believe all human beings are rational animals. Of all the species on earth, only human beings have the capacity for rational thought. The reason one does not find apes building beautiful architecture or debating the sanctity of life is because they lack the proper intellect. Robert Hutchins concurred, saying, "One thing is essential to becoming human,

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<sup>2</sup> Knight, *Philosophy and Education*, 52–53.

<sup>3</sup> Michael J. Anthony and Warren S. Benson, *Exploring the History and Philosophy of Christian Education*, Principles for the 21st Century (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 398–99.

<sup>4</sup> Knight, *Philosophy and Education*, 116.

and that is learning to use the mind.”<sup>5</sup> Human reasoning can discover and understand absolute truth.

The second core pre-supposition in perennialism is that human nature is universally consistent; therefore, education should be the same for everyone.<sup>6</sup> Every human being is endowed with the ability to reason. Therefore, every human being should be taught in the same manner. Once again, Hutchins notes,

Every man has a function as a man. The function of a citizen or a subject may vary from society to society, and the system of training, or adaptation, or instruction, or meeting immediate needs may vary with it. But the function of a man as man is the same in every age and in every society, since it results from his nature as a man. The aim of an educational system is the same in every age and in every society where such a system can exist: it is to improve man as man.<sup>7</sup>

The third core pre-supposition in perennialism is that knowledge is universally consistent; therefore, there are certain basic subjects that should be taught to all people.<sup>8</sup> Knight also notes that knowledge is what is agreed upon and that educational systems should not deal with opinion, which is subject to change, but with knowledge that can lead someone to eternal truth.<sup>9</sup> This is why perennialists do not value what interests the child in the present or the current fads in learning embraced by educational professionals. The child must learn to understand the essential truths of the world and learn to reason so that they can better relate to their fellow human beings, thus creating a more suitable social order. This particular point fits well within the principles of biblical wisdom.

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<sup>5</sup> Robert M. Hutchins, *The Learning Society* (New York: Praeger, 1969), 114, quoted in Knight, *Philosophy & Education*, 117.

<sup>6</sup> Knight, *Philosophy and Education*, 117.

<sup>7</sup> Robert M. Hutchins, *The Conflict in Education in a Democratic Society* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953), 68.

<sup>8</sup> Knight, *Philosophy and Education*, 117.

<sup>9</sup> Knight, *Philosophy and Education*, 118.

The fourth core pre-supposition in perennialism is that the subject matter, not the child, should be at the center of the educational endeavor.<sup>10</sup> If eternal truth is what offers the student a balanced life and a life that flourishes, then the subject matter that helps the child obtain that truth must be central in education. Perennialists believe that the ancients understood this best and so maintain that curriculum should be geared toward classic literature, languages, mathematics, natural science, philosophy, and the fine arts. Furthermore, disciplining the mind through rote memory, drill exercises, reading, computation are most important in developing the intellect. Additionally, reason learned through logic, grammar, and rhetoric is also vital.

The fifth pre-supposition in perennialism is that the great works of the past are a repository of knowledge and wisdom that has stood the test of time and is relevant in our day.<sup>11</sup> The child must learn from works that have stood the test of time, books that have been valued in varying civilizations and cultures. These books develop the intellect for critical thinking and wise creativity. Once again, like biblical wisdom, perennialism values tradition.

The final pre-supposition in perennialism is that the educational experience is preparation for life rather than a real-life experience.<sup>12</sup> The school does not have the capacity to truly reflect the variables of life. It can help the underdeveloped minds into mature intellects that can flourish in society, no matter the child's future vocation.

### **Ecclesiastical Perennialism**

Ecclesiastical perennialism is the church's adaption of secular perennialism. Although Christians see the benefit of perennialism as a philosophy, they recognize some obvious problems as it relates to the Christian worldview. For instance, human beings are

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<sup>10</sup> Knight, *Philosophy and Education*, 118.

<sup>11</sup> Knight, *Philosophy and Education*, 119.

<sup>12</sup> Knight, *Philosophy and Education*, 119.

not merely rational animals, as Aristotle proposed. We are spiritual beings made in the image of God (Gen 1:26–27). As his image bearers, God has endowed every human being with the ability to reason and the intellect to explore and flourish in his creation. Also, God has created and governs the world to function in a consistent manner. Perennialism’s commitments to reason, creational order, and tradition marry well with the Bible’s framework of discipleship and instruction of wisdom.

Christians who have adopted perennialism as an educational philosophy understand that reason by itself falls short of a holistic education that leads to a flourishing life. Instead, they stress that both faith and reason are developed in a relationship with God. Christians emphasize that the Word of God is the final divine authority, the lens through which to view creation, and the source of wisdom that leads to eternal truth.

Ecclesiastical perennialism reflects the principles of Luke 2:52, which describes Jesus as a young boy who “kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.” With Jesus as the exemplar, ecclesiastical perennialism seeks to help learners grow in wisdom (cognitive) and stature (physical) and in favor with God (spiritual) and men (social). As Knight notes, “The [ecclesiastical] perennialist sees the need for students to grow in a balanced perspective within each of these important areas. Salvation is not the result of ministry but a means to the end of discipleship.”<sup>13</sup>

### **The Ecclesiastical Perennial Teacher and Student**

The role of the ecclesiastical teacher is to be the authority who disciplines the child’s mind toward reason and his heart toward faith. To teach the child to use critical thinking is paramount, while at the same time, the teacher must use biblical wisdom to help the child see themselves in the life of Christ, flourishing in his kingdom now as they

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<sup>13</sup> Anthony and Benson, *Exploring the History and Philosophy of Christian Education*, 399.

await his kingdom to come. The educator sees the mind like a well; the answers to life's questions can be drawn from its supply of clear pure truth.<sup>14</sup>

Likewise, the student is seen as a natural being in the quest for truth and knowledge, but at the same time, the child is a spiritual being. The student exercises his desire for knowledge and faith so he can come to know God. The educational institution provides the space to bring these two desires together through an integrated blend of curricular and co-curricular activities.<sup>15</sup>

### **Differentiated Learning Strategies**

One argument a progressive teacher would make against perennialism is that underserved children would not be able to flourish in a strictly perennial environment. Perennialism is too rigid for their impaired learning and offers little grace for their trauma-driven behavior.

While it is true that perennialism's methods could be too robust for underserved children and the complex problems they bring to the classroom, the theory can still be helpful to underserved children. The principles of perennialism are robust enough to handle underserved children and flexible enough to utilize differentiated learning strategies.

Differentiated instruction is modifying one's content to fit the student's needs. Carol Ann Tomlinson, Professor of Educational Leadership, Foundations, and Policy at the University of Virginia, defines differentiated instruction as

an approach whereby teachers adjust their curriculum and instruction to maximize the learning of all students: average learners, English language learners, struggling students, students with learning disabilities, and gifted and talented students. Differentiated instruction is not a single strategy but rather a framework that

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<sup>14</sup> Michael S. Lawson, *The Professor's Puzzle: Teaching in Christian Academics* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015), 13.

<sup>15</sup> Anthony and Benson, *Exploring the History and Philosophy of Christian Education*, 398.

teachers can use to implement a variety of strategies, many of which are evidence-based.<sup>16</sup>

There are three options for differentiating instruction for any curricular area: modifying the content, modifying the process of learning, and modifying the end product.<sup>17</sup> Differentiated instruction pays attention to the student's needs. If a child is struggling, the teacher adjusts the method of instruction or the content. For example, using small teaching strategies such as predictive, retrieval, and interleaving activities could be a differentiated strategy to help students retain information.

### **Small Teaching as a Strategy for Differentiated Learning**

James Lang defines small teaching as “an approach that seeks to spark positive change in higher education through small but powerful modifications to our course design and teaching practices.”<sup>18</sup> As a differentiated learning strategy, small teaching uses incremental change to help students retain more information. For example, Lang encourages predictive activities that cause the student to consider the previous knowledge of something they have learned or offer a semi-informed opinion on a topic before studying it. Predictive activities may include having students answer questions on unfamiliar information or doing an information dump on a topic, even if they are only vaguely familiar with it. Predictive activities support learning by helping the learner retain more knowledge.

These strategies are conducive to the perennial classroom. Moreover, small teaching fits well inside the idea of differentiated learning strategies. Using incremental

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<sup>16</sup> Carol Ann Tomlinson, “What Is Differentiated Instruction?” IRIS Center Peabody College Vanderbilt University, accessed on July 1, 2023, <https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/di/cresource/q1/p01/>.

<sup>17</sup> Marcie Nordlund, *Differentiated Instruction: Meeting the Educational Needs of All Students in Your Classroom* (Lanham, MD: R&L Education, 2003), 2.

<sup>18</sup> James M. Lang, *Small Teaching: Everyday Lessons from the Science of Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2016), 4.



strategies to teach, retrieve, and retain knowledge works well with children who struggle with paying attention, suffer anxiety in class, or lack motivation. Small teaching can provide small wins for the child, which is the point of differentiated learning and the goal of ecclesiastical perennialism.

Differentiated learning stresses the importance of classroom management. A leading voice in differentiated learning is Maurice Nordlund, who says, “A well-developed plan of classroom management includes three phases of discipline: prevention, reactive discipline, and a success system. A good system of prevention includes managerial techniques of movement, transitions, alertness, variety, and ‘withitness.’”<sup>19</sup>

A good classroom management plan is vital to the success of underserved children in the classroom. The classic perennial disciplinarian may be suitable for children who live “normal” lives. For underserved children with trauma, however, classroom management needs to be temperament based.

### **Temperament-Based Classroom Management**

Underserved children will likely enter the classroom loaded with stress from their living environments. If they are living in poverty, it is possible they have not eaten over the weekend. If their parents are addicted to drugs, they may have been left in a strange, unsupervised place. If their parents are divorced, it is possible they enter their classroom on the heels of an argument between mom and dad. If they are coming from a class in which they are not doing well, it is possible they were scolded by a teacher who is unaware that the child has a learning disability. Underserved children must learn while burdened with unique stressors.

Temperament-based classroom management endeavors to study the child’s temperament and recognize that each child will have an individual response to stress that

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<sup>19</sup> Nordlund, *Differentiated Instruction*, 3.

generally fits inside the four categories. Teachers then use management strategies that fit the student's temperament. Sandee McClowry offers the following framework to implement temperament-based classroom management: *recognize* child temperament, *reframe* perceptions, and *respond* in ways that enhance environmental fit (the three Rs). Teachers can then *scaffold* their students when they encounter situations that are temperamentally challenging and gently apply strategies that *stretch* a student's emotional, attentional, and/or behavioral repertoire (the two Ss).<sup>20</sup>

### **Recognizes Child's Temperament**

Perennial classroom management uses a firm but fair hand in the classroom. The teacher is in charge, and the child is to voluntarily come under their tutelage. Any rebellion or disruption in the class or rebellion is to be met with swift consequences. Because the pursuit of truth is the highest goal, disorderly conduct cannot disrupt the learning path. With underserved children, however, teachers need to take a different approach. They need to make every effort to avoid setting up the child for failure, and to do so, they need to study the child's temperament. Temperament, according to McClowry,

is the consistent reaction style that a child demonstrates across a variety of settings and situations, particularly those that involve stress or change. The construct refers to an individual's emotional, attentional, and behavioral tendencies or dispositions (Rothbart & Bates, 2006). Temperament also is a social processing system through which children view and interact with the world, both altering the responses of others and contributing toward their own development.<sup>21</sup>

A child will react a certain way to good and bad situations, a reaction heavily influenced by a worldview inherited from their living environment. Temperament-based

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<sup>20</sup> Sandee Graham McClowry, *Temperament-Based Elementary Classroom Management* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 2.

<sup>21</sup> McClowry, *Temperament-Based Elementary Classroom Management*, 3.

classroom management pays attention to a child's consistent reaction to stress, particularly in the classroom.

Temperament-based classroom management is based on qualitative and quantitative research that suggests that a child's temperament (1) is biologically based and resistant to change, (2) predicts behavior, (3) modulates one's perceptions of experiences, (4) is often recognized in situations that involve change or stress, (5) influences social interactions, and (6) classifies individuals.<sup>22</sup>

To say that a child's temperament is biological is to say it is the way God has physically wired them. Some would argue adults should not try to change a child's temperament because it is biologically based. However, this is inconsistent with a biblical worldview. The promise of the gospel is to change our bad temperament to a Christ-honoring temperament, especially in our response to our difficult circumstances. Children are to be trained up in the Lord (Prov 22:6) to trust him with all of their heart and lean not on their own understanding (Prov 3:5–6). Jesus told us not to worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow has its own problems (Matt 6:34). Paul said he learned to be content in all things (Phil 4:11–13). So, children must learn to discipline their temperament in a way that honors God.

Temperament predicts behavior in that it is a combination of traits that are expressed by strong propensities to demonstrate consistent, predictable behavior.<sup>23</sup> These behaviors are assessable and can give a general description of a child's behavior pattern. Temperament also modulates one's experiences in that it governs how and how much the child may respond to stress. McClowry explains,

Temperament modulates how people perceive their experiences. Based on their temperament, individuals either augment or reduce their emotional response to an event. Consequently, temperament contributes significantly to how they remember

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<sup>22</sup> McClowry, *Temperament-Based Elementary Classroom Management*, 5.

<sup>23</sup> Jan Strelau, *Temperament as a Regulator of Behavior: After Fifty Years of Research* (Clinton Corners, NY: Eliot Werner, 2008), 7.

and interpret experiences. Surely, you have noticed that people often differ in their affective descriptions of the same event. Two students may describe an incident that occurred in the classroom and sound as if they had very different experiences.<sup>24</sup>

Temperament is often recognized in situations involving change or stress; it is an indicator of how students will respond to changes in the setting or circumstances of the learning environment. Temperament pays attention to test days, field trips, visitors in class, and early release days.

Temperament is affected by the influences of social interactions. Students interact with diverse age groups and develop various degrees of relationships, positive and negative, with other students, teachers, and staff. McClowry notes, “The reciprocity that occurs in these transactions has implications for future encounters. Children who are consistently pleasant are likely to elicit positive responses from others. Those who are grumpy most of the time, regardless of the circumstances, are likely to annoy other people.”<sup>25</sup>

Finally, temperament classifies individuals, that is, temperament can organize the general temperament dimensions of children into four categories: motor activity, task persistence, withdrawal, and negative reactivity. Motor activity refers to the high-strung busybody who has a hard time sitting down. The task-persistent child is more of “Type A” personality who is driven to finish their work. The withdrawal child is the shy and timid child who prefers to be alone. Finally, the negative reactivity child is more pessimistic and likely to respond negatively to life’s situations. A teacher uses these dimensions to assess if a child is high or low on a specific dimension.

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<sup>24</sup> McClowry, *Temperament-Based Elementary Classroom Management*, 7.

<sup>25</sup> McClowry, *Temperament-Based Elementary Classroom Management*, 9.

## Reframes Perceptions

Building on the four dimensions above, McClowry offers four common profiles of temperament found among children: high maintenance, industrious, shy and cautious, and social and eager to try.

High-maintenance children are emotionally driven, meaning their response to stress or change is usually negative and over the top. They are low in task persistence and have difficulty finishing a task, although they are high in motor activity.<sup>26</sup>

Industrious children are task-oriented and focused. They are high in task persistence and low in motor activity. They take pleasure in finishing their work and have an approachable demeanor. They are well-behaved in class and liked by their peers.<sup>27</sup>

Shy and cautious children will be cautious, timid, and distant at first. They are high in withdrawal, which means they are likely to hide or be reluctant to change. They demonstrate high negative reactivity and will let you know they are not pleased with a situation.<sup>28</sup>

Social and eager-to-try children are eager to make new friends. They are high in approach, meaning they are driven by a need to be with people. They are open to new experiences. They are low in negativity and withdrawal, which makes them pleasant to be around.<sup>29</sup>

The four profiles can be determined empirically by a questioner or can be observed intuitively. Once a teacher can categorize a child in one of the profiles, they are better equipped to reframe their perception considering the strengths and concerns of the child's temperament. Doing this helps the teacher move beyond seeing the child's actions

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<sup>26</sup> Insights Intervention, "Meet the Kids," accessed July 1, 2023, <https://insightsintervention.com/meet-the-kids/>.

<sup>27</sup> Insights Intervention, "Meet the Kids."

<sup>28</sup> Insights Intervention, "Meet the Kids."

<sup>29</sup> Insights Intervention, "Meet the Kids."

as merely misbehavior and helps them find a goodness of fit, which occurs when the demands, expectations, and opportunities of the environment match an individual's temperament.<sup>30</sup>

### **Responds in Ways That Enhance Environmental Fit**

Student-teacher relationships are the cornerstone of a safe and productive classroom management plan. Research has shown that positive relationships between students and their teachers through the upper elementary grades reduce the likelihood that students will develop adjustment problems.<sup>31</sup> Teacher response to a child's temperament can have either a positive or negative effect on their relationship. Moreover, the response of the teacher can have a detrimental effect on the child's success in class.

McClowry offers three categories of teacher response: counterproductive, adequate, and optimal. A counterproductive response escalates the situation. These responses are typically condescending, done in an angry tone, and provide no solutions to move forward. An adequate response is more neutral and seeks to resolve things quickly. The response might be apathetic, but it does not raise the temperature of the issue. The optimal response is one in which the teacher tries to build up the student's confidence. It recognizes the child's temperament and attempts to understand the child's strengths and needs. This kind of response uses eye contact with a warm tone, seeking both to understand and move forward in a way that changes the child for the better.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> McClowry, *Temperament-Based Elementary Classroom Management*, 27.

<sup>31</sup> Erin E. O'Connor, Eric Dearing, and Brian A. Collins, "Teacher-Child Relationship and Behavior Problem Trajectories in Elementary Schools," *American Educational Research Journal* 48, no. 1 (2011): 120–62.

<sup>32</sup> McClowry, *Temperament-Based Elementary Classroom Management*, 43.

## **Scaffolds Students When Encountering Challenging Situations**

Scaffolding is a term used by teachers to describe building knowledge. Although its tenets are used primarily in understanding, McClowry finds them helpful in temperament-based classroom management. McClowry says that from a temperament perspective, scaffolding occurs when an adult or a more advanced classmate supports a child during a temperamentally challenging situation. By preparing and maintaining a positive classroom environment, teachers scaffold their students.<sup>33</sup>

A positive classroom environment will consist of four components. First, a teacher must organize the physical layout of the classroom in a way that enables the child to use the various resources and opportunities for learning but minimizes disruption to the class. For example, organizing desk in a U-shape allows the teacher to maintain eye contact and promotes class participation. It also allows a child to move freely about the back of the class to sharpen a pencil or throw away trash.

Second, teachers should thoughtfully organize their classroom to consider noninstructional time and setting behavioral expectations with consequences. It could be that the class is invited to help decide the consequences that foster community and increase buy-in to the learning process.

Third, monitoring and consistency are needed to maintain a positive classroom environment. Although many classroom activities and interactions occur simultaneously, effective teachers monitor the students individually and collectively.<sup>34</sup> Finally, teachers must organize a plan for all adults involved in the learning process to address disruptive behavior. McClowry suggests a three-step discipline ladder plan:

Step 1 is a verbal or nonverbal reminder. Classroom signals or individually negotiated secret signals are other types of reminders. Examples of Step 2 strategies include a loss of privilege, time-out, or allowing the natural consequences of the misbehavior to occur. Step 3, reserved for students who are frequently noncompliant

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<sup>33</sup> McClowry, *Temperament-Based Elementary Classroom Management*, 61.

<sup>34</sup> McClowry, *Temperament-Based Elementary Classroom Management*, 62.

or disruptive, often involves other school personnel. Using a temperament framework can provide insight into how teacher strategies may need to be modified for optimal use.<sup>35</sup>

### **Stretches a Student's Repertoire of Emotion, Attention, and/or Behavior**

McClowry explains that stretching involves deliberate teacher actions intended to foster the self-regulation and social competence of children in temperamentally challenging situations.<sup>36</sup> Self-regulation is the child's ability to adapt appropriately to the stress or change in their circumstances and to those involved. Individuals who are high in self-regulation can modulate their temperamental reactions, including their emotions, attention, and motor activity.<sup>37</sup>

Classrooms can become spaces where an underserved child is overwhelmed or overstimulated by activity, causing the child to lose impulse control. The classroom can also be a place where, if the child is properly supported, the child can be stretched to grow in self-regulation. For the child who is weak in impulse control, the teacher can implement cues that help the child know to settle down. Another support could include a cooperation contract with one realistic goal, responsibilities for the student, and positive reinforcement. If the goal is not met, a teacher who provides the optimal response of encouragement can motivate the child to keep working at achieving the goal.

Social competence, simply put, means to function well in society. Social competency skills include listening, empathy, cooperation, and competition, problem-solving, conflict resolution, and assertiveness.<sup>38</sup> This has been expanded by others to include (1) self-awareness, or identifying one's own feelings, interests, values, strengths,

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<sup>35</sup> McClowry, *Temperament-Based Elementary Classroom Management*, 62.

<sup>36</sup> McClowry, *Temperament-Based Elementary Classroom Management*, 70.

<sup>37</sup> Mary K. Rothbart, *Becoming Who We Are: Temperament and Personality in Development* (New York: Guilford Press, 2011), 214.

<sup>38</sup> McClowry, *Temperament-Based Elementary Classroom Management*, 71.



and limits; (2) self-regulation, or monitoring one's emotional state and intentional modulating of temperamental reactions, (3) social awareness of others, or understanding and appreciating others' perspectives and empathizing with them, (4) responsible decision making, or including the ability to problem-solve and negotiate with peers and adults, and (5) evaluating the ethical repercussions of behavior and its impact on the well-being of others, which is a social competency that develops as children mature.<sup>39</sup>

A temperament-based classroom management plan will value the teacher's intentional role in modeling social competency for students. Using eye contact, listening with intent, showing empathy when they are saddened or excitement over good news, encouraging communication, being patient with a child when their feelings are too complicated for them to express—all of these responses model social competency for the child.

A temperament-based classroom management plan will use helpful conflict resolution and problem-solving strategies that can be practiced by the students before a conflict arises. Underserved children come into the classroom with various degrees of stress. They are likely to lack intrinsic motivation and exhibit anti-social behavior. Their temperaments are heavily influenced by their troubled environments. Temperament-based classroom management allows the teacher to study the child to find viable ways to help the child grow in a safe learning environment. It teaches the educator to not overreact and to “receive the first blow,” so to speak, to determine what is really causing the disruption. Additionally, this kind of classroom management uses preventive strategies that avoid setting up the child for failure. It provides structure and discipline with grace and tact without compromising the reality that children are foolish at heart and rebellious in nature. It serves underserved children well to learn in a temperament-based

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<sup>39</sup> Susanne Ayers Denham, Chavaughn Brown, and Celene Domitrovic, “Plays Nice with others’: Social-Emotional Learning and Academic Success,” *Early Education and Development* 21, no. 5 (October 2010), 652–80.

classroom. However, even with a robust educational philosophy and a grace-oriented classroom management plan, if the parents are not invited into and equipped to participate in the processes, a holistic education for underserved children will fall short.

### **Parent Involvement**

By God’s design, parents are the primary spiritual and physical caregivers for their children. The Bible calls parents to disciple their children in a way that does not hinder their children from tasting and seeing that the Lord Jesus Christ is good and that he alone is to be worshiped with all of our heart, mind, and soul—individually and corporately—for all eternity. Considering this, teaching underserved children must seek to involve parents in the process of education. Joyce Epstein’s framework for parental involvement in education is the best model to incorporate in a teaching ministry because it provides six effective types of parent involvement that encourage and equip parents to actively engage with the learning process.

### **Involved Parents Increase a Child’s Educational Success**

In 1998, the Higher Education Act of 1965 was amended to establish “GEAR UP: Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs.”<sup>40</sup> The purpose of GEAR UP was to encourage early awareness of college requirements and funding for students who attend low-income schools. GEAR UP addressed “the professional and career development opportunities for teachers designed to promote systemic reform in the targeted schools. It also [addressed] the need for increased

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<sup>40</sup> United States Department of Education, “Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP),” last modified June 14, 2023, <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/gearup/index.html>.

parental involvement of parents or guardians in classroom and social life, which encourages parents to take an active role in their children’s education.”<sup>41</sup>

One of the programs developed in GEAR UP was the “I CARE” model. The “I CARE” model was a mentor and training initiative that encouraged parents to get involved in the academic life of their children at home and in school through a series of character-building activities suggested monthly by the teacher.<sup>42</sup>

According to the “Every Child Succeeds Act” (ESSA) of 2015,

The term “parent” refers to a legal guardian or any other person standing in *loco parentis* (such as a grandparent or stepparent with whom the child lives, or a person who is legally responsible for the child’s welfare). Parental involvement means the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities, including: (A) integral role in assisting their child’s learning; (B) active involvement in their child’s education at school; (C) partners in their child’s education and are included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees; and (4) included in carrying out of other activities, described in section 1116 [LEA and school parent and family engagement policies].<sup>43</sup>

Wendy S. Grolnick and Maria L. Slowiasek offer a more concise definition that seems to capture the essence of the ECSA description of parental involvement, defining parental involvement as the dedication of resources by the parent to the child within the domain of education.<sup>44</sup>

There are variety of ways parents dedicate resources to their children. Parents can be involved in their children’s schooling by engaging in school functions such as parent-teacher conferences. They can take an active role inside the home by setting time

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<sup>41</sup> Hope M. Bland and Ashraf Esmail, *School Social Work Services in Federally Funded Programs: An African American Perspective*, Issues in Black Education (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2012), 11.

<sup>42</sup> Bland and Esmail, “School Social Work Services in Federally Funded Programs.”

<sup>43</sup> Office of the State Superintendent of Education, “ESSA Requirements: Parent and Family Engagement,” accessed September 24, 2022, [https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/page\\_content/attachments/ESSA%20Parent%20and%20Family%20Engagement%20Requirements%20PowerPoint.pdf](https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/page_content/attachments/ESSA%20Parent%20and%20Family%20Engagement%20Requirements%20PowerPoint.pdf).

<sup>44</sup> Wendy S. Grolnick and Maria L. Slowiasek, “Parents’ Involvement in Children’s Schooling: A Multidimensional Conceptualization and Motivational Model,” *Child Development* 65, no. 1 (February 1994): 237–52.

aside to help with schoolwork, arranging a space in the home that is conducive to finishing homework, providing encouragement, and modeling a good work ethic and a good attitude.

Furthermore, outside the home, parents involve themselves in their child's education by being an advocate for their child and serving in the classroom, or they can take an active role in the governance and decision-making necessary for planning, developing, and providing an education for the community's children.<sup>45</sup>

### **Parental Involvement: The Benefits of Investing Resources**

It is no secret that parental involvement in the academic life of students positively affects the child's overall success in the classroom. Many professional educators and administrators understand the value of parental involvement and have sought to integrate parental involvement in educational policies. David Topora notes,

Parent involvement in a child's early education is consistently found to be positively associated with a child's academic performance . . . . Specifically, children whose parents are more involved in their education have higher levels of academic performance than children whose parents are involved to a lesser degree. The influence of parent involvement on academic success has not only been noted among researchers, but also among policy makers who have integrated efforts aimed at increasing parent involvement into broader educational policy initiatives.<sup>46</sup>

Deborah Davis contends, "Parental participation improves student learning whether the child is in preschool or in the upper grades, whether or not the family is struggling economically or is affluent, or whether the parents finished high school or graduated from college."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Kathleen Cotton and Karen Reed Wikelund, *Parent Involvement in Education*, School Improvement Research Series 6 (Portland, OR: Education Northwest, 1989), 9.

<sup>46</sup> David R. Topora et al., "Parent Involvement and Student Academic Performance: A Multiple Mediation Analysis," *Journal of Prevention and Intervention in the Community* 38, no. 3 (2010): 1.

<sup>47</sup> Deborah Davis, "Supporting Parent, Family, and Community Involvement in Your School," Northwest Regional Education Laboratory, June 2000, <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.564.3558&rep=rep1&type=pdf>.

She also notes that there are tangible advantages for students who have strong parental involvement in their education journey. Davis states that children whose parents dedicate resources to their education domain tend to have higher grades and test scores, better attendance and more homework completed, fewer placements in special education, more positive attitudes and behaviors, higher graduation rates, and greater enrollment in post-secondary education.<sup>48</sup>

In a similar vein, the Centers for Disease Control advocates parental involvement in children’s education because it promotes positive health behaviors among children and adolescents. Additionally, children who feel supported by their parents are less likely to experience emotional distress, practice unhealthy eating behaviors, consider or attempt suicide, or disengage from school and learning.<sup>49</sup> Studies reveal a positive correlation between parental involvement in education and the decrease of the likelihood of their children initiating smoking and the increase of the likelihood of their children meeting the guidelines for physical activity. In addition, interventions with a parent-engagement component have been shown to increase positive health behaviors such as children’s school-related physical activity.<sup>50</sup>

### **Theory of Overlapping Spheres of Influence**

Joyce Epstein created a framework for parental involvement to help educators create meaningful opportunities for parents to engage in their child’s educational process. Her framework builds from her theory of overlapping spheres of influence. Epstein explains her theory in *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action*:

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<sup>48</sup> Davis, “Supporting Parent, Family, and Community Involvement in Your School.”

<sup>49</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Parent Engagement: Strategies for Involving Parents in School Health*, Atlanta: US Department of Health and Human Services, 2012.

<sup>50</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Parent Engagement*.

The external model of the theory of overlapping spheres of influence recognizes that the three major contexts in which students learn and grow—home, school, and community—may be drawn together or pushed apart. The model includes sections showing that schools, families, and communities conduct some practices separately, and other sections that overlap to show some practices are conducted jointly. The internal model of the theory of overlapping spheres of influence shows where and how complex and essential interpersonal relations, interactions, and patterns of influence occur between individuals at home, at school, and in the community.<sup>51</sup>

Epstein offers an example that is helpful in explaining her theory:

In some schools, there still are educators who say, “If the family would just do its job, we could do our job.” And there still are families who say, “I raised this child—now it is your job to educate her.” These are sentences of separate spheres of influence. Other educators say, “I cannot do my job without the help of students’ families and support from this community.” And some parents say, “I really need to know what is happening in school in order to help my child.” *These are sentences of overlapping spheres of influence.*<sup>52</sup>

Epstein’s point is clear: the most effective partnerships between family, school, and community recognize the value and significance of these three spheres uniting to work together. The harmony of these three spheres of influence provides the greatest opportunity for the student to thrive socially, emotionally, cognitively, and in their educational journey.<sup>53</sup> Additionally, this requires schools, families, and communities to proactively build supportive partnerships with each other. Epstein describes these partnerships as family-like schools, school-like families, and school- and family-like communities.

### **Family-Like Schools**

In family-like schools, Epstein describes a two-way partnership between the school and the family that has a positive impact on the child: “In a partnership, teachers and administrators create more *family-like* schools. A family-like school recognizes each

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<sup>51</sup> Joyce L. Epstein et al., *School, Family, and Community Partnerships: Your Handbook for Action*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, 2019), 12.

<sup>52</sup> Epstein et al., *School, Family, and Community Partnerships*, 13 (emphasis added).

<sup>53</sup> Organizing Engagement, “Framework of Six Types of Involvement,” accessed October 3, 2022, <https://organizingengagement.org/models/framework-of-six-types-of-involvement/>.

child's individuality and makes each child feel special and included. Family-like schools welcome all families, not just those that are easy to reach."<sup>54</sup>

### **School-Like Families**

On the other side of that relationship, families are expected to reciprocate the relationship by recognizing the school's role in the child's success. Epstein elaborates, "In a partnership, parents create more *school-like* families. A school-like family recognizes that each child is also a student. Families reinforce the importance of school, homework, and activities that build student skills and feelings of success."<sup>55</sup>

### **School- and Family-Like Communities**

The final partnership of influence involves the community cooperating with the school and the family to create opportunities to motivate, reward, and reinforce student success and family health in education. Epstein clarifies the community's role:

Communities, including groups of parents working together, create *school-like* opportunities, events, and programs that reinforce, recognize, and reward students for good progress, creativity, contributions, and excellence. Communities also create *family-like* settings, services, and events to enable families to better support their children.<sup>56</sup>

Partnerships between the school, family, and community are important for students to experience success in school. All three spheres of influence have the same goal in mind and all three spheres must be intentional in making and maintaining these partnerships. Epstein's framework is the best model for encouraging and equipping schools and parental involvement.

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<sup>54</sup> Epstein et al., *School, Family, and Community Partnerships*, 13.

<sup>55</sup> Epstein et al., *School, Family, and Community Partnerships*, 14.

<sup>56</sup> Epstein et al., *School, Family, and Community Partnerships*, 16 (emphasis original).

## **The Framework of Six Types of Involvement**

Epstein makes it evident that parent involvement with the school is a two-way partnership. Ideally, it is a partnership co-developed by educators and families working together, not a one-way directive unilaterally determined by a school.<sup>57</sup> Epstein's six types of involvement are explained below.

### **Parenting**

Type 1 involvement seeks to help all families establish home environments to support children as students. This kind of involvement occurs when family practices and home environments support "children as students" and when schools understand their children's families.<sup>58</sup> Examples include parent education and other courses or training for parents, family support programs to assist families with health, nutrition, and other services, or home visits at transition points to elementary, middle, and high school.<sup>59</sup>

### **Communicating**

Type 2 involvement seeks to design effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications concerning school programs and children's progress. Some examples may include conferences with every parent at least once a year, language translators to assist families as needed, and a regular schedule of useful notices, memos, phone calls, newsletters, and other communications.<sup>60</sup>

### **Volunteering**

Type 3 involvement occurs when educators, students, and families "recruit and organize parent help and support" and count parents as an audience for student

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<sup>57</sup> Organizing Engagement, "Framework of Six Types of Involvement."

<sup>58</sup> Epstein et al., *School, Family, and Community Partnerships*, 17.

<sup>59</sup> Project Appleseed, "The Six Slices of Family Engagement," accessed October 4, 2022, <https://www.projectappleseed.org/sixstandards>.

<sup>60</sup> Epstein et al., *School, Family, and Community Partnerships*, 17.



activities.<sup>61</sup> School and classroom volunteer programs to support teachers, administrators, students, and other parents exemplify this kind of involvement. Creating a parent room or family center for volunteer work, meetings, and resources for families fits with this kind of involvement. Annual surveys to identify all available talents, times, and locations of volunteers would create opportunities for increased parent involvement.<sup>62</sup>

### **Learning at Home**

Type 4 involvement occurs when information, ideas, or training are provided to educate families about how they can “help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning.”<sup>63</sup> For example, schools could provide information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning. They could also provide information for families on skills required for students in all subjects at each grade level. Educators could give parents information on homework policies and how to monitor and discuss schoolwork at home.

### **Decision Making**

Type 5 involvement occurs when schools “include parents in school decisions” and “develop parent leaders and representatives.”<sup>64</sup> Decision making involvement occurs when parents are encouraged and equipped to be participate in PTA/PTO or other parent organizations, advisory councils, or committees, and when they are taken seriously for their contributions. Administrators and educators could also find ways to include parents in district-level advisory councils and committees.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Epstein et al., *School, Family, and Community Partnerships*, 18.

<sup>62</sup> Project Appleseed, “The Six Slices of Family Engagement.”

<sup>63</sup> Epstein et al., *School, Family, and Community Partnerships*, 19.

<sup>64</sup> Epstein et al., *School, Family, and Community Partnerships*, 20.

<sup>65</sup> Project Appleseed, “The Six Slices of Family Engagement.”

## **Collaborating with the Community**

Type 6 involvement occurs when community services, resources, and partners are integrated into the educational process to “strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development.”<sup>66</sup> Collaborating with the community means coordinating resources and services from the community for families, students, and the school, as well as providing services to the community.

Schools may be inclined to provide information for students and families on community health, cultural, recreational, and social support, and other programs or services. They could also provide information on community activities that link to learning skills and talents, including summer programs for students, such as mentoring programs at a local church.<sup>67</sup>

### **Examples of Successful Implementation of Epstein’s Framework**

Every year, the John Hopkins National Partnership of Schools highlights and awards schools, districts, and other educational organizations that successfully implement Epstein’s framework. According to Johns Hopkins criteria, “These sites are conducting strong and sustained programs of school, family, and community partnerships. They use NNPS research-based approaches and customize practices for family and community engagement to meet the goals, needs, and interests in their own communities.”<sup>68</sup>

Furthermore, partnership schools, districts, or organizations that implement Epstein’s framework

use research-based structures and processes and implement goal-linked practices to engage all families as partners in children’s education. Each program works to sustain a welcoming climate for all partners in students’ education. Each program

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<sup>66</sup> Epstein et al., *School, Family, and Community Partnerships*, 21.

<sup>67</sup> Project Appleseed, “The Six Slices of Family Engagement.”

<sup>68</sup> National Network of Partnership Schools, “Partnership Award Winners 2021,” Johns Hopkins University, accessed October 8, 2022, <https://nnps.jhucos.com/success-stories/partnership-awards/2021-partnership-award-winners/>.

engages family and community partners in ways that contribute to student achievement, behavior, and other indicators of success in school.<sup>69</sup>

The following section highlights two 2021 National Partnership Award winners, learning centers that I have selected because they demonstrate Epstein’s framework in a setting similar to Tending the Vine.

### **McMillan Early Learning Center**

McMillan Early Learning Center (MELC) serves toddlers and preschool children. They believe that lasting, positive change begins with access to opportunities. They seek to bridge the opportunity gap by connecting as many people as possible to effective health care, education, and essential human services.<sup>70</sup>

During the height of COVID-19 in 2021, MELC asked families and children to think about the essential workers in their communities. MELC and school leaders publicized an event called “Sip and Paint” by distributing flyers and by calling parents to invite them to participate. MELC solicited the help of parents to fill “Sip and Paint” bags with a canvas, paint, brushes, cups, tea, and juice boxes. The volunteer parents picked up the supplies on the school playground a week before Sip and Paint day.<sup>71</sup>

MELC also supplied parents with a helpful page of questions to talk over with their preschooler at home. Parents were encouraged to spend time with their child talking about their favorite essential workers in the community—what they did, where they worked, and how they helped them and other people. The conversation with their children established a working vocabulary of words like “essential,” “community,” and

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<sup>69</sup> National Network of Partnership Schools, “Partnership Award Winners 2021.”

<sup>70</sup> ChildcareCenter, “McMillan Early Learning Center, Cleveland Heights OH Licensed Child Care Center,” accessed October 8, 2022, [https://childcarecenter.us/provider\\_detail/mcmillan\\_early\\_learning\\_center\\_cleveland\\_hts\\_oh](https://childcarecenter.us/provider_detail/mcmillan_early_learning_center_cleveland_hts_oh).

<sup>71</sup> Margie Jennings, “Sip and Paint to Thank Essential Workers,” in National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS), *Promising Partnership Practices, 2021*, ed. Brenda G. Thomas et al. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 2021), 20–21, [https://nnps.jhuucos.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/FINAL\\_PPP\\_2021\\_PRINT.pdf](https://nnps.jhuucos.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/FINAL_PPP_2021_PRINT.pdf).

“virus.” The children learned to use math skills by counting the colors they used in their paintings, even discussing what was happening in their paintings. Students used cognitive skills, coping mechanisms, and social interaction. The event also provided parents and their learners with an opportunity to enjoy art.

The children brought their paintings to school, where they were framed and taken to some of the community workers featured in the pictures. The recipients were truly appreciative of being recognized and remembered, as noted on the MELC site: “An Assistant Store Manager at a grocery store said. ‘You and the families and students . . . will never know just how important this really [is] for all of us. Just to know that our daily efforts have been recognized.’ Another noted, ‘We will place this on our “love board” in the staff room. Saying thank you is not enough.’”<sup>72</sup>

The National Network of Partnership Schools recognized that “students not only developed school skills, but also extended social and emotional skills. They expressed their appreciation for people in the community and took some time to think about others. Sip and Paint is a creative stress-reducing activity for participants that also produced priceless art and valuable messages for community partners.”<sup>73</sup>

The McMillan Early Learning Center implemented various aspects of Epstein’s framework. They cooperated with the school and family to support essential workers in the community. They encouraged parents to volunteer in planning and implementing the “Sip and Paint” event. MELC equipped parents with materials to educate their children in math, reading, and art.

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<sup>72</sup> Jennings, “Sip and Paint to Thank Essential Workers,” 20.

<sup>73</sup> Jennings, “Sip and Paint to Thank Essential Workers,” 20.

## **William Patrick Day Early Learning Center**

The William Patrick Day Early Learning Center (WPDEL) is a Head Start program serving more than three thousand children annually throughout the Greater Cleveland area. It aims to “deliver high-quality early childhood education programs in safe, nurturing environments.”<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, the WPDEL is deeply committed to parent involvement. They describe their commitment to parental involvement:

Parental input and involvement in the Head Start program is vital to the growth and development of the program and the children who participate in it. In addition to participating in classroom activities, parents are encouraged to voice their opinions and shape the program through Parent Committee’s at each Head Start Center. Select parents serve on a CEOGC Policy Council that includes representatives from CEOGC and its partners. The CEOGC Policy Council has a distinct voice in the operation and governance of CEOGC’s Head Start program.<sup>75</sup>

Along with the CEOGC Policy Council, the WPDEL also created an Action Team for Partnership. This team created activities to celebrate Black History month that would utilize parental involvement and educate the children. According to the National Partnership Award, “Parents on the ATP took the lead and designed a strong, exciting, and memorable series of activities focused on famous African Americans, whom many people did not know about. Parents clicked a flyer on the school website to register to attend.”<sup>76</sup> All in all, “The program offered children and parents a balanced mix of active learning, listening, participation, and exercise. The activities strengthened children’s cognitive, social-emotional, and motor skills. The chat box and comments were unanimous: *Amazing! Loved it! Fantastic!*”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Childcare Center, “William Patrick Day Head Start, Cleveland OH Licensed Child Care Center,” accessed October 8, 2022, [https://childcarecenter.us/provider\\_detail/william\\_patrick\\_day\\_head\\_start\\_cleveland\\_oh](https://childcarecenter.us/provider_detail/william_patrick_day_head_start_cleveland_oh).

<sup>75</sup> Childcare Center, “William Patrick Day Head Start.”

<sup>76</sup> Nicole Hawthorne, “Black History Month Celebration,” in NNPS, *Promising Partnership Practices*, 2021, 15.

<sup>77</sup> Hawthorne, “Black History Month Celebration,” 15.

The WPDELC was able to successfully utilize Epstein's framework for parental involvement. Parents were given to opportunity to plan and implement activities. They were also given tools and materials to assist their child's learning at home. Furthermore, parents collaborated with the community and school with an auction that raised funds for the Head Start Program.

### **Conclusion**

Parents are a vital component in their child's spiritual and educational journey, and the church needs to do everything in its power to encourage parents to actively participate in that journey. Epstein's parent involvement framework is a proven tool that ministries teaching underserved children can use to creatively engage parents in the learning process. With the support of parents and a commitment to both the principles of ecclesiastical perennialism and the practice of G.R.A.C.E. temperament-based classroom management,<sup>78</sup> churches that seek to disciple underserved children through teaching will have the right components to create a constructive and safe learning environment. Furthermore, through prayer, God's Word, and the power of the Holy Spirit, our classrooms can become life-giving environments that help underserved children feel safe, connected, and valued as they learn of the abundant life Jesus offers them.

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<sup>78</sup> G.R.A.C.E is a biblical conflict management plan that works with temperament-based classroom management. G.R.A.C.E. is acronym: Get to the heart of the matter, Recognize the difference between foolishness and rebellion, Ask heart probing questions, Communicate the gospel clearly, and Expect reconciliation and restoration. See appendix 3 for an overview of the G.R.A.C.E. plan.

## CHAPTER 4

### DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

The purpose of this project was to equip volunteers at Tending the Vine in Litchfield, Illinois, to teach underserved children. This chapter addresses the steps taken to implement the project, including survey development, recruiting participants, curriculum development and session descriptions, project implementation, data analysis, and development of a strategic plan to implement a parent involvement framework at TTV.

#### **Pre-implementation Activities**

Pre-implementation activities for this project focused on how to help underserved children by training volunteers in a teaching methodology that incorporated a philosophy of education, classroom management, and parent involvement.

#### **Survey Development**

I developed the survey<sup>1</sup> used in the project by having informal conversations with a few of the potential participants about the project's content: discipleship, underserved children, ecclesiastical perennialism, and temperament-based classroom management. Their input helped me design the survey in such a manner as to show significant change between the beginning of the project and its conclusion.

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<sup>1</sup> See appendix 1.

## **Recruiting Participants**

I recruited participants through several means of communication. First, in the spring of 2023, I announced to current volunteers that there would be a training for TTV coming in the fall. In July, I sent a text to all volunteers and several church members announcing the two-day training in August and requesting an RSVP. I received two confirmations. Next, I announced the training to the church body for three Sundays, inviting anyone who would like to learn how to disciple underserved children through the ministry of education to attend the training. I received little to no feedback or a commitment to my training. By the day of the training, I had ten committed trainees. By God's grace, fourteen attended both days of training. Because I was competing with the beginning of the academic calendar year and my project deadline, I chose to do a two-day training focusing on six sessions.

## **Curriculum Development**

When developing the curriculum, I divided my sessions into six parts. The introduction would serve to grab their attention with an interactive case study or object lesson. I would then transition into a lecture-style format lasting no more than twenty minutes. After the lecture, I planned for the participants to work in small groups to discuss the material and complete activities. Finally, the training would conclude with a large group review of the material.

I knew that the temperament-based classroom management model would be a wonderful asset for teachers who instruct underserved children. However, the one downside to the model is that it is heavily grounded in secular psychology that does not recognize both the soul of the child and God's desire for a child's temperament to change. Furthermore, the model does not adequately address conflict resolution. To supplement the model with biblical wisdom, I created G.R.A.C.E., a framework that uses



five principles to direct the heart toward right belief for right behavior.<sup>2</sup> G.R.A.C.E gets to the heart of the matter, recognizes the difference between foolishness and rebellion, asks heart-probing questions, communicates the gospel clearly, and expects reconciliation and restoration. It is most effectively used for conflict resolution.

### **Project Implementation**

I implemented the training over a period of two days, a Friday evening (three sessions) and a Saturday (three sessions). An overview for each session is presented in the following six sections.

#### **Session 1: Who Are the Underserved Children?**

Session 1 provided a working definition of underserved children, demonstrated how their trauma-infused behavior disrupts their learning, and provided biblical support for discipling these children through a teaching ministry. The class developed an 18 to 25-word Great Commission-based purpose statement for discipling underserved children through a teaching ministry. By the end of this session, students could recognize underserved children and biblically support a discipleship ministry of teaching for them.

#### **Session 2: Biblical Foundation for Discipleship as Teaching**

Session 2 laid the biblical foundation for serving underserved children through the discipleship of teaching. We explored what the Bible says about discipleship as a teaching ministry in both the Old and New Testaments. We also examined the role and nature of the Holy Spirit in the educational process. We discussed the four components of biblical wisdom. Finally, we saw how the church community is a resource for underserved children to develop meaningful relationships and have positive shared life

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<sup>2</sup> See appendix 3.

experiences. By the end of the class, students were better able to understand God's spiritual resources for a discipleship ministry of teaching to underserved children and could apply a wisdom grid of thinking and react rightly using biblical wisdom in their classroom context.

### **Sessions 3 and 4: Ecclesiastical Perennialism and Differentiated Learning Strategies**

Sessions 3 and 4 introduced ecclesiastical perennialism (EP) and differentiated learning strategies. We discussed EP origins and how it has been adapted for FBCL. Furthermore, we discussed its framework, commitments, relevance, and goals for teaching underserved children at FBCL. We discussed how differentiated learning strategies coupled with the principles of ecclesiastical perennialism support underserved children in their learning process. By the end of class, students could identify the six adapted principles of EP, understand examples of differentiated learning strategies, have resources for classroom strategies for teaching and learning, and discuss its framework and relevance to their discipleship of underserved children.

### **Session 5: G.R.A.C.E Temperament-Based Classroom Management**

Sessions 5 and 6 introduced temperament-based classroom management. We discussed its origins and how it has been adapted for FBCL. Furthermore, we discussed its adaptive framework, commitments, relevance, and goals for productively managing underserved children in the classroom. The class was able to demonstrate some proficiency in applying this G.R.A.C.E temperament-based classroom management when asked to develop a working classroom management plan. By the end of this class, students had a tangible resource that works the components of G.R.A.C.E temperament-based classroom management principles into a working classroom management plan.

## **Session 6: How Do We Increase Parental Involvement in the Child's Learning Journey?**

Session 6 explained why Christian teachers need to involve parents in their child's learning journey. The class was introduced to a parent involvement framework that helps the Christian educator offer parents six avenues of engagement to the parent. By the end of class, students were able to develop a strategy to implement more parental involvement using some of the six avenues of engagement.

### **Post-implementation Activities**

After conducting the training, I readministered the survey, performed data analysis, and developed the strategic plan to implement a parent involvement framework at TTV.

### **Data Analysis**

I administered the pre-training survey just before session 1 and administered the post-training survey immediately after the sixth session was complete. It took each participant approximately fifteen minutes to complete the survey, and all fourteen participants took both the pre- and post-training surveys. Because of the timing of the pre-training survey administration, I was not able to make any adjustments to my curriculum. This is addressed in chapter 5.

### **Developing a Strategic Plan to Implement a Parent Involvement Framework at TTV**

My fourth and final goal of my project was to create a strategic plan for implementing a parent involvement framework at TTV. The following sections describe this plan.

## **Parenting**

A parent's relationship to their child is a cornerstone to a child's success in school. Likewise, parents are to use their meaningful relationship with their child in the context of shared life experience, to train their children in moral and practical wisdom. Some in the field of child psychology call this "parent practice." Winston Seegobin says parent practice

focuses on the specific resources that are available to a child within a specific domain. For example, the parenting practices of attending school functions, ensuring that homework is completed and checking grades affect children's academic achievement. Parenting practices also affect specific behaviors, such as table manners, by having a direct goal attainment or outcome.<sup>3</sup>

Through parent practices, parents train and equip their children to become responsible adults. Likewise, parent practice plays an integral part in the spiritual domain of their children. Regarding youth and religion, the National Study for Youth and Religion conclude "that the best way for youth to become more serious about religious faith is for parents to become more serious about theirs."<sup>4</sup> What the world calls parent practice, the Bible calls parent discipleship.

### **TTV Seeks to Train, Involve, and Equip Parents**

The Bible calls parents to disciple their children in such a way that they are unhindered in tasting and seeing that the Lord Jesus Christ is good and that he alone is to be worshiped with all our heart, mind, and soul—individually and corporately—for all eternity. Parents are to leverage their lives to advance the kingdom of God so that every tribe, nation, and people group can taste and see that the Lord is good and put their trust in him (Ps 34:8).

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<sup>3</sup> Winston Seegobin, "The Parent-Child Relationship," in *Christianity and Developmental Psychopathology: Foundations and Approaches*, ed. Kelly S. Flanagan and Sarah E. Hall (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 105.

<sup>4</sup> Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 111. More information on research conducted by the National Study for Youth and Religion can be found at <https://youthandreligion.org>.

Therefore, the chief end of parenting is to be faithful in teaching and living out the gospel of Jesus Christ before one's children so that they will have every opportunity to glorify God and enjoy him forever. Parents need not accomplish this on their own. God has given his church to help train, involve, and equip parents for such a task.

God has created the family and the church to work in harmony to proclaim his glory through the gospel of Jesus Christ. The first institution is seen in Genesis and throughout the Old Testament when God created the first families and commanded them to disciple their own children. The second is seen throughout the New Testament and in the commandment to go and make disciples of all men.<sup>5</sup> These two institutions work together to disciple those who call on the name of the Lord to be saved.

Tending the Vine desires to *train*, *involve*, and *equip* parents in such a way that they will be unhindered in seeing and savoring the Lord Jesus Christ, so their children will likewise be unhindered in seeing and savoring the Lord Jesus.<sup>6</sup> We want to help parents lead their children to take hold of the mantle of faith with a passion to advance the kingdom of God so that every tribe, nation, and people group can taste and see that the Lord is good.

For that to be done biblically and consistently, parenting must be intentional. With this principle in mind, TTV recognizes that parents will need guidance and support in the journey of child rearing. TTV will train, involve, and equip our parents by providing a robust theological training for their children during their worship time. We

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<sup>5</sup> Steve Wright with Chris Groves, *A Parent Privilege: That the Next Generation May Know* (Wake Forest, NC: InQuest Ministries, 2008), 58.

<sup>6</sup> This is Timothy Paul Jones's discipleship model for family ministry. The idea behind the TIE Model is that instead of adding new programs, the ministry can modify existing activities and events over time so that each activity does at least one of the following: *trains* parents and families in faith to become disciple-makers in the lives of children and youth, *involves* parents and older adults in activities in which they would previously not have been present and involves children or youth in meaningful service alongside parents and older adults, and *equips* parents and families in faith with a resource that may assist them at some point away from church in understanding and interacting meaningfully with children or youth. See Timothy Paul Jones, "Family Ministry: The Discipline of Generational Diversity (Part 2)," *Timothy Paul Jones* (blog), May 25, 2017, <https://www.timothypauljones.com/family-ministry-discipline-intergenerational-diversity-part-2/>.

will provide parents with resources such as Scripture music and short instructional videos that equip parents to have faith talks at home. We will also invite parents to help plan and implement Family Equipping Seminars that address a variety of familial needs for discipleship in the home.

In every journey, there are great milestones of accomplishment. We believe in celebrating these milestones with the body of Christ and the family. There are seven milestones we recognize that families and their children encounter in their faith journey: the birth of a baby, a faith commitment, preparing for adolescence, a commitment to sexual integrity, the passage to adulthood, high school graduation, and life in Christ.<sup>7</sup>

TTV seeks to collaborate and celebrate these milestones with parents and their children. Between each milestone, parents will be equipped to intentionally instruct their children in collaboration with the body of Christ. One way in which TTV will equip parents with this task is in faith talks. Faith talks are intentional discussions that mothers, fathers, guardians, or grandparents have with their children on a daily or weekly basis. These talks can range from identifying God's handiwork in creation to deeper soul care issues with which the child may be wrestling. TTV will offer counseling, guidance, devotional resources, and training to help parents help their children grow in God's grace through faith talks. Faith talks are an instrumental means to helping children reach their spiritual milestones. As our children reach each spiritual milestone, the church family celebrates the growth in grace in these families.

## **Communicating**

Healthy, vibrant relationships between parents and TTV are built on successful communication. Parents need to be able to communicate their needs openly and accurately to TTV, and in turn, TTV must strive to communicate what resources and

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<sup>7</sup> Brian Haynes, *Shift: What It Takes to Finally Reach Families Today* (Loveland, CO: Group, 2009), 51–101.

support we eagerly provide for them. We also must hear our parents and understand their circumstances and the space in which they live. In the same way, communicating with parents about their children and their development can either hinder or help our partnership between the home and TTV.

Mike Smith defines communication as the interactive process of providing and passing of information that enables an organization like the school system to function officially and for employees to be informed about developments within the system.<sup>8</sup> Thomas H. Ogden says communication is the process of increased community or sharing between participants based on receiving and sending messages.<sup>9</sup> Tracey Salamondra offers a simpler definition, defining communication as the passing of meaningful messages from one person to another or group of people.<sup>10</sup> Good communication must be effective, requiring that those receiving the communication understand the message in its intended form.<sup>11</sup> All three definitions have three things in common: cooperation, sharing, and meaningful information. Getting all three components to effectively sync on a consistent basis makes communication both complicated and vital to building a successful relationship with parents.

### *Cooperation*

At TTV, we see cooperation in communication as an intentional positive relationship between the parents and educators that fosters community and partners together for the success of the child. Cooperation allows both the parents and the teachers

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<sup>8</sup> Mike Smith, *Fundamentals of Management* (London: McGraw-Hill, 2009), 368.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas H. Ogden, "On Psychoanalytic Supervision," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 86, no. 5 (March 2005): 1265–80.

<sup>10</sup> Tracey Salamondra, "Effective Communication in Schools," *BU Journal of Graduate Studies in Education* 13, no. 1 (2021), 22.

<sup>11</sup> C. O. Fashiku, "Effective Communication: Any Role in Classroom Teaching-Learning Process in Nigerian Schools?," *Bulgarian Journal of Science and Education Policy* 11, no. 1 (June 2017): 171–87.

to pass on meaningful information that helps the educational process function and addresses developments in the child's growth. Cooperation also allows the parents and teachers to support each other as a community as they work to achieve their goals.<sup>12</sup>

### *Collaboration*

Collaboration in communication, however, is an interactive process between parents and teachers who share ownership and work toward a shared objective in giving meaningful information that fosters community and supports their partnership for the success of the child. Collaboration is a network of purposeful connections that allow open lines of communication between parents, children, and teachers as they work together.<sup>13</sup>

### *Meaningful Information*

Meaningful information is information that is relevant as well as accessible and manageable to parents, children, and teachers. It is relevant in that it is specific and matters to the shared objective of the parents and the teachers. It is accessible in that the information is properly organized and clear in its content. Endless scores of materials will not equal endless meaning. There is a negative correlation between giving information and understanding it. As information increases, meaning often decreases as we are unable to process what we are taking in.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, meaningful information is manageable when it is communicated in smaller amounts consistently over a period.

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<sup>12</sup> Marie Prokopets, "Collaboration vs Cooperation and Why It Matters," *Nira* (blog), accessed October 10, 2022, <https://nira.com/collaboration-vs-cooperation/>.

<sup>13</sup> Corey Moseley, "Collaboration vs Cooperation: What's The Difference?," *Jostle* (blog), June 2020, <https://blog.jostle.me/blog/collaboration-vs-cooperation#:~:text=Collaboration%20implies%20shared%20ownership%20and,I'm%20ultimately%20responsible%20for.>

<sup>14</sup> Sam Cox, "What Is the Meaning of Information?," *Two Twelve Voice* (blog), October 20, 2014, <http://www.twotwelve.com/voice/what-is-meaningful-information.html>.



## **TTV Communication Planning Guide**

TTV can design more effective forms of program-to-home and home-to-program communications with all families, addressing new opportunities for growth, upcoming events, and their children's progress by valuing cooperation, collaboration, and meaningful information. With these criteria in mind, TTV can create an effective communication planning guide. Using Joyce Epstein's framework, we can invite parents to form an action team for partnership (ATP). The ATP can survey parents to find which means of communication are most helpful. Then the ATP can collaborate with the TTV director to create an effective communication planning guide (CPG). The CPG will allow parents to be involved in creating policy for communication channels such as websites, social media, email, and text messaging. Furthermore, TTV can utilize parent volunteers who would use their discernment in how to make the most out of today's communication channels.

Teachers can ensure that effective communication is taking place with parents and children through:

1. A home visit with every parent at least once a quarter, with follow-ups as needed.
2. Sending home weekly or monthly notes discussing student progress; these are reviewed by the parents, who have an opportunity to comment and return to teacher.
3. Sending home a student report card detailing how tutoring has helped improve grades.
4. Creating a weekly schedule of useful email notices, memos, phone calls, newsletters, and other communications.
5. Providing clear information on the role and nature of teachers and students and our cooperation with the schools.
6. Providing clear information on all program policies, reforms, and transitions.

## **Decision Making**

School-based decision making (SBDM) comes from the reform efforts of the 1980 and 1990s that sought to decentralize decision making from state and school administrations and to recognize the value of teacher input. SBDM is a concept based on

the fundamental principle that individuals who (1) are affected by a decision and (2) possess expertise regarding the decision are (3) responsible for implementing the decision and (4) should be involved in making the decision.<sup>15</sup> Many schools have developed a school-based decision-making council. Paul Laurence Dunbar High School in Lexington, Kentucky, has an SBDM council that seeks to

promote shared leadership among those who are closest to the students: parents, teachers, and administrators. As the school's governing body, the council determines curriculum, staffing, discipline, scheduling, instructional practices, extra-curricular activities, and other matters pertinent to the operation. The council must set school policy to provide an environment to enhance student achievement and help the school reach its accountability goals.<sup>16</sup>

In a similar fashion, TTV can create a partnership of decision-making with parents in the form of a parent-based council. The parent-based council (PBC) can lead in helping organize cooperation between the school and community to highlight the health and well-being of our learners. The PBC can also be influential in creating and maintaining a network of meaningful connections between TTV families to establish closer community. Moreover, the PBC can take an active role in setting the proper atmosphere for learning by setting standards for teachers and holding teachers, learners, and parents accountable for their participation in the education process.

## **Volunteering**

Epstein posits that good parental involvement seeks to organize and recruit parents as volunteers. Parent volunteers at TTV can create a climate of trust and openness if we are willing to hear and accept each other's ideas. Through parent volunteers, our learners would be able to develop bonds and relationships that would serve as a support

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<sup>15</sup> State University School-Based Decision Making: Key Elements, Scope of Decision Making, Decision Making Structures," accessed October 10, 2022, <https://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/2386/School-Based-Decisionmaking.html>

<sup>16</sup> Paul Laurence Dunbar High School, "School-Based Decision-Making Council," accessed October 10, 2022, <https://www.fcps.net/domain/9874>.

network for them. Moreover, having parental involvement in TTV provides the program with additional adult supervision.<sup>17</sup>

The PBC could recruit parent volunteers to serve as aids in the TTV classroom, fellowship hall, and worship time. Parent volunteers could also be invited to assist in our Sponge Room,<sup>18</sup> helping the students with special projects. TTV focuses heavily on math and reading. Parent volunteers could be invited to tutor some of our learners one-on-one in those specific subjects.

Parent volunteers can be the backbone support to TTV. They provide the manpower and support needed to biblically teach well. Parent volunteers make up most of the framework thus far.

### **Learning at Home**

Keeping in line with the six types of parent involvement framework, learning at home provides information and ideas to families about how to help students at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities, decisions, and planning. This involves offering information for families on skills required for students in all subjects at each grade, as well as information on homework policies and how to monitor and discuss schoolwork at home.

Tending the Vine can provide parents with resources and materials that help the instructional process continue in the home. As mentioned, TTV can provide parents with short videos sent over text explaining what the child has learned that day and offer them three tips on how to implement the truth learned in the home. Furthermore, Scripture sheets for writing and memory verses can be used by parents in the home to reinforce what has been taught by the teacher. Finally, faith talk instructions and

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<sup>17</sup> Edwena Kirby, *Essential Measures for Student Success: Implementing Cooperation, Collaboration, and Coordination between Schools and Parents* (Lanham, MD: R&L Education, 2012), 8.

<sup>18</sup> The Sponge Room is a concept developed by John Savage at The Academy of Individual Excellence in Louisville, Kentucky. See <https://aiexcellence.com/>.

devotional resources can be provided to the parent by TTV to help guide the parent as they disciple their child.

## **Community**

Finally, in Epstein's framework of parental involvement, community involves coordinating resources and services from the community for families, students, and the school, and providing services to the community. Programs could provide information for students and families on community health, cultural, recreational, social support, and other programs or services, as well as provide information on community activities that link to learning skills and talents, including summer programs for students.

TTV utilizes community in three ways. First, we establish a partnership with surrounding schools. Access to the schools allows TTV to not only recruit children who would benefit from biblical mentoring, but also gives us access to their teachers and schoolwork. We can accurately assess a child's social and academic struggle in the classroom. In addition, the teacher's insight and cooperation help create a support network for the child. Having the support of the school gives TTV more validity in the eyes of the parent, which helps us have a better relationship with the family. Our partnership with the school is vital to the success of TTV.

Second, we maintain a working relationship with police and other community programs such as food banks and shelters (homeless, pregnancy, and domestic). Many of our families struggle with a broken family dynamic, which is exacerbated by poverty and substance abuse. Children in our program come to us with having experienced trauma. Having a working relationship with the police and other community programs gives TTV more resources to serve our children and appropriate strategies to intervene when necessary.

Finally, TTV generates networking opportunities with local banks and businesses that support TTV. Through these relationships, we generate funds and

relationships for our children and families. Using our leverage with community relationships, we can connect families to employment opportunities, healthcare services, and counseling.

One example of a way TTV would coordinate resources in the community to help our families is by organizing a back-to-school bash in the fall. Our parent-based decision-making council could set the activity in motion by creating an action for partnership team of parents and mentors. The ATP would publicize the event and solicit community businesses and services to donate their time and resources. For example, a resident salon could donate a day of free haircuts for children. The local hospital could provide physicals for sports. An optometrist and dentist could offer free eye and dental exams. A car dealer or mechanic shop might be willing to do oil changes or tune-ups. The schools could do a backpack supply drive and hand them out at the back-to-school bash.

On the day of the back-to-school bash, parent volunteers would help check attendees into the event and serve as aids to the vendors. TTV could provide a checklist of supplies and services needed to begin school, as well as reasons why it is important to be prepared for school—even more importantly—how God will help them this year. The parent and the child can work together at the event to check everything off the list. Once they are home, both can discuss preparation for the coming school year and the child could draw a picture of what it looks like for God to help them be a good student. The student would then sign the picture, writing out their favorite Bible verse, and bring it back to TTV. Finally, TTV could mail the pictures to each vendor with a card expressing thanks and appreciation for their support.

### **Conclusion**

It is no secret that parental involvement increases the success rate of children in school. It is my conviction that parental involvement will increase the effectiveness of teaching underserved children. As parents are trained, involved, and equipped to

spiritually disciple their children, the gospel can take root in the family. TTV strengthens that opportunity by valuing a parent's role in communicating the shared vision and goal of learning. Furthermore, parents who are invited to participate in the process will enjoy ownership as they are given leadership roles in the direction and decision-making process of the program.

Strong parental involvement in decision-making will open more doors of opportunity for parent volunteers, who would become the backbone of support for TTV. And because TTV values the parents as the primary physical and spiritual provider, parents will be given resources and training to equip them to continue the gospel learning in the home. Finally, TTV will leverage its community relationships and influence to create healthier partnerships for the family. Epstein's is the best model for parental involvement in education because it provides six effective types of parent involvement that encourage and equip parents to actively engage with the educational process.

## CHAPTER 5

### EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

This project was designed to develop a resource to equip volunteers at Tending the Vine to teach underserved children in Litchfield, Illinois. This chapter evaluates the project's purpose and goals, explains its strengths and weaknesses, describes changes I would make, and includes theological and personal reflections gleaned from the completion of this project.

#### **Evaluation of the Project's Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to equip volunteers at TTV in Litchfield, Illinois, to teach underserved children. The project successfully fulfilled its purpose according to the curriculum advisors, participants, and the results of a *t*-test that revealed a significant change in the participants' knowledge and attitude toward instructing underserved children.

Understanding the context of the community of Litchfield, one can see why the project was necessary and its outcome was good news for the church and Tending the Vine. Litchfield is a community that is burdened by poverty, substance abuse, broken family dynamics, impaired learning, and being unchurched. Many children suffer the maltreatment of abuse and neglect coupled with limited to no resources to help them flourish, especially in a learning environment.

COVID-19 exposed the harsh reality in which these children live and learn. First Baptist Church Litchfield filled an education void for underserved children brought on by COVID-19 by opening our facilities and providing volunteers to tutor, instruct, and mentor underserved children. Many of the children came to TTV's learning environment

with a spectrum of complex behaviors that could include anything from lack of intrinsic motivation to anti-social behavior. It became apparent to the church leadership that our volunteers needed training on how to teach underserved children.

The curriculum addressed the question, “How does one teach underserved children?” It then defined “underserved child” and described their living environment while explaining the complicated behaviors one can expect from the child. From there, the curriculum laid a biblical foundation for education as a ministry of discipleship and defined the role and nature of God’s Word, the Holy Spirit, and the church in the instructional process. Building on this biblical foundation, a proven educational philosophy was set in place that utilized some modern strategies for teaching children with impaired learning. The volunteers were also equipped with a classroom management plan that was compatible with the educational philosophy and the complex behaviors that present with underserved children. Finally, the curriculum offered a framework to help volunteers find creative and constructive ways to involve parents in their child’s learning journey.

The verbal feedback from the participants was overwhelmingly positive. During a time of group feedback, many of the participants commented on how much better they felt about working with underserved children. Others affirmed that the curriculum could be modified to teach adults. Others even stated that the curriculum would be best used to train teachers in a Christian school or used to revitalize a school. All of them said they would take the training again if offered.

### **Evaluation of the Project’s Goals**

Successful completion of this project depended upon the completion of four goals. The first goal was to assess volunteers using a pre-project survey. This goal was considered successfully met when fourteen volunteers took the survey and data analysis yielded a clearer picture of their perceived teaching aptitude before training.



The survey used a Likert scale designed to measure the pre- and post-project change in perceived teaching aptitude in discipleship knowledge, educational philosophy and practice, and attitude toward teaching underserved children.

The second goal was to develop a six-session curriculum that would equip volunteers to teach underserved children. The curriculum helped the volunteers recognize the broken context of the children we teach, laid biblical foundations for a discipleship ministry of teaching, philosophy of education, classroom management, and provided a proven framework for parent involvement in the education process. A panel of four experts examined the curriculum and utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum. The panel was comprised of a Christian public-school teacher who has taught school for over twenty years, a Christian scholar/editor, an ordained pastor, and a deacon who serves at First Baptist Church Litchfield. This goal was successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criteria met or exceeded the sufficiency level.

The third goal was to improve the volunteers' teaching aptitude by delivering the curriculum on teaching underserved children. This change in aptitude was measured by readministering the Teaching Underserved Children Assessment survey in goal 1. There was a noticeable change in the mean score between the pre/posttest. The pretest mean score was 93.14 with the post-test mean score being 106.5, showing a positive increase of 13.4 points in perceived aptitude. The goal was met when fourteen TTV volunteers participated in all six sessions and a *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference between pre and post-project survey scores:  $t_{(13)} = -7.061, p < .0004262$ .

An area of greatest improvement, in my estimation, is how the volunteers developed a better understanding of new educational concepts. I knew going into the training that my participants would have very little knowledge of the educational philosophies and practices as well as the parent involvement framework I was presenting

to them. I anticipated low scores on the pretest survey regarding these questions. I was pleasantly surprised in their increased understanding of those topics in the post-survey. Regarding the questions pertaining to understanding ecclesiastical perennialism, G.R.A.C.E Temperament Based Classroom Management, and the Parent Framework, the participants mean score increased by 8.5 points. Their t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference between pre- and post-project survey scores:  $t_{(13)} = -8.448$ ,  $p < .0005872$ .

I learned that although my content was new and somewhat dense, the method I chose to teach the content was, to some degree, helpful in my volunteers obtaining new information. This was affirmed by the comments of the participants relating to the organization and instruction of the material in a follow-up discussion. The participants also felt that having a better understanding of the education concepts I presented increased their confidence to serve underserved children in a teaching ministry.

The fourth goal was to develop a strategic plan for implementing a parent involvement framework at TTV. This goal was successfully met with the development of a strategic plan for implementing a parent involvement framework at TTV (see chapter 4).

### **Strengths of the Project**

There were four strengths of this project. First, the research for the project brought to light a severe need in our community. For the first time in the church's history, we were able to examine our community and discover where darkness reigns the most. We found that poverty, substance abuse, broken family dynamics, impaired learning, and being unchurched were severely detrimental to our community. This gave us clarity in forming a mission, vision, and strategy for serving underserved children who suffer in Litchfield's darkness.

Second, while organizing and implementing this project, practical experience helped blend philosophical research with real-world application, enabling me to refine and present training material that was more applicable to the children we serve. Tending the Vine is an after-school program that helps underserved children succeed academically and socially in the classroom. Serving these children allowed us to experience the needs of the children and their families, as well as identify the areas where we need to scaffold the volunteers. The research began to help us blend the philosophical and practical together. Furthermore, it allowed me to present the training material with refined applications to real-life situations.

Third, this project cast a vision for moving beyond an after-school program to forming the building blocks of a school. Many of the participants in the training commented that the material would be perfect for training teachers at a school. Moreover, they encouraged the church to consider establishing a school where these principles would be applied and practiced.

The final strength of the project was the panel of experts who examined the curriculum. I was fortunate to have an experienced Christian educator, a Christian scholar, a well-read deacon, and an experienced pastor critique the curriculum. They all offered great feedback that allowed me to make careful and thoughtful adjustments.

### **Weaknesses of the Project**

There were three weaknesses of this project. First, I taught the curriculum in six sessions over a period of two days. In the future, the amount of time allocated to teaching the curriculum should be doubled. The material is dense in places and needs more time for explanation and application.

Second, the curriculum is geared more toward educators than volunteers. Many concepts and ideas are confined to the teaching world, which makes its vernacular foreign to most lay volunteers. To be versatile enough to help both churches and schools, the

curriculum needs to be adjusted to account for lay volunteers with no teaching experience.

Finally, the project could have spent more time exploring ways to help the volunteers examine their own aptitudes and attitudes. For example, even though the curriculum is helpful for those who want to engage underserved children, volunteers can enter the classroom with a wrong heart attitude that needs correction. Other times, a volunteer may want to use a methodology that once was helpful to them but is not helpful to the children they now serve. Volunteers will become more confident in their ability to help underserved children when they understand the areas in which they too need to grow and learn. The project could explore more of these deficiencies to better equip the volunteers to serve underserved children.

### **What I Would Do Differently**

There are several things I would do differently with my project. The first thing I would do is utilize the small teaching concepts I learned in my seminars. The volunteers at TTV would fare better with receiving new information in smaller doses. In the future, I would develop a strategy for organizing my material and time around taking advantage of small teaching. Along those same lines, the second thing I would do differently is teach the material over a 6 to 8-week period. Although teaching six sessions allowed for more consistency and continuity, the new information intake was overwhelming to the volunteers' learning process. They were physical and mentally tired after two sessions. One participant said it was like standing in front of a fire hydrant with the water coming full force at his face. Even though he liked it, it was overwhelming at times. Spreading the sessions over a longer time period would give volunteers the opportunity to process the information and give me thoughtful feedback.

The last thing I would do differently is administer the pre-project survey two or more weeks ahead of time. This would enable me to better discern the needs of the

volunteers and cater the curriculum to their needs. I intuitively knew there were certain ideas that would be foreign to them, but I underestimated their commitment to discipleship. I could have spent less time on establishing education as a ministry of discipleship and more time on the philosophy of education, classroom management, and parent involvement.

### **Theological Reflections**

This project forced me to reflect on three necessary truths. To begin, in this world, we live in the tension of the beautiful yet broken. It is obvious God has covered the heavens with his majesty (Ps 8:1), and the skies proclaim his handiwork (Ps 19:1). And yet, the effect of sin is never more pronounced than when it affects a young child. The contrast is unbearable at times. A child, made in the image of God, is a gift to the family and the world and yet suffers the maltreatment of poverty, substance abuse, broken family dynamics, learning impairment, and being unchurched. A child is gleaming with God-given potential and yet can feel unsafe, dysregulated, disconnected, and devalued. Yes, our world is beautiful, but it is broken. Doing this project was like connecting little pixels of information and painting a portrait that contrasted the darkness that Litchfield suffers with the life Jesus offers to underserved children.

Secondly, the Christian faith is the only worldview that offers underserved children an understanding of why their life is affected by such brokenness and the solution to their brokenness: finding abundant life. The Bible reveals that God made everything perfect and good (Gen 1–2). Man’s disobedience brought the curse of sin and death (Gen 3:1–15; Rom 3:23; 6:23). Everything breaks and dies because of sin. Poverty is in the world because of sin. God’s image bearers suffer addiction because of sin. Families break apart because of sin. Impaired learning, whether it is from the womb or the environment, comes at the hands of sin. Being separated from God and rebellious to his ways is the effect of sin. Yes, we are broken, but God can restore us to beauty.

The gospel offers underserved children the right solution. God did not leave us in our brokenness, but instead sent his Son to redeem, reconcile, and restore us to a right relationship with him. Yes, we are all broken, but Jesus's redemption is our only hope for reconciliation and restoration. Underserved children must hear this truth.

Finally, the truth is that every underserved child and their family needs to be pursued with the zeal of the Great Commission. Now that the church knows the darkness of Litchfield and the underserved children who live there, FBCL has an obligation to direct all its resources to bring the light of life to these children and their families. When Jesus says, "Go and make disciples of all people," he includes underserved children who live in poverty, suffer at the hands of substance abuse, are broken by their family's dysfunction, struggle to learn, and have little to no access to the gospel. It is the mission of FBCL to joyfully advance the kingdom of God by making disciples out of underserved children who will make much of Jesus in the church, community, and home.

### **Personal Reflections**

I learned that I have a passion for Christian education. I did not go into the project with a desire to teach underserved children. My DEdMin journey began with a desire to help families who have children with disabilities. On a whim decision, I changed my DMin to a DEdMin after attending an education class. From there, I soaked in every education class I could take. I found myself enjoying the readings that were assigned, even setting books aside to read again. I watched my professors through an educational lens and learned what a good teacher looks like. My own teaching at FBCL changed, and people have taken notice. Several friends in the church have suggested that I teach more classes or even, God willing, work in an educational environment.

I have a desire to either start a Christian school or revitalize a Christian school. My project has given me confidence that I have the tools necessary to take on such an endeavor. My faith and reason align to dream big for the kingdom of God. I can envision

a school where teachers are trained to instruct from an ecclesiastical perennial philosophy that uses modified differentiated learning strategies to see underserved children grow in their faith and reason. I can envision classrooms where the teacher's goal is to disciple the child's heart toward right belief for right behavior. I have confidence in the parent involvement framework that would provide creative ways for parents to engage in the learning process and grow as we disciple them. Three years ago, I could not see this. Now, I see myself joyfully advancing the kingdom of God by making disciples of underserved children who will make much of Jesus in the church, community, and home.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this project was to equip volunteers at Tending the Vine in Litchfield, Illinois, to effectively teach underserved children. Underserved children have limited to no resources. They suffer maltreatment from poverty, substance abuse, dysfunctional family dynamics, learning impairment, and being unchurched. Because of this, they lack intrinsic motivation to do what is best and even lash out in anti-social behavior. These behaviors make it difficult to find success in their learning environment, especially when that environment is not conducive to their needs.

My project has shown that Christians possess the necessary spiritual resources to disciple underserved children holistically through the ministry of teaching. God's resources come in the form of a framework of discipleship, the power of his Holy Spirit, and the community of his church. Furthermore, Christians who teach underserved children must embrace an ecclesiastical perennialism that utilizes differentiated learning strategies coupled with temperament-based classroom management and a robust parent involvement framework. These things combined create an intentional focus on the child's intellectual and spiritual development, a right routine and structure for the learning environment, and a robust support system for the underserved child to flourish in the abundant life Jesus offers. When a teacher embraces this philosophy and practice, the

teacher will be able to effectively teach underserved children who will make much of Jesus in the church, community, and home.



APPENDIX 1  
TEACHING UNDERSERVED CHILDREN  
ASSESSMENT

The following instrument is the Teaching Underserved Children Assessment. The assessment is comprised of general questions concerning the participant's background and a twenty-question survey assessed on a six-point Likert scale. The purpose of this survey is to assess each volunteer's level of confidence and competency in effectively teaching underserved children.

## TEACHING UNDERSERVED CHILDREN ASSESSMENT

### **Agreement to Participate**

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to measure your knowledge of teaching underserved children. This research is being conducted by Jason Plumer for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. By completion of this survey, you are providing informed consent to use your responses to this project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses.

*Participation is strictly voluntary, and you are free to withdraw anytime. Indicate below your agreement to participate in this project.*

I agree to participate

I do not agree to participate

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Four digit code :** \_\_\_\_\_

**Gender:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Age:** \_\_\_\_\_

### **General Questions:**

1. Have you accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior?
2. How long have you been a member in a Bible-believing church?
3. How many hours a week do you read or study your Bible?
4. How many hours a week do you spend in prayer?
5. How many Sundays do you make it to church in a three-month period?
6. Do you serve as a leader or volunteer in children's ministry?
7. How would you describe discipling children?
8. How would you describe teaching children?
9. How would you describe biblical wisdom?
10. Describe any training in teaching children you have received:
11. What concerns, if any, would you have about teaching underserved children at FBCL?
12. What would you expect from the church to help you teach underserved children?

**Directions:** Please mark the appropriate answer. Some questions may ask you to give your opinion using the following scale:

- SD:** Strongly Disagree
- D:** Disagree
- DS:** Disagree Somewhat
- AS:** Agree Somewhat
- A:** Agree
- SA:** Strongly Agree

	<b>Question</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>DS</b>	<b>AS</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
1	Teaching underserved children is a needed ministry in the church.						
2	I feel confident I could teach an underserved child.						
3	I have served in children's ministry at the church.						
4	I feel confident I could manage a classroom of underserved children.						
5	The Bible commands Christians to disciple children.						
6	I believe the Bible is fully sufficient and authoritative to guide and guard the hearts of children.						
7	The teacher must be empowered by the Holy Spirit to effectively teach underserved children.						
8	The church provides the best community for underserved children to flourish.						
9	I am confident in my ability to show love, compassion, kindness, and patience with underserved children.						
10	The parents must be engaged in the learning journey of underserved children.						
11	I have some knowledge of ecclesiastical perennialism as an educational philosophy.						
12	I have some knowledge of temperament-based classroom management.						
13	I have some tools for creating a plan for involving parents in the educational journey of their children.						
14	I believe the Bible provides wisdom for underserved children to flourish in this life.						

	<b>Question</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>DS</b>	<b>AS</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>
15	I pray for the underserved children of our church and community often.						
16	The Bible gives clear guidance for parenting children.						
17	The Bible provides the right worldview to explain the suffering of underserved children.						
18	The Church is to pursue underserved children as part of the Great Commission.						
19	I am skilled at asking good questions to address the feelings of a child.						
20	The church is equipped with capable volunteers to serve underserved children.						

APPENDIX 2  
CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

The following rubric was provided to a panel of four experts. The panel was comprised of a Christian public-school teacher who has taught school for over twenty years, a Christian scholar/editor, an ordained pastor, and a deacon who serves at First Baptist Church Litchfield. This panel evaluated the curriculum to ensure it was biblically accurate, sufficiently thorough, clear in presentation, and practical.

Name of Evaluator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Curriculum Evaluation Tool</b>					
<b>1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary</b>					
<b>Criteria</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Biblical Accuracy</b>					
Each lesson was sound in its interpretation of Scripture.					
Each lesson was faithful to the theology of the Bible.					
<b>Scope</b>					
The content of the curriculum sufficiently covers each issue it is designed to address.					
The curriculum sufficiently covers a biblical pedagogical methodology.					
<b>Pedagogy</b>					
Each lesson was clear, containing a big idea.					
Each lesson provides opportunities for participant interaction with the material.					
<b>Practicality</b>					
The curriculum clearly details how to develop a lesson to teach the Bible.					
At the end of the course, participants will be able to better teach others the Bible.					

## APPENDIX 3

### G.R.A.C.E. CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT PLAN

Conflict is inevitable when sinners do life together, especially children. Temperament based classroom management provides helpful guidelines for engaging children when they are dealing with stress or change, but it fails to capture their hearts. Temperament based classroom management needs to be wrapped with G.R.A.C.E if it is to be holistic and successful. This appendix provides an overview of the G.R.A.C.E. classroom management plan.

## G.R.A.C.E.

### **What is G.R.A.C.E?**

G.R.A.C.E stands for five biblical principles that guide the teacher toward the heart of the child so that God's truth can be applied to bring about right belief and right behavior. When dealing with the student, the teacher must:

#### **G: Get to the heart of the matter.**

Proverbs 4:23 says, "Guard your heart above all else, for it is the source of life." Jesus said, "From the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks (Matthew 12:34). What is in one's heart? Jesus said, "For from the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, sexual immoralities, thefts, false testimonies, slander. <sup>20</sup> These are the things that defile a person; but eating with unwashed hands does not defile a person. (Matthew 15:19-20)." James says that the reason why people argue, and fight is because of passions that wage war inside of you (James 4:1). It is in the heart where conflict begins. Therefore, the heart must be addressed if one is going to truly resolve sinful disruptions or conflict.

#### **R: Recognize the difference between foolishness and rebellion.**

The Bible says that a child must be trained in the fear of the Lord (Proverbs 22:6; Ephesians 6:3). Why does a child have to be trained? A child has to be trained because, as the Bible says, "Foolishness is bound to the heart of a youth; a rod of discipline will separate it from him (Proverbs 22:15). We are to expect a child to act foolish out of ignorance and immaturity. A teacher helps a child develop categories of right and wrong, sinfulness and rightfulness.

Not all foolishness is rebellion. Rebellion is direct defiance to authority. With foolishness a teacher can be patient and creative in her approach to correct the child, direct defiance needs to be dealt with swiftly and sometimes severely. In the Old Testament, habitual rebellion in a child wrought the death penalty (Deuteronomy 21:18-21). There is no need to overreact to a child's foolishness with severe consequences. On the other hand, it would be detrimental to the child's faith and flourishing to let them continue with a rebellious heart toward the Lord and his appointed authority.

#### **A: Ask good heart probing questions.**

Good questions are those that cause the child to think about and respond to the situation. A teacher must listen well to ask good questions. One good question can be better than ten pieces of advice. Good questions, therefore, are:

1. Focused questions: Stay on point with the issue you are addressed.
2. Forward Questions: Answers need to lead to the heart issue.

#### **C. Communicate the gospel clearly.**

A "values" only response does not provide long term resolution. The child must learn of his need for a Savior. Disruption and conflict are an opportunity for the child to see their broken condition, see Jesus as their only hope for redemption, and learn how to walk in the redemption He offers them. Therefore, the teacher needs to help a child see:

1. His sin (Romans 3:23).
2. The wage of his sin, which is death, God's condemnation (Romans 6:23a).
3. Jesus as his solution, the gift of God's salvation (Romans 6:23b).
4. That while he was a sinner, God loved him and sent His Son to die for him (Romans 5:8).
5. His need to confess his sin and repent (Romans 10:9).
6. His need to believe in his heart that God raised Jesus from the dead and call Him Lord (Romans 10:10).



**E: Expect reconciliation and restoration.**

Children need to be trained in how to reconcile a relationship that has been broken by sin. An offending child must go to the person they offended, look them in the eyes, and ask for forgiveness. It is not enough to say, "I am sorry." God demands that people ask for forgiveness to receive salvation. Asking for forgiveness is essential to restoring the relationship. Offended children need to learn that they must forgive their classmate, and that God does not like when people are unforgiving. We are not to repay evil for evil or hold a grudge (1 Peter 3:9). If someone asks for forgiveness, Jesus demands that we give it.

**What if the offender child refuses to ask for forgiveness or the offended child refuses to give forgiveness?**

You are the teacher. You are training the child in how to reconcile and restore a relationship. If the offender/offended refuse to cooperate, use the principles of reconciliation that Jesus instituted in Matthew 18:1-6.

**Step 1:** Invite the principal/Sunday School director/ administrative authority into the conversation to help the child have understanding. The tone of the conversation should be gentle, soft, edifying, and filled with the desire to help the child see why this step is important.

**Step 2:** With the teacher and administrative authority, invite the parents into the conversation. Help the parents understand why it is biblical and important for forgiveness to be given and received. Give them time to help the child understand and follow through with the expectation. It is not wise to let things linger for very long, but time may be needed to allow the parents to disciple their child.

**Step 3:** At this point, the conversation is more between the administrative authority and the parents. The administrative authority will have to decide what consequence is necessary and if the class or school is a good fit for the child.

APPENDIX 4  
T-TEST RESULTS

<b>T-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means</b>		
	<i>Pre-Project Total</i>	<i>Post-Project Total</i>
Mean	93.14285714	106.5
Variance	69.05494505	56.73076923
Observations	14	14
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	13	
t stat	-7.06134296292547	
P(T<=t) one-tail	4.26288E-06	
t Critical one-tail	1.770933396	
P(T<=t) two-tail	8.531E-06	
t Critical two-tail	2.160368656	

APPENDIX 5

T-TEST RESULTS FOR QUESTIONS 11, 12, 13

<b>T-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means</b>		
	<i>Pre-Project Total</i>	<i>Post-Project Total</i>
Mean	7.28571428	15.7142857
Variance	15.29670329	3.14285714
Observations	14	14
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	13	
t stat	-8.4887523	
P(T<=t) one-tail	5.807233E-07	
t Critical one-tail	1.7709333	
P(T<=t) two-tail	1.16145E-06	
t Critical two-tail	2.160368656	

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## ABSTRACT

### EQUIPPING VOLUNTEERS AT TENDING THE VINE IN LITCHFIELD, ILLINOIS, TO EFFECTIVELY TEACH UNDERSERVED CHILDREN

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Current educational philosophies and practices fail to equip teachers to holistically address underserved children's learning needs. This project aims to equip volunteers at Tending the Vine in Litchfield, Illinois, to effectively teach underserved children. Chapter 1 describes the context of ministry in the community of Litchfield and presents the purpose, goals, context, rationale, definitions, limitations, delimitations, and research methodology of the project. Chapter 2 lays the theological foundation for reaching and instructing underserved children through the discipleship ministry of education. Chapter 3 explores how a hybrid educational philosophy that combines perennial principles with differentiated learning strategies, a G.R.A.C.E temperament-based classroom management plan, and a parent involvement framework holistically support underserved children to flourish in a learning environment. Chapter 4 gives a detailed description of the implementation of the project and the data analysis. The final chapter presents an evaluation of the project.

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