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DEVELOPING A DISCIPLESHIP CURRICULUM FOR  
EDUCATORS OF EAST ASIAN CHILDREN AT  
CHILDREN'S EDUCATION IN CHRIST  
NETWORK EAST ASIA

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

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

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by  
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**APPROVAL SHEET**

DEVELOPING A DISCIPLESHIP CURRICULUM FOR  
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NETWORK EAST ASIA

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To my wife, Ella, and our daughters, Dora and Peipei

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## PREFACE

When I started this project to write a curriculum to teach educators how to disciple children, it marked the beginning of a new journey. Having been trained as a preacher at 12 in East Asia, I never thought I would be teaching young children, but at nearly 40 years old, I became a preschool principal. Teaching young children about the Word of God has been an amazing experience for me, as I never thought I could manage it. Young children have taught me how to teach them God's word in a hermeneutical approach, rather than just reciting Bible stories. I believe that training parents to teach their children in a hermeneutical way will help them be much more successful.

However, the persecution and pandemic lockdown changed my approach. I began to understand the importance of koinonia, and that John wrote his letter - the word of God—for koinonia. Through this project, I began to understand more about the purpose of eternal life and how the Word of God is meant for koinonia—intimacy with the triune God. Persecution and pandemic lockdown cannot stop this from happening. This project helped me become aware of my blindness, and it is a starting point for my next journey with the children, who are growing up and will be the next generation of leaders to serve God and enjoy koinonia with Him in difficulties and trials.

Thank you, Dr. Haste, for your encouragement and help, and thank you, Dr. Thomas Chow for your fatherly hug.

Matthew Jili Yang

Irvine, California

May 2023

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

This project aimed to equip teachers and parents in East Asia to disciple their children in persecution. The first section of this chapter gives a brief introduction to the initiatives of equipping teachers and parents in a broader ministry context of the discipleship network in East Asia, Europe, and North America. The chapter continues with the rationale for this project, its goals, and the research methodology used, and then concludes with a mandate for discipleship.

#### **Ministry Context**

I participated in a discipleship training network, known as the Discipleship Training Camps (DTC), for around seventeen years. I served in both an educational role, leading an educational team; and a pastoral role, leading a related church plant project in an Eastern Asian city, and later in the United States. One of my spiritual mentors initiated this network in the early 2000s in Europe among overseas East Asian students. The DTC network grew from Europe and the US to East Asia and beyond. As the DTC ministries grew, leaders and attendees established churches and fellowships as a core part of the network.

A typical DTC camp was twelve hours per day, for three to five days, twice a year. In two years, the attendees would finish four modules: “Life in Christ,” “New Creation,” “Me and My Church,” and “Hermeneutics: Receiving God’s Word.”<sup>1</sup> The number of camp attendees varied from 50 to 200. Most attendees were pastors and

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<sup>1</sup> The founder gave me permission to reflect and report on his unpublished curriculum, mainly the PowerPoint materials, in this project and any other assignments related to my theological education.

ministry leaders. For each camp, there were four to five trainers and seven to twenty small group leaders. A normal twelve-hour day included worship, teaching, small group discussion, inspirational preaching, and biblical counseling.

In 2014, I led a team to start a school-based educational project. The primary task was to establish the DTC educational ministry and to transform the DTC camp adult curriculum into a preschool curriculum and Sunday school curriculum. This team also aimed to support the children's ministry in the network. However, at the end of 2017, the preschool was forced to close. The teachers continued to serve in a network to train parents and other teachers. In 2018 and 2019, this network started a few camps designed for educators and parents.

All the attendees of the educator's camp were teachers and parents who had attended the DTC adult camps. In two experimental camps in 2018 and 2019 in East Asia, more than seventy people attended. Most of the attendees were parents. Fifty percent of them were children's Sunday school teachers. The need for educational ministries in the network was growing dramatically. One week after the second camp in June 2019, attendees in three cities began sub-camps/learning gatherings using audio recordings and materials from the educators' camp. Their initiatives also required further support from the network.

In 2020, I attempted to establish an online Christian high school using the initial curriculum to teach high school students in East Asia. However, due to the ban on most online education in the area, the online school had to shut down. Despite this setback, I gained valuable experiences in developing a curriculum for educators.

Despite the significant growth and emerging opportunities, the DTC and educational ministries faced two major challenges. First, churches in East Asia had experienced increasing persecution in the previous five years, leading to the closure of the Christian preschool/research center. This persecution environment added more pressure to adult disciples, who were now tempted to return to their old way of living or religious

practices, similar to what happened to the Hebrew believers in Hebrews 2:1, 3:6, 4:1, and 10:38-39. Moreover, if persecution became more severe, mature mentors from outside the area might be expelled, creating an urgent need for a leadership transition that could cause turbulence among disciples. In fact, many churches in the region had split over debates on theological differences and strategies to face the challenges of persecution. Additionally, children who were followers of Christ faced significant tension due to authorities launching political education in preschools and requiring public school students, including elementary school students, to disclose their beliefs and those of their parents/guardians. Therefore, the support of a greater community of believers was essential.

Second, cultural traditions in East Asia challenged discipleship in persecution. Jesus's Parable of Four Soils illustrated this concern well (Mark 4:5-6, 16-17). The disciples might accept God's Word and discipleship gladly at first, but when tribulation or persecution arose for the Word's sake, they immediately stumbled. Jesus indicated that one of the reasons the Word of God had no root in the audience's hearts was because of the stony ground inside (Mark 4:16-17). In the immediate context, these stones in the ground were anything that stopped roots from growing deeper. Though they initially seemed to accept the Word of God happily, in the past three years some zealous and happy disciples in the discipleship network ceased to be followers of Christ because of persecution. In the East Asian context, the godless cultural tradition of more than 5,000 years represented the stones or even rocks in the hearts of the trainees of this project.

One example of how cultural traditions could impede discipleship was the tendency of male East Asian attendees of the DTC to prioritize being good breadwinners over following God's instructions to teach and model to their children the commandments (Deut 6:1-7). In East Asian tradition, mothers typically take the lead in raising children. As a result, fathers often work long hours to earn money for their families' expensive education, leaving little time or energy for caring for their wives, children, or themselves.

Consequently, children often viewed their heavenly father in the same way they view their earthly fathers—as a distant, busy, sometimes careless, and even angry figure. Another example is the East Asian way of learning, which prioritizes rational or theoretical understanding over relational walking with God in daily life. These cultural traditions pose a challenge to the growth of discipleship and had to be navigated carefully.

These two challenges also indicated opportunities for disciples to grow deeper in the Word of God. This, persecution might have been a starting point for future revival in East Asia. If these cultural rocks could be moved from the hearts of the trainees, then the Word of God would produce some thirty, sixty, or a hundred times more fruit. The gospel of Christ might multiply in the coming years as it had in past persecution (Mark 4:20).<sup>2</sup>

### **Rationale**

To address these challenges, other leaders and I initiated an educator’s camp program that focused on essential everyday settings of practice, such as parenting and education. The success of three experimental camps in 2018 and 2019 demonstrated a growing demand for formalized training and a curriculum, or a textbook to support discipleship and leadership development. The main objective of this educational project was to develop a comprehensive curriculum or textbook for educators that could facilitate four-generation discipleship (2 Tim 2:2-3) and equip teachers to disciple children as future Christian leaders, particularly in light of the growing threat of persecution. The approach was grounded in the biblical model of discipleship presented in 2 Timothy 2:2-3, where Paul urged Timothy (the second generation disciple) to identify and train faithful men (a third generation of disciples) who would continue to mentor and disciple others (the fourth generation). Despite restrictions on religious activities for children, small Christian communities or family churches provide a viable option for spiritual education and pastoral support, and over time, these child disciples emerge as mature leaders for the future. My

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<sup>2</sup> In my hometown, the believers increased eight times to more than 310,000 during the cruel persecution of cultural revolution (1966-1980).

personal experience, having been trained as a preacher at the age of 12, underscores the importance of early discipleship in nurturing the next generation of Christian leaders. In fact, many of my co-workers, who were also trained at a young age, are now leaders of various local churches all over the world.

The provision of a comprehensive curriculum and textbook for the educators' camp would not only serve to enhance the abilities of teachers to teach and disciple children effectively, but more importantly, would prepare them to take on leadership and mentoring roles in small spiritual communities or family churches. These communities and churches would provide a supportive and nurturing environment for children to grow in their faith and develop into the future Christian leaders that East Asia needs. This holistic approach would play a crucial role in sustaining and strengthening the faith of the next generation, even in the face of challenges, such as persecution and cultural barriers.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to equip teachers from Discipleship Training Camps in East Asia to disciple children in an educational setting.

### **Goals**

To achieve this purpose, three goals were established.

1. The first goal was to develop an eight-session curriculum for the Educator's Camp to teach parents and teachers how to disciple children in educational and family settings.
2. The second goal was to assess the leaders' understanding of children's koinonia discipleship.
3. The third goal was to teach the curriculum in one educational camp online or in person.

### **Research Methodology**

Three goals determined the effectiveness of this project. The first goal was to develop an eight-session curriculum for the Educator's Camp to teach parents and teachers how to disciple children in educational and family settings. This goal was measured by an

expert panel of three, who used a rubric to evaluate the curriculum's biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability.<sup>3</sup> The goal was considered successfully met when at least 90 percent of the evaluation criteria met or exceeded the sufficient level. If the 90 percent benchmark was not initially met, then the material was revised until it met the standard.

The second goal of the project was to assess the leaders' understanding of children's koinonia discipleship. This goal was achieved through a Questionnaire of Koinonia Education (QKE) survey that was administered before the training.<sup>4</sup> The survey was piloted in an East Asian language and then translated into English. The survey included four dimensions: conviction, awareness, responsiveness, and affirmation (CARA). The goal was considered successful when more than 75 percent of participants reported that the QKE had helped them become aware of their convictions, wrong core beliefs, responsiveness, and affirmation (in section 4 of the survey). Specifically, survey questions in section 3 assessed participants' CARA in six different areas of children's discipleship. In section 4, participants were asked whether the survey questions in section 3 helped them become aware of their CARA.

All the data in section 4 was self-reported. However, the extensive data collected in section 3 helped validate the results of section 4. Specifically, in part 1 of section 3, participants' convictions about koinonia education tended to predict their practice of koinonia education in part 2 of section 3. This suggests that if there is a correlation or at least a prediction between convictions and awareness-responsiveness-affirmation (ARA) in koinonia education, the self-reported data in section 4 may have some degree of internal consistency, thereby validating the success of goal 2.

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<sup>3</sup> See appendix 2. All 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. This methodology is described in the following section.

<sup>4</sup> See appendix 1.

Assessing participants' convictions could have been challenging due to several factors. First, individuals might not be aware of their untruthful beliefs, with many core beliefs being based on lies from the world instead of the Word of God. Second, East Asian Christians are good at guessing the correct answers during surveys, resulting in no change in convictions in pre-training and post-training surveys. To help them become more aware, I listed some contradictory facts that the trainees might not be aware of, as their convictions might be nominal, and they might be practicing wrong core beliefs without realizing it. This approach was like the one used by the apostle John in 1 John, where he pointed out the contradictions between the recipients' claimed koinonia with God and their behavior that indicated the opposite (not abiding in Christ) because they did not love one another (1 John 4:8). John indicated such contradictions so that the recipients might repent (1 John 1:8-9).

I also made changes to the conviction questions by using the Likert scale instead of right or wrong options. This change enabled participants to rate how often they had been practicing a specific conviction. If a conviction was seldom practiced, then it was likely that it was only nominal.

The second and third dimensions were awareness and responsiveness. In terms of awareness, the aim was to help participants become more aware of important aspects of their convictions of koinonia education such as demonstrating to children of being in Christ or not (John 15:1-8), walking in the Spirit or fulfilling the lust of the flesh (Gal 5:16-20), the different temptations they may face (Matt 4:1-11), and the importance of trusting God through the Scriptures (2 Tim 3:16-17). This heightened awareness was expected to lead to greater responsiveness, which involved being willing to respond to God by admitting sins (1 John 1:8-10) and offering themselves as a spiritually resurrected new self to God (Rom 6:13), among other things.

The last dimension was affirmation. When it comes to the conviction that born-again Christians are always in Christ, it was true that they could not be out of Christ.



However, when they forgot or failed to identify with their actual life and personhood in Christ, they might have acted in ways that were inconsistent with their true identities. Through repentance, they could have experienced koinonia with God and affirmed that they were genuinely in Christ. For example, 1 John emphasizes koinonia and confirms that believers had eternal lives (1 John 5:13) even though their behavior may have contradicted their true identities.

To measure awareness, responsiveness, and affirmation, a six-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6) was used. For example, to assess how responsive a participant was to the Spirit in koinonia education (Gal 5:16-25), the survey measured how often they repent when they realize they are not following the Spirit in discipling children.

The third goal was to evaluate the curriculum's effectiveness in preparing a minimum of 25 teachers or parents for koinonia discipleship/education with children. This was accomplished by administering the same survey before and after the training courses. A *t*-test of dependent samples was used to determine the success of the goal. The survey results were analyzed in three areas of section 1 and CARA in section 3. Additionally, section 4 evaluated the effectiveness of the training through the respondents' feedback on five areas of helpfulness. The post-training survey included a question on whether the participants experienced koinonia during the training online.<sup>5</sup> The success of the training was confirmed if over 75 percent of respondents indicated that it was helpful in these five areas. The training could be conducted either in-person or online, and the primary objective was to enhance the readiness of participants to engage in koinonia discipleship/education with children.

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<sup>5</sup> To enhance engagement in an online environment, I drew upon my experiences serving in many online discipleship training camps during the COVID-19 pandemic. I incorporated two sessions of inspirational preaching and a short worship session to facilitate interaction. This design appeared to be effective, as evidenced by the data analysis presented in chap. 5.

## **Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations**

The following definitions of key terms are used throughout this project.

*Koinonia.* *Koinonia* is the fellowship of the born-again new person with the Triune God and other fellow persons in Christ (1 John 1:1-4). A believer can experience such fellowship when following the Spirit to identify with the new, born-again life (Rom 8:16; Gal 4:6) and present oneself to God and members of body as instruments of righteousness in Christ (Rom 6:13).

*Discipleship.* In this project, *discipleship* is defined as an inside-out paradigm of becoming like Jesus as a true disciple (e.g., putting on the new self as a new creation, Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). It is also a paradigm by following the Spirit to manifest the relationship with the Triune God (*koinonia*). The paradigm is based on Paul's teachings of living out the new creation in Christ.

Two limitations applied to this project. First, it was designed as an additional discipleship camp for educators, in addition to the four existing discipleship camps. Camp attendees were mostly limited to those who had already participated in the previous four camps, and the experts who evaluated the curriculum were from the related training network. As a result, it was important to ensure the continuity of these camps for better and more comprehensive training. Therefore, the curriculum was based on the design of the previous four modules of DTC.

Second, the design and implementation of the project were constrained by the persecution context in East Asia, which limited its effectiveness. For instance, communication and training methods were restricted due to internet censorship, creating difficulties in effectively training the teachers. Furthermore, persecution forced a shift in the educational setting from an attendance of one hundred to a smaller online setting, necessitating flexibility in training design. Consequently, I had to conduct the camp through Zoom, an online video conference service. Nevertheless, owing to my extensive experience in serving in other online discipleship camps, I was able to create a conducive environment for *koinonia* experiences through Zoom.

## **Conclusion**

Despite the significant challenges of severe persecution and pandemic trauma, God presented opportunities for educational ministries in discipleship training in East Asia. A curriculum centered on koinonia discipleship can serve as an effective tool to equip educators in nurturing an intimate koinonia with the triune God and children, while also training future leaders for Christian communities in East Asia. This close relationship with God can bring healing and reconciliation within churches and families, which is of utmost importance in the region's churches for the foreseeable future. By providing a practical model for creating a nurturing environment for children to grow, the project can serve as a vital foundation for the long-term growth of churches.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEOLOGY OF KOINONIA EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN

This chapter introduces the theological foundation of koinonia education for children, featuring a concise translation of part 1 of my textbook, which was the curriculum for the online camp.<sup>1</sup> This chapter provides practical applications for children’s discipleship and emphasizes the importance of concrete examples in specific cultural and educational contexts, rather than just theological abstraction.

The chapter begins with the importance of children’s cognitive paradigm in the kingdom of God, drawing on a discussion of Matthew 19:13-15, with its literary context from Matthew 18:1-5, and a cross-reference to Mark 10:1-25. Jesus urges his adult disciples to turn to the likeness of children, highlighting the need for educators to have humility and trust in God. When children trust God, they can experience his greatness and understand how the kingdom of heaven works.

The second section discusses the core of adults’ unbelief and self-striving through Genesis 2:24-3:7, emphasizing the importance of educators being aware of their own weakness in faith when demonstrating their relationship with God to children.

The chapter continues with Matthew 28:18-20 to show that educators and disciple-makers of children need to have an attitude of “going” to be sent to children as part of the many nations. Matthew 4:1-10 then shows that educators need to “go” and understand children’s temptations. Their temptations are the same as those of adult disciples. Educators can learn to lead children out of temptations by sympathizing with them.

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<sup>1</sup> Chap. 3 covers a brief translation of part 2 of the textbook.

The fifth section of this chapter summarizes the theological foundation of the children’s discipleship curriculum. It highlights the role of the curriculum from a relational perspective as koinonia education/discipleship. The chapter concludes with Mark 4:1-20, the Parable of the Four Soils. Educators can follow Jesus’s teaching to discern the hearts of children to lead them to the koinonia with God.

**A Life-and-Faith-Seeking-Understanding Paradigm:  
Starting Point for Koinonia (Matt 19:13-15;  
see also Mark 10:1-25)**

Jesus teaches his adult disciples that the kingdom of God belongs to little children. Matthew 19:13-15 says, “Then little children were brought to Him that He might put His hands on them and pray, but the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.’ And He laid his hands on them and departed from there.”<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, Jesus clarifies to Nicodemus in John 3:3 and 3:5 that without a born-again life, no one can enter or see the kingdom of God. Jesus’s statement lays the epistemological foundation for children’s discipleship. In other words, one must be born again to have this new/eternal life, to know God and his kingdom; children are no exemption. This new life is the epistemological foundation of understanding, which is a life-seeking-understanding paradigm, which is parallel to the faith seeking understanding paradigm of Herman Bavinck.<sup>3</sup>

How does this paradigm work in a believer’s understanding of the kingdom? Jesus’s statement in John 3:2-5 about a born-again life is the necessity rather than sufficiency for the knowledge of God. For example, in Matthew 18:3, Jesus radically indicates that unless adult disciples repent to the likeness of children, they cannot enter the kingdom of God. Most commentators agree that Jesus emphasized the value of

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<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations come from the New King James Version (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982).

<sup>3</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Christian Worldview*, trans. Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, James Eglinton, and Cory C. Brock (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 11.

children in the kingdom of God in Matthew 18:1-5 and 19:13-15.<sup>4</sup> This section argues the importance of Matthew 19:13-15 in its literary context as a starting point for children's cognitive advantage over adults.

Educators need to understand that young children, as disciples, are newborns in both the heavenly and earthly realms. Adults may not value young children because of their lack of experience and abilities to survive and thrive in the earthly realm. However, adults must become like children to enter the realm/kingdom of heaven/truth;<sup>5</sup> only then can adults lead children to God. Donald Hagner suggests that the phrase "entering the kingdom of God" (Matt 18:3-4) means the experience of the kingdom of God<sup>6</sup> rather than the salvation of disciples.

In this broader context of Jesus's discourse with his disciples, "entering the kingdom of God" is the same as "owning the kingdom of God," "inheriting eternal life," "entering eternal life," and "being saved" (18:3; 19:14, 16-17, 23-25), because Jesus interchangeably used these expressions. In his simple language, children in the kingdom represent the opposite of the adult disciples at that moment: they could experience the kingdom while the adults could not.

What stops adult disciples from experiencing/entering the kingdom? Disciples live in the world and the world by its nature is a stumbling block (*σκάνδαλον*; Matt 18:7). Disciples stumble and become stumbling blocks when the world influences them. Matthew 18:5-6 implies that if they do not accept little ones as they accept the Lord, then disciples become stumbling blocks (18:5-6). In this broader context, Matthew 19:13 suggests that when disciples are not living in the kingdom of heaven, they are influenced by the world and become stumbling blocks for children coming to Jesus.

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<sup>4</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 506.

<sup>5</sup> Bavinck, *Christian Worldview*, 46.

<sup>6</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33B (Nashville: Nelson, 2008), 517.

If children can experience the kingdom of heaven, especially the authority and blessings through Jesus Christ (e.g., Jesus hugs them and blesses them; Mark 10:16<sup>7</sup>), then they can also learn to know the kingdom of God (Matt 18:1-5; Mark 10:14-15), and the kingdom belongs to them. Meanwhile, the embracing and blessing of Jesus would instill in children a sense of acceptance, which is crucial for building intimate relationships and developing self-worth. On the contrary, in the context of Matthew 18:1-19:26, adult disciples were not experiencing the kingdom; they also did not understand what Jesus was trying to teach. What they did was against the will of Jesus to stop the children to enter the kingdom (Matt 19:14-15).

What caused children to be in the kingdom while adult disciples were not? The literary context of Matthew 19:13-15 starts with a connecting word, “then,” which leads to the previous context (Matt 19:1-12). Jesus was tempted by the Pharisees on the issue of divorce. He began to teach about the explicit intention of God: “Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matt 19:6). R. T. France suggests, “Jesus’ reaffirmation of the ideal of unbreakable marriage in 19:8 provokes the disciples to reflect rather weakly that such a demanding commitment in it might be better avoided by not marrying at all!”<sup>8</sup> Hagner writes, “The risks of becoming inseparably linked with an unsatisfactory wife, in whatever way, were too great in their estimate.”<sup>9</sup> The adults’ response seems natural, supposing one is struggling in marriage. It is hard for disciples to believe this original command of God. Disciples do not believe it is not good for Adam to be alone (Gen 2:18, 24; 1:27, 31). Their conclusion is that it is better to not be married (*ου συμφερει γαμησαι*), which is against the perspective of God.

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<sup>7</sup> In my preschool class, every morning I knelt down and hugged the children to welcome them and show them acceptance. I greeted them, saying, “The Heavenly Father loves you, so do I!”

<sup>8</sup> R. T. France, *Matthew*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 1 (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity, 2008), 220.

<sup>9</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 549.

When God created both Adam and Eve and united them, he believed it was perfect; the whole creation was perfect because of this marriage union (Gen 1:28; 2:18). Therefore, it is good for a man to join with his wife as one (Gen 2:24).<sup>10</sup> However, due to the Israelites' hard-heartedness, God allowed them to divorce their wives, even though it went against his intended design (Matt 19:8-9). If they did not allow divorce, then God would have had to exclude them from the community. Nevertheless, God shows great mercy to the Israelites, as divorcing their wives goes against his will and is considered adultery.

In the previous discussions, the disciples' weak response indicates their lack of faith.<sup>11</sup> A disciple struggling in marriage would not enjoy the blessing of marriage; rather, one would find it impossible to obey such a command of inseparability. He would probably respond as the disciples did.

The narrative that follows Matthew 19:13-15 indicates the disciples' distrust/unbelief more explicitly. Matthew 19:16-26 is about a young rich ruler who asks Jesus what he could do to can inherit eternal life. Along with the conversation, Jesus said that he lacked one thing (see also the parallel passage in Mark 10:21), but his commands included selling everything, giving to the poor, and following Jesus (Matt 19:21; Mark 10:21). To achieve these three things, he needs faith in God. He is a man that trusts in his riches (see also Mark 10:24); without faith in God, he could not sell everything, nor give to the poor.

In practice, a rich person would think he works hard to earn his money. When he sees the poor, he might feel that they are lazy. If he does not have compassion for the poor, then he will not be generous to the poor. The young ruler cannot enter the kingdom of heaven (inherit eternal life) because he has no faith in God. Likewise, the disciples'

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<sup>10</sup> If God did not join Adam and Eve, then the whole creation would become "not-good" because it was not good for Adam to be alone.

<sup>11</sup> France, *Matthew*, 285.



astonishment reflects their unbelief in God and their trust in the human endeavor for salvation/entering the kingdom (Matt 19:25). Jesus said, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Matt 19:26). Their astonishment indicates that they rely on their abilities to obey the law, just as the young ruler. If a rich young ruler with near-to-perfect behavior cannot be saved, then who can be saved?

In contrast, what can little children do to enter the kingdom of God? Children are humble to accept their inabilities (and perhaps their social insignificance<sup>12</sup>), and they must rely on and trust in their parents to help them. In this context, adult disciples cannot experience the kingdom because they are proud, rely on their self-striving/riches, and do not trust in God’s good intention for marriage nor God’s power to save.

To sum up, in the literacy context of Matthew 18:1-19:26, children can experience/enjoy the kingdom of God because of their humility and faith. As they experience blessings from Jesus (Matt 19:15; Mark 10:16) and their own greatness (personhood, identity, self-worth, etc.) in the kingdom, they can understand how the kingdom of God works. This paradigm of understanding the kingdom is life and faith-seeking-understanding. However, if adult disciples fall into pride (i.e., self-striving, relying on their own capabilities) and unbelief, then they cannot experience or understand the kingdom from a life-and-faith perspective. Pride and unbelief would cost them their ability to know God’s kingdom. Therefore, educators, as adult disciples, need to be alert and repent to children’s likeness of humility as to trust in God as a born-again life, when they have pride and are self-striving. Moreover, it is crucial for children’s ministry to serve another essential purpose: to demonstrate to adults this likeness and indicate that they must embody to repent. As exemplified in Matthew 18:2, Jesus asked a child to display an example to the disciples, followed by His command for them to repent. This illustrates the need for a shift in the epistemological paradigm where adults transition

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<sup>12</sup> Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 517.

from their current comprehension of challenging faith to a faith-seeking understanding, similar to that of children.

### **Self-Striving (Gen 2:25-3:7)**

When adults do not live in their faith, they will not be able to teach children to live in faith. Instead, they would teach children something else. In children's education in the area of East Asia, most educators/parents teach children the same as they would teach adults. Educators want adults to obey the law and improve behavior.<sup>13</sup> For example, the most spiritual people in East Asian churches are often those with the best behaviors, who are gentle and do not quarrel with others. In such a context, virtuous people are examples of spirituality. Hence, few Christians would think that children in the church would be the most spiritual and live in the heavenly kingdom, because children may not behave as adults expect. However, the law cannot teach people to improve their behavior (Gal 2:21-23), and behavior can sanctify no one (Rom 3:20; 4:1-2). Pastors/teachers know that they cannot achieve everything they are expected. Therefore, they teach others to do what they can do themselves. Likewise, when educators teach children, they teach them to do what adults can do.

Because of this mentality, adults evaluate the behavior of young children by what adults can do and therefore they doubt the faith of children. Educators in Christ need to be alert to whether they live by the law to judge the faith of children. On the contrary, educators need to repent to the likeness of a child: living in faith. If educators teach children how to meet the requirements of the law by self-striving, then children will not experience or understand the kingdom of God.

This self-striving comes from the fall of Adam and Eve in Genesis 2:31-3:7. In Matthew 19:4-6, concerning God's will in divorce, Jesus refers to the creation of man and woman in Genesis 1:27 and the union of a man to a woman in Genesis 2:24. This union

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<sup>13</sup> Most of this section is based on my more than thirty years of ministry experiences and observations in the East Asian Christian context, it may not apply to the US context.

is crucial for God.<sup>14</sup> In retelling the creation story in chapter 2, God sees Adam's loneliness as not good. This phrase *בִּטְוֹאֵל* means bad.<sup>15</sup> Without the union of Adam and Eve, creation was not perfect. Therefore, according to God's will, a man should leave his parents and join his wife (Gen 1:24). Furthermore, because of this wholeness, they were not ashamed of their nakedness.<sup>16</sup> However, after the fall of Adam and Eve, their concord vanished.<sup>17</sup> They felt ashamed of their nakedness (Gen 3:7, 10). In this context, shame can be defined as feeling uncomfortable when looking at one's nakedness (in daily language). This definition captures the self-conscious and painful dimension of shame.

Adam and Eve respond to their shame by covering themselves with fig leaves instead of asking for God's help. They hide from the presence of God. These efforts to cover this shame are self-striving. Therefore, self-striving can be defined as any godless effort to cover shame. In self-striving, man cannot rest from his works (Heb 4:10-11); he is in the curse of Adam (see also Gen 3:17-19). Thus, self-striving is the opposite of God's rest.

The beginning of Genesis 2 describes God's rest. When God finished his work of creation, he rested. Furthermore, in the narrative of in the previous six days, this phrase always ends the day: "So the evening and the morning were a certain day" (Gen 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31; 2:1-3). However, this phrase is not included on the seventh day, which implies that the day of the Sabbath did not end. In fact, without the temptation of the devil later in chapter 3, man would have lived in God's rest always (see Heb 4:3-4).

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<sup>14</sup> The inclusion of self-striving in this chapter is inspired by my discussion with my spiritual mentor, Thomas R. Chow.

<sup>15</sup> Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 88.

<sup>16</sup> Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 90.

<sup>17</sup> Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries vol.1 (Downer Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), 71.

After the fall of Adam and Eve, human beings could no longer live in God's rest. Adam and Eve covered themselves with fig leaves, through self-striving. Ever since, humans must find their own value/significance and meaning in such efforts. They want to cover their shame with something. Therefore, in this context, anything humans use to cover shame is like the fig leaves of self-striving.

Jesus came to restore God's rest as well as the true meaning of the marriage of man and woman and the true unity of human beings, but his disciples focused on self-striving (if they could not achieve the command of the union in marriage, then they would instead not get married). Likewise, the young ruler relied on self-striving when he asked what he could do to inherit eternal life. Furthermore, when the disciples heard the conversation between Jesus and the young ruler, they responded, "So who can be saved?" (Matt 19:25; Mark 10:26). The disciples and the young ruler depended on their abilities for good behavior and riches. Both riches and good behavior are their fig leaves to cover shame. However, these fig leaves could not cover the shame (as Gen 3:8, 21 implies). Jesus also told the young ruler that he still lacked one thing: trust in God rather than in his riches or good behavior (as the exegesis of the previous paragraphs shows (Mark 10:21; Mark 10:25)).

Contrary to adult disciples, children do not have any of the things the young ruler had—his good behavior in obeying the commands, education/knowledge, social status, or wealth. Matthew 18:3 says, "Unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." Having the likeness of children, in the literary context, is the opposite of the disciples and the young ruler. Children have faith and rely on God instead of self-striving. The humility of children is their acceptance of their incapability and their trust in their God.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Little children accept their inability and trust in the help of their parents. If parents introduce to them by example how to trust in the heavenly Father, then children have opportunities to believe in God.

Unfortunately, in East Asian churches, adults often teach children to change behavior by following the law, which encourages self-striving instead of trusting and relying on God for rest. This is contrary to Jesus’s teachings and the truth of the heavenly kingdom. In practice, young children do not question the love of parents or teachers during discipline, and they are less likely to question God’s love during discipline. Conversely, adults tend to doubt the existence of God and His love when things do not happen according to their desires or expectations. Children may not be able to understand this contradiction; they would take self-striving as a teaching of God. Consequently, they will grow into such mindset gradually.

The cultural belief in self-striving is pervasive in East Asian churches where shame and guilt are used to drive children to change behavior instead of the affirming and accepting love of God. Educators must understand this perspective to teach children how to rest in Christ instead of covering their shame with fig leaves and reinforcing the world’s teachings of self-striving, which leads to the curse of Adam (Gen 3:17-19, especially v. 19).

### **The Great Mission to “Go” to Children (Matt 28:18-20, see also Phil 2:4-8)**

Educators/parents need to follow the examples of the Lord Jesus and “go” to children. The great mission starts with the authority of Christ. Jesus’s universal sovereignty should include children. Adults also need to understand children’s problems. To achieve this, they need to have the mindset to “go” to all nations. They need to enter the “nation”<sup>19</sup> of children to understand their difficulties to know God, speak their language, and understand their culture. When educators teach young children faith, they cannot teach them through the abstract approach of theological education used for adults. Because children have not been trained in such abstract thinking, they cannot understand it. For

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<sup>19</sup> To numerous adults, communicating with children can feel like traveling to a foreign nation and speaking a different language.

example, children cannot understand systematic theological terms like sanctification or justification. Instead, if educators go through the Bible word by word, explaining the meaning of a word and connecting it with concrete examples in young children's daily life, then children will trust in God's Word and their curiosity will lead them to understand fundamental concepts of hermeneutics and biblical theology.

Educators should not teach children the way of law-obeying or self-striving. The law can indeed teach right and wrong and protect them. Though it is important for children to learn the boundaries of right and wrong through law and rules of God (Gal 4: 1-3; Rom 7: 7), the law cannot teach them to have faith in God.

To "go," Christ became human (Phil 2:4-8), spoke the human language, and came to live in the midst of men. In the same way, educators must learn to be like children, speaking a language children can understand. I was blessed to have three years of teaching children in preschool. I lived with them from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. every day, five days a week. Over the years, I began to understand the differences between children's communication and that of adults, and the differences between disciplining young children and adults. For example, when I communicated with children, I would lie down to illustrate what death is. I would use storytelling, body-facial-dramatic signs, and visual languages in communication with children. But in adult communication, sometimes it becomes inappropriate to make similar illustrations. Therefore, when I preach or communicate with adults, I communicate in different ways. At the same time, because I use this approach to communicate with children, they regard me as their own, believing that I know them, and they would follow the Lord with me.

Many adults find it hard to connect with little children. The difficulties in training children are not in skill but in a willingness to lower themselves and become like children, just as Jesus lowered himself and became in like a human (Phil 2:6-7). An educator should have a missionary mindset for children. Therefore, for children's educators, to "go" is to be willing to understand children with a servant's heart (Phil 2:7).

If an educator has only knowledge or training in children's psychology and education without identifying with the life of Christ, he/she cannot teach children to come to Christ. The educator will not be able to teach children to identify with their changed life and identities as spiritual persons (1 Cor 2:13-15). If the adult cannot identify as a spiritual person, then he/she cannot teach spiritual things to spiritual children either. The educator may have much training in children's education and understand their hearts from a psychological and educational perspective but cannot get into children's hearts and lead them to God. The secular system of education and children's psychology do not affirm Christians' changed life and their missional identities to this world. This psychology does not have a perspective of new creation. It focuses on the behaviors of the flesh while neglecting the changed nature and the spiritual/missional identities of a Christian (2 Cor 5:15-17). However, the objective of Christian education should not be solely focused on modifying children's behavior according to the flesh. Instead, the goal should be to guide children toward faith and the affirmation of their status as a new creation in Christ. Given that both adults and children face ongoing problems in the world, the key to children's education lies in whether they can live in faith and rely on Christ to confront difficulties.

The goal of Christian children's education is that the educator, the messenger of Christ, should go to children and bring them to Jesus Christ (Col 1:28). Educators are new creations and are entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation with God. Therefore, teachers should help children reconcile with God (2 Cor 5: 17-18). To achieve so, educators need to first be aware of their own changed life and new identity (Gal 2:20).

Children's educators must also follow Christ's example and go to children to understand that children's temptations are the same as adult temptations. With this understanding, educators can bring children out of their temptations. Christ came to his people and was willing to be the only mediator between God and them, and also their

high priest (1 Tim 2:2; Heb 4:14). This high priest is very great<sup>20</sup> but also sympathizes with his people so that they can come to God, because he was tempted in all things like them. In the same way, educators can have compassion for children.

### **Understanding Children’s Temptation (Matt 4:1-11): Obstacles for Koinonia**

Just as Hebrews 4:15 indicates, Christ experienced temptations. Unless he had experienced temptations, he could not have understood the difficulties of human beings in temptation. He is fully God and knows everything, but he had not experienced these temptations. As a fully human being, after going through these temptations, he can sympathize with their weaknesses. Children’s educators must understand that the temptations of children and of themselves are the same so that they can be sympathetic to the weaknesses of children and lead them to the seat of mercy of the Father (Heb 4:14-16). Matthew 4:1-10 speaks of Jesus’s temptations:

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread.” But He answered and said, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’” Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: ‘He shall give His angels charge over you,’ and, ‘In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.’” Jesus said to him, “It is written again, ‘You shall not tempt the LORD your God.’” Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, “All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.” Then Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.’”

### **The Nature of Jesus’s First Temptation Is That Man Shall Live by Bread Alone**

Satan does not come to test the divine sonship of Jesus.<sup>21</sup> The most significant

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<sup>20</sup> Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2012), 167.

<sup>21</sup> Donald Alfred Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33A (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 146.



key to understanding these temptations is found in Jesus's responses.<sup>22</sup> The connecting word "but" (ἀλλ') suggests that his answer is the opposite of Satan's temptation (Matt 4:4). Jesus says that man shall not live by bread alone; therefore, the devil implies that people cannot live without food (man shall live by bread alone). Jesus is the Son of God and has the authority to order the stones to become food. On the contrary, Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 8:3: "So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone, but man lives by every *word* that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD."

God is the one who took Jesus to the wilderness—he had Jesus fast for forty days and allowed him to starve, which was the same situation that occurred with the Israelites in the wilderness (Deut 8:2). What does it mean to live by food alone? If Jesus does not turn this stone into food, then he will die—this idea is of the world. Jesus fasted for forty days and nights, but he did not die. The way out of temptation is to believe that man lives not by food alone, but by all the words that come out of God's mouth.

John Nolland suggests, "The devil's 'if' is not an expression of doubt on his own part, nor an attempt to insinuate doubt into the mind of Jesus" concerning his sonship.<sup>23</sup> Temptation is not a test of ability, it is a test of choice. Next are some examples of both children and adults facing the same temptation. When a child yells or moans for ice-cream/lollipop, a toy, playing a video game, then the child is probably falling the same temptation that without this item, she/he cannot live, or be happy. Similarly, when adults with addictions (pornography, games, mobile phones, food) fall into the same temptation. Similar cases include the "eager-for-marriage" syndrome for East Asian women—some women may choose to marry anyone that is available and end up a bad

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<sup>22</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 144.

<sup>23</sup> John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2005), 163.

marriage. By relating children's temptations to adults' situations, educators can sympathize with children's weakness and patiently lead them to the mercy-seat of the Father.

### **The Nature of Jesus' Second Temptation Is whether God Is with Us or Not**

In Matthew 4:7, Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:16: "You shall not tempt the LORD your God as you tempted *Him* in Massah." This quotation leads to Exodus 17:7b: "Because they tempted the Lord and said, 'Is the Lord among us or not?' Therefore, the second temptation is to doubt the presence and love of Yahweh. When disciples follow God's command, yet they encounter difficulties and misfortune unexpectedly (as what happened in Exod 17:1-7). Disciples would probably be like the Israelites. When they did not have water to drink, they doubted, "Yahweh is not among us" (Exod 17:7b).

The temptation of the devil comes through quoting Psalm 91. Psalm 91:1 talks about a person living in the secret place of the Highest. The phrase living-in/dwelling means always being there. When the devil tempted Jesus, Jesus had been fasting in the wilderness for forty days and seemed to be lonely and hungry. The devil's temptation is to make him jump from the pinnacle of the temple to prove the presence and protection/love of God. As born-again Christians, disciples are like Jesus, knowing that they hide in God (Col 3:1-4), Jesus has taken them to reside in the Most Holy place of God (Heb 10:19-20). But when they forget this, they do not believe in their close relationship with God (*koinonia*). They are still alive, but they worry that they will die soon (as the Israelites). Likewise, they dwell in the secret place of the Most High; they want to jump out of the temple to see if God will save them. The nature of this temptation is unbelief—being unsure of God's presence and love.

What follows are some examples of adults and children in this temptation. To begin, adult disciples could fall into the same temptation in Bible study. For example, when they read John 15:10, "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love," many may ask, "If I do

not obey His commands, will God still love me?” This question seems to be logical, and the answer appears to be *yes*: “If I want to get God’s love, I have to obey his commands.” However, the presupposition of the command is in the previous verse: “As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love” (John 15:9). Disciples are already in his love. Often, adult disciples challenge the Bible through their rational thinking. Another example is similar when participants in the hermeneutical camps argue that the logical flow of the Bible seems right, but they do not feel right. In this case, feeling/emotion is above faith. This approach is not faith seeking understanding, it is understanding/emotion, denying the faith.

Educators need to know that God is invisible, children would want to verify God’s love through their teachers and parents. Since teachers witness that God accepts and loves children unconditionally, children will try to test if their teachers/parents love them. For instance, I once led a young child to believe in the Lord. I went through John 3:14-16 and Romans 4:17-25 to testify his faith in children’s language.<sup>24</sup> We had a prayer of affirmation of his faith, and then it was lunch-nap time; he took my left hand gently and put it into his mouth and begun to bite as hard as he could. Because he used to scratch and bite teachers, I immediately doubted whether he believed. However, a voice in my heart reminded me not to question his faith with his behavior, but to strengthen his behavior with his faith. As I look back, because I affirmed my love for him and did not react in fear or doubt, he began to have more confidence in the Heavenly Father’s love. In this case, his biting may have been to test the Father’s love through his teacher.

This second temptation is not uncommon. When East Asian adults read the Scriptures, they tend to follow the systematic theological approach to ask some questions. In this approach, the Bible is often required to prove its systematic and logical nature: if the Scriptures are not reasonable, then readers do not believe. This approach seeks faith

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<sup>24</sup> One needs to have the same faith as Abraham so that one can be sure one is witnessing their true faith.

through reasoning. However, educators' approach to Christ should be faith seeking understanding. Likewise, when Christians share the gospel with others, they try to explain the rationality of the Bible from the perspective of unbelievers. When Christians appeal to rationality, seeking evidence to prove God's presence, they are not aware that their standpoint in faith has shifted. This shift indicates their fall into the second temptation.

Children are willing to believe. Their unbelief is more likely that they have not been taught. Nevertheless, adults' falling into the second temptation is because of unbelief. When children are reminded of the truth, they are sometimes less likely to challenge it. In the current educational environment, educators must be aware that the approach to science and academic research may tempt disciples. Theoretically, Christians have the knowledge that science is not the truth. Scientific research finds a theory based on evidence. If new evidence is available, then researchers may change their theory. Christians often forget this presupposition. They sometimes use science and academic research approaches to question the reliabilities and validities of the Bible.

### **A Shortcut to Glory: Whether Jesus Would Choose to Serve/Worship God Alone**

First, educators must understand the glory of the world is in the hands of the devil.<sup>25</sup> Otherwise, Satan's question are not temptation, but deception. Jesus's answer to Satan would be "you do not lie to me!" Therefore, at that time, when the Lord Jesus had not yet fulfilled what the Father God had entrusted him; indeed, the devil had the right to give people the glory of all nations. Second, Jesus's answer indicates the way out of the temptation: "Worship the Lord your God alone and serve him alone" (Matt 19:7). This verse is from Deuteronomy 6:13-14: "You shall fear the LORD your God and serve Him, and shall take oaths in His name. You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are all around you." Therefore, the temptation Satan presented to Jesus was

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<sup>25</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 148.

to offer him the glory of all nations, and to suggest that Jesus could achieve this without the crucifixion. Essentially, Satan was offering Jesus a shortcut to power and glory, without the need for sacrifice or suffering.

Glory was at Jesus's fingertips, but he answered that he wanted to honor the Lord God alone, who is the only God. The context of Deuteronomy 6: 10-12 shows that God gave everything Israel received in the land of Canaan, and they must not forget it. However, when they forget, they think they earned it all by themselves. Then they begin to rely on themselves and worship the false gods around them (because these visible gods seemed to give them more practical benefits).<sup>26</sup> In the same way, as Nolland suggests, the glory of all the kingdoms of the world as offered to Jesus is to be contrasted with the heavenly glory that will be his to manifest at his future coming.<sup>27</sup> Satan offered the glory of all nations in front of Jesus to make Jesus forget that glory is fundamentally given by God. Satan was offering a path of glorification without the cross. The essence of this temptation is whether disciples will choose the future glory from God, or if they will forget God, and rely on themselves and worship the devil to gain present glory.

For adults, when husbands and wives fight, when they are trying to take control of each other (see also the curse of Adam and Eve, Gen 3:16),<sup>28</sup> they could be falling into the third temptation. Because they have forgotten that marriage is a gift from God, they do not follow Jesus's example to serve each other (Matt 20:25-28; especially v.

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<sup>26</sup> This exegesis is based on discussion with Thomas R. Chow and his exegesis of Matthew in another language.

<sup>27</sup> Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 167.

<sup>28</sup> Gen 3:16b: "Your desire shall be for your husband, And he shall rule over you," indicates that husband is trying to rule over wife and the wife desire the reverse. The word תִּשְׁקָתָהּ (desire) can be interpreted more explicit in Gen 4:7b, And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it. The connecting word but indicates the control and counter-control game between sin and Cain, therefore it is very likely that in Gen 3:16b, husband and wife are in a similar situation.

27).<sup>29</sup> Likewise, when disciples worry about their careers/jobs, they probably forget that jobs are from God—they think they earned them. If disciples lose sight of God in their hearts, they may begin to place the things and glory of the world above Him, turning worldly possessions into idols. Work, marriage, children, and even their ministries in the church and spiritual gifts can all become idols if they lose focus on their faith. The same is true for children, as they can also fall into this trap by seeking excessive affirmation and acceptance from teachers, parents, and peers, or by trying to show off their possessions. In this way, children may become vulnerable to the third temptation.

Nevertheless, adults and children react differently to temptations. Because of their moral discipline and the moral pressure from people around them, adults can sometimes rely on their willpower to keep themselves from bad behavior. But children do not have this training yet, so they hardly restrain their behavioral reaction. Sometimes adults may be confused or mistaken if they judge children from a behavioral point of view, and they look down on children. God cares about what is inside (Matt 5:27-28). In the eyes of God, adults are not necessarily better than children. The kingdom of God belongs to children because they are not hypocrites. They are often much more likely to accept correction than adults.

Moreover, many children do not know how to face temptation because no one has taught them to do so through the Word of God. However, adults sometimes do not believe the truth they already know. From this perspective, educators should be encouraged that their children-disciples will respond better than adult disciples because of their trust in both their disciple-makers and God. Educators should be humble to learn from them and be encouraged by children's faith in God.

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<sup>29</sup> The teachings of Jesus in Matt 20:25-28 convey a similar message: whereas the world (represented by the gentiles) seeks to control and dominate, Jesus came to serve, rather than to be served or to rule over others. As such, disciples of Jesus are called to follow his example rather than succumb to the worldly mindset of seeking control—a mindset that has been present since the fall of Adam and Eve in the context of marriage.

Temptations are obstacles for disciples to experience fellowship with the triune God. In the Israelites' case, the Father God is dwelling with them (Exod 25:8; 29:45-46) in a covenantal relationship. He shows his presence through many miracles, signs, buildings, the ark of the covenant, etc. However, these temptations stop them from experiencing the blessings of dwelling together in a covenantal relationship (Exod 19:3-6); they doubt the love and presence of God and even worship false gods. Likewise, in the new covenant, temptations stop Christians from experiencing fellowship with the Triune God, the koinonia (1 John 1:3-4). If a born-again new creation does not fall into temptation, one would experience koinonia.

### **Children's Discipleship Curriculum: The Koinonia (1 John 1:1-4)**

The word "then" in the narrative of the temptations of Christ in Matthew 4:1-8 links his experience of affirmation and acceptance as the beloved Son of God during his baptism in Matthew 3:16-17 to his temptations. Similarly, children need to experience the acceptance of the Father, the Son of God, and the Holy Spirit as a foundation for self-affirmation and self-awareness to face temptations. Educators must understand that they are messengers of Christ to demonstrate his life with the help of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 5:17-18; Gal 2:20; 5:16-25), and their in-Christ ministry to children is not possible without this self-affirmation. Without such, they cannot affirm children either.

The apostle John made it clear in 1 John 1:1-4 that fellowship between teachers and disciples is essential. In this fellowship/koinonia, teachers show the character of Jesus Christ to children and lead them to fellowship with Christ and the Father. First John 1:1-3 says,

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

The incarnation of the Word brought the personal God to the disciples in a way that they can touch, feel, hear, see, and experience the reality. The connecting word “also” (v. 3) implies that the purpose of this incarnation is to enable disciples to have fellowship with the Father and with His Son. When Jesus ascended to be with his Father, his apostles witnessed this incarnated Son so that both the disciple-makers and next-generation disciples could enjoy fellowship with the Father and the Son all together.

Therefore, in this project, koinonia is defined as the fellowship of a born-again life with the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, and with other born-again children of God. This fellowship is the most intimate relationship of Christians have with the Triune God (John 6:56, Col 3:2): the new life is hidden with Christ in God.

In addition, Jesus says, “He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him” (John 6:56). In John 6:35, he also indicates he is the bread of life: “He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.” If he is the bread, a hungry one would naturally come to eat his flesh and will be hungry no more. At the same time, eating his flesh and drinking his blood equals “coming to Him” and “putting trust in him” (see also, the parallel structure of John 6:35). Those who eat His flesh abide in him (John 6:56); therefore, those who trust Him abide in Him (John 6:63b).

The verses in the previous paragraph connect faith/trust with koinonia (abiding in Him and Him in them). Teachers need to help children learn to live by faith, not by experiences without Christ. When children come to Jesus to eat the bread of life, abide in Christ, and trust the Father, they will experience the love of the Father in Christ.<sup>30</sup>

The education of koinonia will be more and more critical in the context of East Asian Christians for various reasons. First, the young generation will find it difficult to embrace koinonia. They spend more time in front of screens than previous generations. It

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<sup>30</sup> See also the summary of loving relationships in Gerald L. Borchert, *John 12-21*, The New American Commentary, vol. 25B (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 172.



will be difficult to develop meaningful relationships with other persons and with God. Meanwhile, they will face more persecution in the future. In such circumstances of persecution, teachers and fellow children in public schools would probably isolate them because of their faith. The joy of koinonia with the Father, the Son, and fellow brothers and sisters in the spiritual family will help them face persecution and witness for the gospel (1 John 1:4).

In the educational context of East Asia, fellowship and tangible experience will be crucial in the coming years after the pandemic. The official/government-dominated approach to education focuses on passing on knowledge and training of skills. There is a gap in emotional/social education in the past seventy years in the area. East Asian authorities in the area criticized emotional education for more than thirty years until the open-door policy in late 1979 because they believed emotional education was related to the western culture. It took much time for both school and family education to restart and develop emotion education in the system in the past forty years. However, in recent years, local authorities have restarted political education programs, even in the preschool system. Educational authorities will probably eliminate modern emotional education in the coming years.

Under these circumstances, “koinonia” education should also emphasize emotional education of echoing God’s empathy for his children. Children can learn to identify and develop emotions through the connection with the triune God and other members of the body. For example, it is difficult for people to express positive affections in the culture. In reading God’s Word, I learned to feel emotions and later express my emotions with my mentors and fellow disciples in discipleship training “koinonia.” Likewise, teachers in my preschool tend to be too shy to say, “I love you” to students, so I encourage them to start with “the heavenly Father loves you, and I love you.” It is a great advance for teachers to start to express their feelings with their heavenly Father.

In “koinonia” education, the children’s curriculum should emphasize their experiences with God, as well as their interactions with teachers and peers in daily life. As part of this approach, I developed a comprehensive children’s discipleship course for my preschool and children’s Sunday school. This course focuses on the impact of living an eternal life on individuals, highlighting important aspects such as acceptance of God the Father (John 3:14-16; Rom 5:5-8; Eph 3:1-14), acceptance of the Son of God (1 Tim 2:5; Heb 4:14-16), acceptance of the Holy Spirit (Gal 4:1-7), fulfillment of the relationship with the Triune God (Matt 6:5-13; Heb 12:1-2; 1 John 2:2; Heb 4:14-16; 3:14; Gal 5:16-25), and relationships with others (acceptance: Rom 14:1-6; forgiveness: Luke 17:3-10; patience: Matt 18:21-35; gentleness: Gal 6:1). The curriculum also includes instruction in hermeneutics.

The curriculum is not like what is usually taught in children’s Sunday school in East Asia: God is great; God is loving—to teach some abstract knowledge from a systematic theology perspective.<sup>31</sup> Knowledge is not unimportant, but it is more important to lead children to experience God through God’s Word to build theological thinking. Because children cannot see God, educators must live among them (just as Jesus lived among the apostles) so they can experience God the Father (John 1:14, 18). I have lived among children in preschool for more than three years. Children have experienced acceptance and affirmation from God through my witness before I taught the curriculum. The curriculum reminds children of their experiences and provides further instruction through the Word of God. Typically, teachers spend one to two weeks emphasizing acceptance of God the Father, then shift focus to acceptance of God the Son

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<sup>31</sup> East Asian Christians tend to study the Bible by searching for systematic theological conclusions, often starting with their own questions instead of using a hermeneutical approach to understand the passage. However, this can lead to the second temptation discussed earlier, as it can be challenging to determine if questions are grounded in faith. It is important to note that Christians do not need systematic answers to all their questions to have faith in God. Much like how children trust their father without requiring a paternity certificate, Christians can have faith in God even when they do not have all the answers.

for another week or two, and so on. This arrangement allows children to build on their understanding and experience of the different aspects of their faith.

As discussed, in “koinonia” education, the underlying emphasis is on the life of the educator, and therefore relationships between the teachers/parents and the students. Children will follow what they hear and see from adults. When teachers/parents live in Christ, the children experience and follow Christ (see also Paul’s encouragement for the Philippians to follow him: Phil 4:8-9). Children do not necessarily need to know what they experienced: what the affirmation of the Father is, what the difference between affirmation and acceptance is. But they need acceptance from God to face the temptations and difficulties of living in the flesh (Gal 2:20; Rom 7:14, 27-28<sup>32</sup>). Teachers need to affirm them of their new identities through the Word of God in Christ, despite bad/imperfect behavior.<sup>33</sup> For example, they need to know that God chose them before the creation of the world (Eph 1: 3-14). As believers of Christ, they have eternal life. They are not only the adopted sons of God (Gal 4:5), but more importantly they are the born-again children of God (see also John 1:13; 3:5).

In my fifteen years of experience as an adult disciple and disciple-maker of adults, I have observed that disciple-makers working with preschool-aged children have greater opportunities to foster koinonia compared to those working with adults in churches. Adult disciples have about eight days of immersive camp experiences each year with follow-up training and visitations. Gradually, disciple-makers aim to develop the koinonia over the years. For example, my fellow disciples and I grew together to become disciple-makers. We began to know each other better than our own families and

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<sup>32</sup> In East Asia, most Christians believe that Rom 7 is the experience of a Christian’s struggles in flesh. See Thomas R. Schreiner, “Will Timmins Changed My View on Romans 7,” Twitter post, July 2, 2018, <https://twitter.com/drtomschreiner/status/1013784025813733376>. For more on the identities of “I” in the flesh, see Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), 353.

<sup>33</sup> Chap. 3 provides examples of teaching the Word of God using practical hermeneutics in a way that uses concrete language, without the need to turn God’s message into stories that could dilute its power after being re-written.

close friends outside the discipleship network. However, in a preschool, I had more than eight hours a day to develop this “koinonia.” It takes only one or two months to develop such fellowship with children and to start to learn God’s Word in-depth.

Without such koinonia, sometimes curricula can become an advanced theory in adult discipleship, and thus become abstract knowledge that teaches the life of Christ in the midst of a vacuum. Abstract theories can hardly help people in real life when facing temptations. For example, most disciples in our training camps know that God is love and he is just, but they do not know in a specific circumstance whether God’s love or his justice goes first.

East Asian Christians value the teaching of knowledge. This approach of teaching and learning turns the Word of God into a textbook for intellectual studies. Contemporary school education, especially the exam-oriented system in the area, reinforces this approach and mindset. As a result, many Christians come to believe that this approach is the only way to learn the Word of God. However, Jesus, the Son of God, lived among men and taught by example, and it is impossible to truly understand his teachings and way of life without being born-again and experiencing it firsthand (John 1:14-18; see also John 14:8-9; 3:14-16<sup>34</sup>).

Therefore, it is imperative for East Asia educators to recognize and emphasize to young children that they are not solely physical beings but also spiritual entities. Adult Christians in East Asia often prioritize their earthly desires, including their identities and sexualities, over spiritual growth, as seen in biblical passages such as Galatians 5:16-21 and Colossians 3:5-8. This may manifest in excessive concerns about their children’s education and extracurricular activities, like their non-Christian counterparts. Regrettably, such an approach, albeit unintentional, reinforces the perception of Christians as visible, physical entities that care for their fleshly needs, just like unbelievers. Because of this,

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<sup>34</sup> It is crucial for educators to recall Jesus’s message to Nicodemus, which emphasized the necessity of being born-again to enter and comprehend the kingdom of God (John 3). This highlights both a cognitive and emotional incapacity to know God without spiritual rebirth.

educators must emphasize detaching from fleshly problems and prioritizing heavenly matters, as encouraged in Colossians 3:1-9. Failure to do so could result in disciples identifying with fleshly works and feelings, which are associated with the works of the flesh (Gal 5:19-21), rather than disassociating themselves from their fleshly works to recognize their true spiritual selves. It takes longer to lead adults to affirm their spiritual life due to the impact of their family upbringing, culture, and the sins of the world that have shaped their mindset for more extended periods than young children.

Teaching the greatness of God is a crucial concept that must be emphasized. If God is not viewed as great, then His acceptance loses its significance, and Christians fail to appreciate the value of His gift—Jesus Christ, His death, and resurrection (John 3:14-16; Rom 4:17-25). The importance of salvation, which acts as a cover for shame (Gen 3:7) and a deterrent for self-striving and seeking personal significance, becomes meaningless to Christians unless they view God as truly great. Only by recognizing the greatness of Jesus can Christians appreciate the depth of His salvation and the power of His redemptive work.

Moreover, the problem with Christian curriculums in East Asia is that they are designed to teach in a vacuous setting. For example, many teachers find it difficult to experience koinonia themselves. Therefore, they will not be capable of demonstrating discipleship in koinonia. They may try to teach abstract principles/concepts in the classroom and then urge students to apply them in their daily life. However, young children will not understand these abstract principles, nor will they know how to apply them without a life model among them. For example, teachers try to teach children abstract terms like justification or sanctification, which children cannot understand. On the contrary, the Bible even communicates with adults in concrete ways, especially in the genre of narratives.

In conclusion, it is essential for children to have guides who can lead them to God. As it says in Colossians 1:28-29, “Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this

end, I also labor, striving according to His working, which works in me mightily.”

Educators of children should utilize various communication methods to teach children in ways that they can comprehend.

### **Discerning Children’s Hearts for the Word of God (Mark 4:1-20)**

Educators live among those who do not understand the life of Christ and teach them through their example. Like Jesus, educators must also discern what is in the hearts of their disciples, as there may be obstacles to understanding the Word of God. Children may struggle with understanding God’s Word due to their earthly perspectives and concepts. Therefore, educators must understand these perspectives and lead children to a deeper understanding of God’s Word. The Parable of Four Soils illustrates this paradigm/pedagogy for children’s education in Christ:

And again He began to teach by the sea. And a great multitude was gathered to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat in it on the sea; and the whole multitude was on the land facing the sea. Then He taught them many things by parables, and said to them in His teaching: “Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow. And it happened, as he sowed, that some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds of the air came and devoured it. Some fell on stony ground, where it did not have much earth; and immediately it sprang up because it had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up it was scorched, and because it had no root it withered away. And some seed fell among thorns; and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no crop. But other seed fell on good ground and yielded a crop that sprang up, increased and produced: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred.” And He said to them, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” But when He was alone, those around Him with the twelve asked Him about the parable. And He said to them, “To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables, so that ‘Seeing they may see and not perceive, And hearing they may hear and not understand; Lest they should turn, And their sins be forgiven them.’” And He said to them, “Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables? The sower sows the word. And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts. These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word’s sake, immediately they stumble. Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred. (Mark 4:1-20)

First, educators need to know that Jesus addresses this parable to his disciples. The first verse indicates that many people also heard this parable. However, this parable is to deliver the mysteries of Heaven (vv. 2, 10) to the non-outsiders (v. 11): the disciples who ask the meaning of this parable when no one else is present. Jesus uses this parable to separate outsiders from his disciples<sup>35</sup> so that “seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand; Lest they should turn, And their sins be forgiven them” (v. 12).

Verse 12 is from Isaiah 6:9-10, “Go, and tell this people: ‘Keep on hearing, but do not understand; Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’ “Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; Lest they see with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart, And return and be healed.” Those with a dull/calloused/fattened heart in Mark 4 are the multitudes who have ears to hear, but do not want to hear (Mark 4:9).<sup>36</sup> James Edwards suggests that for the outsiders, the parables seal their unbelief.<sup>37</sup>

The consequence of not understanding this parable is that the outsiders could not be able to understand all other parables.<sup>38</sup> Jesus’s warning seems radical. In the context, the outsiders listened to the parables, but they did not stay to ask, they would have no chance to listen to the explanation of the parables: the mysteries of the kingdom of God (see also Mark 4:2, 33, 34). Jesus also warned the disciples that their incapability to understand this parable could also result in unexpected consequences (Mark 4:13, 24-25). His disciples should be careful of the way they listen to the mystery of the kingdom.

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<sup>35</sup> Mark L. Strauss, *Mark*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 185.

<sup>36</sup> Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Mark*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 2 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2017), 103.

<sup>37</sup> James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 138.

<sup>38</sup> Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 34A (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 221.

If they are not careful, then the Word of God will bear no fruit in their hearts. If disciples today do not understand this parable, then they will not be aware of their attitude to the Word of God. Without this awareness, they will not be able to understand other mysteries of the kingdom.

Second, the parable explains the mystery of how the Word of God produces many fruits in the hearts of the disciples (v. 20). The seed is the Word of God (v. 14). When educators lead children as disciples, their purpose is to sow this seed in children's hearts so that the Word will bear fruit. They need to allow the Word of God to bear fruit first in their own hearts so they can pass on the Word of God. Then they need to discern how the Word of God bears fruit in the hearts of both them and children.

In this parable there are four soils, but only two types. One is soil that cultivates the Word of God to bear fruit, and the other is not. Soil is the environment in which the seed grows: the place where the Word of God falls into—the heart of the disciples (v. 15 and 17 refer to the heart twice).

### **The Wayside Soil: Where God's Words Have No Impact**

In this soil, the seed has no roots and does not sprout. It is inevitable that the seed will be eaten by birds or taken away by the devil. When disciples hear or read the Word of God but resent or doubt it, the Word of God has no impact on their lives due to unbelief or inattention. While listening to sermons, disciples tend to judge God's Word unconsciously with logic or feelings, filtering out teachings that do not fit their preconceptions. In such cases, the words of God have no impact.

Although children may have cognitive advantages over adults in accepting God's Word because of their tendency to trust, they are not without weaknesses. For instance, the attention span of young children (2 to 4 years old) tends to be less than ten minutes. If educators do not know this, then they will continue teaching after children can



no longer concentrate and are physically incapable of listening.<sup>39</sup> It would be unwise for educators to continue on sowing the seed. Similarly, emotions may present a barrier when communicating with young children. Due to their smaller stature, young children may feel intimidated by an adult standing and speaking to them, which can evoke fear. This fear can prevent them from comprehending or hearing what an adult is saying.

The way adults communicate with children can significantly impact their ability to pay attention and comprehend. Speaking too loudly or expressing emotions too intensely may distract children from the content of the message, whereas a gentle approachable demeanor can help them feel at ease and engaged. When using relatable examples in lessons, educators must be mindful of eliciting overly strong emotional reactions from children. Instead, presenting examples using friendly animal or toy characters can help children feel safer and more engaged. Educators should also receive training to observe and interpret children's expressions, emotions, and body language to better understand their thoughts and feelings, and guide them out of the first soil.

### **The Second Stony Soil: The Most Neglected One in an East Asian Context**

Mark 4:17-18 reads, "These likewise are the ones sown on stony ground who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and they have no root in themselves, and so endure only for a time. Afterward, when tribulation or persecution arises for the word's sake, immediately they stumble." Since participants in the discipleship camps receive the word with gladness, educators might not be able to discern their stony hearts. However, when participants were persecuted and suffered for the Word of God, they immediately fell. Their hearts were exposed. Because there were stones in the participants' hearts to prevent the Word of God from having roots, it bears no fruit.

In the literary context, the stones are anything in the heart that prevents the Word of God from taking root. East Asian disciples grew up in a 5,000-year godless culture in

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<sup>39</sup> Adults' physical conditions could also hinder their capacity for listening.

East Asia. What they value in their hearts is worldly: “Even the heaven and earth would curse him if a man were not for himself”, “God helps those who help themselves.” These well-known East Asian sayings and values are rocks of the concepts/perspectives out of a godless and faithless heart. They prevent the Word of God from growing roots in the heart. One’s family of origin also has an impact. For example, if one grows up in a family with no discipline or rules, he may not know God’s discipline and righteousness, and may find it difficult to understand the consequences of sin. When that person is disciplined, he may think God does not love him. On the contrary, someone from a legalistic family would feel uncomfortable with the love and acceptance of God. One would filter the dramatic loving expressions of God. These two extreme cases reflect many Christians who are bonded by their upbringings. They see themselves not as new creations but still the old person. It is difficult for them to truly believe that, before the creation of the world, God chose them to make them holy and flawless in his eyes (Eph 1:3-14). They will always try to fix themselves. Another stone in East Asian culture also needs attention. The culture places great emphasis on knowledge and degrees, and they think a theological degree equals spirituality. These stones keep the Word of God from taking root in the heart.

For example, in the discipleship training camps mentioned in chapter 1, the messages focus on God’s acceptance and salvation: the love and sacrifice of God, the death and resurrection of Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit living to become a permanent seal and evidence of salvation. In the difficulties/worries of life, when one hears such messages, one could quickly receive them with joy. When one comes back to his daily life, when difficulties or persecution from the world arises, one immediately falls. Educators and counselors who challenge East Asian disciples with the Word of God regarding parent-child problems or during counseling and therapy sessions may encounter counterarguments fueled by unbelief and even anger. These negative emotions serve as indicators of the stones or obstacles present in their hearts.

Children are often more receptive to God’s message of comfort and love because they have experienced less suffering than adults<sup>40</sup> when parents, teachers, or classmates reject them, they are devastated. To bring children out of the second soil, parents and educators should emphasize that their love and acceptance cannot be compared to that of their Heavenly Father. Because some young children may have endured suffering in their upbringing, such as domestic violence, feelings of abandonment, threats from parents or grandparents, and divorce of their parents.<sup>41</sup> If parents or educators discover these rocks, they should be aware that children may also project their earthly father-child relationships onto their relationship with God. In such cases, they need to repent before God and apologize to the children, while also making it clear that the Heavenly Father is not like their earthly father. By doing so, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, the rocks can hopefully be removed.

The following counseling case is typical in my preschool. One child had a conflict with another. I took him to another room and remind him, “If that person does not like you, is there any chance that Heavenly Father will love you less?” Most of the time, this question will calm them. In most cases (probably 80 percent), children will say “no.” I will then continue to ask questions like, “Why? How do you know?” The child will say, “Because Jesus died for me!” If I keep on asking, the child will continue to speak some of the words of God (see also John 3:14-16; Rom 5:5-8; 1 John 1:8-9). Teachers/parents can discover what verses of the Bible has taken root in their hearts.

At the same time, they may also find some stones in the children’s hearts. In 20 percent of the cases, when they say no to God’s love, they do not calm down and are

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<sup>40</sup> Educators should have patience with adults because of these sufferings. Adult disciples tend to doubt more about whether the love and promise of the Father would be like the promises and love of the world that disappoints them. Many counseling cases from the adult discipleship network indicate disciples’ traumatic experiences while growing up, such as sexual abuse, domestic violence, etc. Psychologically, some victims stop maturing since the trauma happened. It would be helpful if pastors could see them as little children in need of re-parenting in the love of the Heavenly Father.

<sup>41</sup> Twenty-five percent of the children in my pre-school were from divorced families.

stuck in their emotions. When they do not believe in God's love for them at a difficult moment, they will fall. However, that moment is an opportunity to discover the rocks within. I would ask, "Will the teachers love you less? Will your mom/dad/grandparent love you less? Will I love you less? Why do you think so?" These questions help to explore the important interpersonal relationships of children. As they probably project their relationships with human beings upon their relationships with God, when educators discover such tendencies, they can illustrate to children that their heavenly Father is different from their earthly caregivers. Hopefully, such tendencies can be removed through the love of God through their educators in Christ.

### **The Third Kind of Soil: The Thorny One**

In the thorny soil, the thorns grew up later: "The cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word (Mark 4:19). That is, the Word of God has taken root, grown, but thorns grow, the desires of the world come in, they choked the crops. In the previous example of counseling children in conflicts in the preschool in East Asia, I found that 80 percent of the time children are like the third soil—when educators remind them, they will remember John 3:14-16, that they are beloved ones of God. They are the third kind of soil. The same is true for adults. If disciples have experienced God's word love and acceptance, when they become confused/forgetful later they fall into the deception of money. Disciples need to remind each other to get out of the third soil (Heb 3:13-14).

### **Conclusion: The Good Soil**

The heart of a born-again disciple of Christ who does not fall into the first three soils is the good soil. Educators must strive to help children move away from the three bad soils. The examples of children mentioned earlier primarily demonstrate how John 3:14-16 resonates with them. As more of God's words take root and bear fruit in

their hearts, educators may witness the vision described in Mark 4:30-32, where the mustard seed grows into a tree that reaches the sky.

To conclude, educators may overlook the second soil in both adults and children because of their initial joy in receiving the Word of God. It can be difficult to discern the rocks in their hearts at this stage. Educators may become too focused on positive response and fail to recognize that the second soil can be deceptive.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY DEVELOPMENT

This chapter discusses how to apply the principles of koinonia education in children's ministry in East Asia. The chapter starts with methodology principles. To experience koinonia, one must trust Christ and respond to the love and acceptance of the triune God. The following section focuses on fostering a koinonia environment for children, especially in a small, united family church. To achieve this, both teachers and children need discipline. This section also explains the principles of koinonia discipline: discipline should combine grace and law. God's grace enables and empowers his children to obey. Because God has changed his disciples' life; the born-again life could fulfill the requirement of the Law.

The final section of the chapter focuses on demonstrating and teaching young children the Word of God as literature for koinonia. It begins by discussing the hermeneutical and linguistic principles that teachers should apply when demonstrating the Word of God to children. The section then presents four practical steps for demonstrating the Word of God to children, enabling them to experience koinonia through the Word of God.

#### **Methodology Principles**

This chapter focuses on methodology and demonstrates how it works in a Christian preschool, an online Christian high school, and children's ministries in various churches in an area in East Asia.

## **Koinonia: Walking by Faith Not by Sight**

Teachers must demonstrate trusting the Father in Christ when children follow their examples and experience koinonia. Teachers also need to point out these experiences of coming to Christ and putting faith in Him to reinforce their faith through actions such as celebrations, prayers of thanksgiving, etc. For example, when a child comes to the Father to forgive others, teachers can help them explore their experiences and celebrate with actions such as drawing a memorial picture, having a group hug, or singing a song.<sup>1</sup>

Teachers need to help children to experience koinonia because children do not always know how to trust Jesus. They naturally act out of their bodily experience; they tend to be self-striving. Similar to adults who struggle with faith, children may also give up on trusting in Jesus, which can lead to feelings of sadness, disappointment, and even anger. Without Christ, their emotions do not confirm the truth that God loves them, but rather validate their belief that God does not care.<sup>2</sup> Teachers must help children come to Jesus and learn to cry for help from the Father. For example, in preschool, young children may have negative feelings when they arrive in the morning, probably caused by bad experiences coming to school. Their negative emotions, like anxiety and anger, may indicate that they do not have the peace of abiding in Christ. In Christ, teachers can welcome them with joyful smiles, hugs, and delicious breakfast. In the worship time that follows, songs crying for help, offering themselves, and singing the Father's love would be beneficial. In the end, they will experience the presence of the Father.

The presence of koinonia in teachers' lives is essential because young children are in a world that lacks examples of living by faith (John 1:11-12; 3:12; 7:15; 10:25-26). Because young children trust their parents and teachers in general, if teachers abide in

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<sup>1</sup> Teachers can consult the numerous festivals in Sabbath in the Old Testament and memorials in the history of Israelites (Exod 15:1, 20; Josh 4:20-24, etc.).

<sup>2</sup> David Eckman, *Knowing the Heart of the Father: Four Experiences with God That Will Change Your Life* (Tempe, AZ: Becoming What God Intended Ministries, 2016), chap. 10, sec. 12. Kindle.

Christ, they can be examples when they teach of faith, and children will follow and learn to trust God as a result. If teachers do not “walk the talk,” their inconsistency would cause doubt and confusion among young children. However, teachers sometimes do fail. In this case, teachers should confess to God for their misbehaviors and then come to children to explain the process of reconciliation with God. While young children may not be able to articulate the terms of koinonia, they can experience and understand it. Thus, modeling the teaching of koinonia is crucial. As teachers abide in Jesus, their actions are like branches bearing fruit (John 15:4-5).

Sometimes young children feel that their without-Christ experiences contradict what they learn of koinonia. When children do not have assurance from God, they tend to seek acceptance from their peers and become disappointed; they exhibit frustration by fighting with others. Teachers must help them understand such experiences and lead them to come to the Father for His mercy (Heb 4:14-16).

To sum up, Koinonia education aims to motivate children to offer/present themselves to God as born-again resurrected life and their members as instruments of righteousness to God in faith (Rom 6:12-13). Douglas Moo indicates,

As Paul will make clear in vv. 16ff (Rom 6:16), there can be no “neutral” position between service of God and service of sin. By characterizing those whom he commands “as those alive from the dead,” Paul reminds us that this presenting of ourselves to God can take place only because of the new state we find ourselves in as a result of our union with Christ in his death and resurrection (see v. 11). Since “being alive” is obviously the state of the believer in this life, the reference must be to the rescue from the state of death that takes place when the believer becomes united with Christ. The bodily resurrection lies ahead, but there has already taken place a “spiritual” resurrection (cf. Col 2:12; Eph 2:6) that introduces the believer into a new life, a life “in God’s service.”<sup>3</sup>

The act of offering oneself starts with identifying with the resurrected spiritual life in the union with Christ (the koinonia). This resurrection is also a creation tied to the promise of

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<sup>3</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 385-86.



“the new self.”<sup>4</sup> The typical “in Christ” language Paul uses in this verse does not compromise the integrity of an individual’s personhood<sup>5</sup>; instead, this mystical union with Christ affirms the new spiritual personhood. The more affirmation one has of such new personhood, the more likely one is motivated to offer oneself to the Father in the battle of righteousness versus sin. Young children are not immune to sin, and when they feel offended, they may respond with hatred towards others. A question that could be asked is, “Are you still God’s beloved one even if you did such a wrong thing?” or “Are you still God’s beloved one even if someone did such a wrong thing to you?” With the assurance of God’s love, young children will be willing to come to the Father and repent, resulting in reconciliation.

### **Koinonia: Love, Acceptance from God and Responses**

In current East Asian culture, many Christians view the Father as distant and vague<sup>6</sup> and see the Spirit as a power rather than a person. While they may believe in Jesus’s love and value His past sacrifice, they often neglect to respond to Him as the high priest in heaven. As a result, teachers should model responses to the triune God in koinonia as interpersonal relationships to demonstrate to children how to engage in a deeper and more personal relationship with God.

First, praying to the Father is an excellent example of how this koinonia works among young children (Matt 6:5-15). The starting point is addressing the Father intimately.<sup>7</sup> By calling “our Father in heaven,” disciples sincerely acknowledge to Him

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 31.

<sup>5</sup> Constantine R. Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 63.

<sup>6</sup> For example, according to my observations, many pastors and believers in East Asia pray to Jesus instead of praying to the Father in the name of Christ.

<sup>7</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, The IVP New Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 154.

that God is the one and only Father (Matt 23:9), and they are born of Him and do not belong the world (John 1:12; 13:20; 17:18; 20:21). Through such convictions, they will experience intimacy with Him. A case in point, one of my mentors struggled with this intimacy towards the heavenly Father. He never saw his earthly father, who left to live on another continent and died when the boy was only six. Then in this mentor's thirties, he found out that his birth parents sold him as a baby. As a result, he found it difficult to envision what it would be like to have a relationship with a father figure. Through intimately calling God "Abba," he began to be affirmed of his new personhood and sonship in Christ.<sup>8</sup> He overcame the bodily experience of lacking a father and developed a close relationship with the Heavenly Father (Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15). His testimony serves as an inspiration for adults and children who come from fatherless or father-absent backgrounds to embrace their intimacy with the Heavenly Father.

Another crucial demonstration is obedience to the Lordship of the Father in forgiveness. The connecting phrase "according to" in verse 12 indicates that the plea ascribes the authority of forgiveness to the Father: "If I do not forgive others, please do not forgive me!" (in children's language). God's forgiveness and reconciliation can heal children from flawed upbringings. Embracing the fatherhood of God seems to help children who have suffered from an absent or abusive father. When they learn to forgive their abusive fathers through a prayer of forgiveness, their past experiences will have less impact on them.

Second, disciples need to respond to the love and acceptance of the Son. Jesus is the author and finisher of faith; disciples should look upon him (Heb 12:2). In practice, many East Asian Christians seek Jesus to acquire earthly blessings, as if He were an East Asian idol. Many East Asian Christians view Jesus to acquire earthly blessings, treating Him like an idol. This mindset hinders them from coming to the Father through the High

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<sup>8</sup> See the description of sonship, as a Christian, in J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2021), 225-59.

Priest and experiencing koinonia. Teachers must teach young children to look-upon Jesus in obedience to stay in God’s love—the koinonia (John 15:9-10; Heb 5:7-10). They need to emphasize Jesus’s role as the High Priest in the human-God relationship to break the idol-worshiping mentality.

To teach the role of Jesus as the priest, Old Testament narratives about high priests can be helpful in dramas, illustrative drawing pages, and even games for children. If children can engage in dramas to understand the role of a compassionate, high priest, they may begin to understand the Son’s mercy and acceptance so that they can come to the Father in Christ. To encourage “constantly-looking-upon,”<sup>9</sup> the narratives of Jesus Christ in the four Gospels help teach young children tangibly. Jesus went through temptations and difficulties on earth so that disciples could look upon him without fear of unacceptance to come to the Father (Heb 4:15; Matt 4:1-11).

Third, young disciples need to respond to the Spirit; they must follow the Spirit, not fleshly lusts (Gal 5:16-17). When one follows the flesh, one cannot experience koinonia. One must follow the Spirit. However, in practice, following the Spirit can be confusing. Many Christians in East Asia may desire the gifts or power of the Spirit, but they often overlook the importance of intimacy with the Spirit as a person. They may mistake that following moral principles as following the Spirit, but this unintentionally leads them to strive to be a holy person like Confucius. True following of the Spirit requires responding to a divine person through an intimate relationship.

In fact, Christians are born of the Spirit (John 3:6-8), and the Spirit indwells in them. Teachers need to clarify that the intimacy of birth is the foundation of “walking by the Spirit” or following the Spirit (Gal 5:25). If teachers demonstrate such intimacy with the Spirit and teach disciples, then they will experience koinonia. When they follow the Spirit, they will not violate the Law of the Father.

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<sup>9</sup> Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1993), 639.

Moreover, Galatians 5:22-23 indicates that the works of the flesh are obvious, but teachers must also recognize that the fruit of the Spirit is not always apparent, and that the enemy of the Spirit is evident. To become more familiar and intimate with the Spirit, teachers should identify the obvious and repent. To teach young children, teachers can use games such as tug-of-war, where they fall for the Spirit when they sense that one is born of the Spirit, and the Spirit team wins. However, the team of the lusts will try to seduce the teacher and confuse them with all kinds of faces of the lusts. Such games can help children raise red flags and be alert when they identify the works of the flesh.

These red flags represent opportunities for disciples to follow the Spirit and repent at the very moment of temptation. Psalm 51 (see also 2 Sam 12:1-14) is a good case study for teaching young children the principles for repentance. When children sin against each other, they sin against the Father “alone” in His presence, just like David did. David despised God despite His love and mercy when he sinned in His sight (2 Sam 12:7-12; Ps 51:6). Therefore, children should understand that the triune God is always present whenever they sin (Ps 51:6) and that their sin disrespects God despite His love and mercy for them.

Furthermore, The focus of David’s pleading is the forgiveness of sins and restoration of his relationship with God. However, in East Asia, many Christians focus on forgiveness as the consequence of sins. For example, they fear some misfortune because of their sins. To overcome this tendency, teachers should demonstrate and teach young disciples to focus on restoring a clean heart and intimate relationship with God. Without sin, Christians will experience koinonia (1 John 1:6-9).

To sum up, koinonia starts with love and acceptance of the Triune God. When disciples respond as the Scriptures teach, they will experience koinonia through the Spirit. In Luke 11:1-13, after teaching the Lordship prayer, Jesus encourages his disciples with the parable of bold asking (Luke 11:5-8). As the connecting words “and” and “so” in verses 5 and 9 indicate, the promise of “giving the Spirit without limit” is an

encouragement for disciples to pray the Lordship prayer. Then, in the parable of the good father in Luke 11:13, God promises his children that He will give the Spirit without limit. When the Spirit works and witnesses in disciples' hearts, they will experience and know the presence and love of the Father and Son in Koinonia (John 16:13; 1 John 3:24).

### **Fostering a Koinonia Environment for Children**

Disciples in East Asia, including both children and adults, may face an increased risk of persecution in the future. Authorities may deprive them of education, job opportunities, and financial stability. In extreme cases, their parents may even be imprisoned or put to death, as has happened in the past seventy years. Under such cruel scenarios, many may even deny the name of Jesus, like the apostle Peter (Luke 22:33-34). Some local governments may begin to forbid organized churches of more than fifty members and encourage people to report church activities. Teachers and parents should be prepared to form small family churches or fellowships; they can foster such churches as a koinonia environment for children. Teachers and parents will be spiritual leaders for koinonia; they need to demonstrate examples living in koinonia and know how to discipline themselves and their children for koinonia.

### **Koinonia and the Importance of Discipline: Grace as Enabler that Natures Children**

To achieve the goals of koinonia education, children need spiritual discipline. To start, koinonia educators need to understand how God the Father disciplines His children. They can learn much from how God makes and executes rules in the old covenant and Mosaic Law as reflected in Deuteronomy 6:1-11, and then under the new covenant of Jeremiah 31:29-31 (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25; Heb 8:8-12). In practice, one principle is essential in East Asia: the koinonia discipline should combine grace and rules.

Paul's discussion of sin, the Law, and grace reflects such principles. In Romans 6:14, Paul says, "For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace." When individuals offer themselves as alive from the dead, as described in

Romans 6:13b, they can be certain that sin no longer has dominion over them because they are under the grace of God. He contrasts “under-Law” versus “under-grace,” not Law versus grace. However, many East Asian Christians misunderstand this verse as Paul indicates the latter. Some believe in lawless grace: if there is grace, then there should be no consequences or rules. Others believe in rules and neglect that there is grace in God’s Law. The latter is more common in East Asia, especially in a legalistic Christian tradition.

God shows the combination of grace and rules in His discipline of the Israelites. Nehemiah indicates this principle in his prayer to God about His mercy and grace in discipline, despite the Israelites’ disobedience (Neh 9:9-38). God gave them the Law (Neh 9:13-14) and disciplined them in mercy and grace though they were disobedient and even killed His messengers (9:16-17, 26-30).

In the context of Romans 6:12-14, the Law shows what sin is. But Christians are no longer under the Law. If they do not identify with who they are under grace, they would be under the Law. When young children are under the Law, unaware that they have forgotten God’s grace, and do not offer themselves as such, they will not be free from sin; they still sin. For example, if they violate the Law without hope in grace, others or their consciences will accuse them of their sins and they would live in guilt. If they can achieve the requirements of the Law themselves without awareness of grace, then they may become self-righteous. No matter which circumstance, they are under the control of sin.

On the contrary, when they are under the grace of God, they have died and been resurrected with Christ (Rom 6:4),<sup>10</sup> which is the great grace from the Father. Being new creations, they can present/offer themselves and their bodies to God (Rom 6:13). They do not have to sin because they are free from sin (Rom 6:14). Teachers can teach young

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<sup>10</sup> Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 365.

children that God loves them; he gave them the life of Christ and also helped them and kept them in His rules and commandments to protect them.

Teachers need to know how to nurture young children in discipline, especially in East Asian contexts where strict or violent discipline has traumatic impacts on young children. Teachers must demonstrate behavioral change out of the life of Christ. When a child sins, it is important for teachers to respond with love and help them change their behavior. However, if teachers are acting in the flesh, they may prioritize behavior change above all else. Instead, they should lead children to be in Christ first, then behavior will change. Because if they are in Christ, they behave as Christ, and Christ would not sin. Likewise, when teachers remind children of the Law, they may use it as if the Law can change children's behavior for justification. However, the Law is the knowledge of sin; no one can be justified by the deeds of the Law (Rom 3:20; 7:7; Gal 3:11). Teachers could be cultivating a mindset of such justification when they remind children to change their sinful behaviors repeatedly and neglect repentance before God first.

On the contrary, teachers need to prioritize repentance by admitting sins before the Father. When teachers focus on behavioral change, as East Asian culture values, children may change their behaviors and think they have been justified before God. But without repentance, their relationships with God have not been recovered; they are still in sin even though they have changed their behavior. To some degree, secular teachers can also help children change behavior using educational psychology and other tools. However, children cannot come to God in *koinonia* without repentance, even after the behavioral change.

In disciplining children, teachers should also prioritize demonstrating repentance as the foundation of a Christian's behavioral change, knowing that it is the power of Christ that enables this transformation (2 Cor 12:9). Generally, teachers tend to behave better than children. Still, when conflicts arise between children, teachers may

sometimes lose their temper. However, these moments can be valuable opportunities for teachers to model repentance, putting their hope in Christ and relying on His grace. By confessing their sin of distrusting God in moments of temptation and offering themselves to Him (Rom 6:13) with a restored heart, teachers can prioritize koinonia in their response to conflict. Daily, teachers help children live out Christlikeness by their demonstration of celebration of God's grace (thanksgiving), repentance, offering, and praise (Eph 5:18-20). This repentance and offering can impact children's cognition, attitude, emotions, and interpersonal/social behaviors.

Parents and teachers must understand that when God gives commandments, He also enables His people to fulfill them; otherwise, God would be cursing His children with punishment. The grace of Christ is the enabler, empowering God's children in their weakness (2 Cor 12:9). This grace is not a free pass to violate the Law without consequences, as David still faced consequences despite God's forgiveness of his sins (2 Sam 12:10-14). Rather, this grace is the born-again life and the koinonia with the Triune God, which empowers and motivates believers to fulfill the righteousness of the Law.

On the contrary, if teachers impatiently repeat the Law when children fail, they may become discouraged and lose hope (Eph 6:4). However, Christians, including children, may still sin because of the flesh (Gal 5:16-17). The Law cannot help them overcome the indulgence of the flesh (Col 2:23), but when they follow the Spirit, they will not sin against the Law (Gal 5:16, 18). In the context of Ephesians 6:4, when the Spirit fills believers (Eph 5:18), husbands and wives will become one in marriage, and children will respect their parents (Eph 5:19-6:9).

God transforms the lives of believers into new ones who desire to obey His commands. Young disciples come to understand that the remarkable graces from the Father are found in Christ and eternal born-again life (John 3:16). The Spirit echoes this truth in Galatians 4:6-7 (see also Rom 8:14-17), as He testifies that "the Holy Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God." As teachers, it is



important to echo the Spirit and demonstrate the acceptance of the heavenly Father to the children, followed by discipline as stewards (Deut 8:5; Luke 15:11-32; Heb 12:5-7). In doing so, teachers can reinforce this first type of echoing in the hearts of the children.

A second type is echoing the Spirit to love God and others. This type reflects the nature of the Spirit's direction towards the new self under the New Covenant. (Ezek 36:26-27; Rom 8:9; Eph 1:13-14). Jeremiah indicates that God writes the Law in their hearts; they no longer need others to teach them to know Yahweh. Packer also suggests that the guidance of the Spirit is “not a revealing to the mind of divine directives hitherto unknown; it is, rather, an impelling of our wills to pursue and practice and hold fast that sanctity whose terms we know already.”<sup>11</sup> The echoing in young children's language can be expressed as: “I am beloved by the Father, and I want to follow the Spirit by loving Him and others!” (a literal translation of what one child told me in the experimental preschool”).

These two types of echoing also indicate the nature of koinonia discipline: to encourage the new creation, the new self, to put on a new self (Eph 2:15; 4:24; Col 3:10; see also Rom 13:14; Gal 6:15; Eph 4:22-24). If a person is in Christ, then they become a new creation (2 Cor 5:17), and God entrusts them with the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18). As teachers, it is important to spend time affirming disciples of these presuppositions first, as discussed in section one of this chapter. Once teachers and parents help child-disciples identify with their new life, personhood, and identity in koinonia, children will be eager to put on their new characters in Christ (Eph 5:1; Col 3:12; 1 Pet 1:12-13).

Teachers can use an analogy of a soldier of the heavenly kingdom putting on his uniform to illustrate this paradigm of a new person putting on the likeness of Christ. The word “uniform” implies the uniqueness of the garments. The more one identifies with

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<sup>11</sup> J. I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit: Finding Fullness in Our Walk with God* (Downer Grove, IL: IVP, 2020), 133.

the uniqueness of his life in Christ and that of His characters—the motivations, attitudes, emotions, and behaviors—the more likely he will feel honorable and lovable to discipline himself to put on the uniform of the likeness of Christ (Rom 13:10, 14). He will also feel disgusted to keep the old self in his behaviors: not loving God and others (Rom 12:9).

### **Discipline in Koinonia: Four Attitudes for One Body**

Koinonia is not only fellowship with the Father in Christ but also with other members of the body of Christ. It is not only loving God but also loving others as oneself. Without loving others, it is impossible to achieve koinonia (1 John 4:12). God is love, and koinonia with Him brings the love of God. When one does not live in His love as to love each other, they are in darkness and lying about their koinonia with God. When members are healthy, spiritual, and love each other, they manifest unity of the body (John 17:23).

Teachers should focus not on behavioral changes but on attitudes and motivations to achieve unity because out of one's heart springs the issues of life (Prov 4:23). Gregory Maio defines attitude as “an overall evaluation of an object based on cognitive, affective, and behavioral information.”<sup>12</sup> Studies indicate that attitudes have a significant impact on information navigation<sup>13</sup> and are a strong predictor of behavior.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, teachers should cultivate changes in attitude first; a good attitude toward God may predict good behavior to glorify God in unity.

Furthermore, four necessary attitudes will help teachers and students stay in a fellowship and accomplish unity. Without such attitudes, they may want to leave a

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<sup>12</sup> Gregory R. Maio, Geoffrey Haddock, and Bas Verplanken, *The Psychology of Attitudes and Attitude Change*, 3rd ed. (London: SAGE, 2018), 4.

<sup>13</sup> Maio, Haddock, and Verplanken, *The Psychology of Attitudes and Attitude Change*, 59-77.

<sup>14</sup> Maio, Haddock, and Verplanken, *The Psychology of Attitudes and Attitude Change*, 76-81.

church. The first is the attitude of belonging (1 Cor 12:12-27). This attitude, in children's language, is that I am a born-again life, and God sent me here (the local church); I belong to this local church as a member of the body of Christ, even though sometimes I do not feel so. This attitude is not just a feeling of belonging. Many Christians seek this feeling in a church, but the pursuit of this feeling can lead to disappointment as no fellowship is perfect. Some may even leave the church if they cannot find this sense of belonging.

Instead, teachers should reassure disciples that they are a crucial and valued part of the small church if God has brought them there. Because they are each a new creation, they are helpful to the body of Christ. To show such helpfulness, in practice, as soon as a child accepts Jesus as their savior, teachers should start to identify their gifts and talents through observations and tests. For example, some children can explain what they learn clearly, while others may be good at echoing the emotions of their peers. They may have the gifts of teaching and caring accordingly. Teachers should assign at least one role for each child to serve so that they feel accepted, "useful," and belong to the little church.

Furthermore, Christians can be helpful to others primarily because they have been born again and can serve as an example of living in koinonia. Even when others behave as if they are "out of Christ," one can still take the lead in repenting and demonstrating how to return to Christ. For instance, in an English language class, I noticed that the entire class followed the works of the flesh, arguing against each other. Therefore, I showed them a story of five fingers fighting each other according to what I observed and how they began their arguments. At the end of the story, I asked, "Does anyone want to repent and go back to Christ first?" As one girl apologized to a boy who started an argument, others followed.

The next and essential step is to show young children could be “terrible rather than useful”<sup>15</sup> if they did not use their gifts to serve one another. For example, a child with the gift of teaching can serve others to help them understand God’s Word. They may also use this gift to criticize those who may not understand as quickly.

The second attitude is that of following the Spirit (Gal 5:15-18). Believers cannot have an attitude of belonging if they follow the works of the flesh. When they follow the flesh, they are selfish; they will be consumed by one another (Gal 5:15). On the contrary, if they follow the Spirit, they will fulfill the Law of loving one’s neighbor as oneself (Gal 5:14, 18). When children sin, teachers should not condemn them or make them doubt their salvation because the ministry of the Spirit is not to condemn (2 Cor 3:9) but to give God’s children hope to fulfill the righteousness of the Law.

Additionally, it is crucial for disciples not to rely on their own efforts or human wisdom when bearing witness to Christ in the face of persecution. Instead, they must trust in the Holy Spirit. Even when they are apprehended by authorities, they can rely on the Spirit to give them the words to speak (Matt 10:17-19). Teachers should instruct children to follow the guidance of the Spirit in their daily lives so that they may develop intimacy with Him. This way, when they are confronted with persecution at school, they will be equipped to speak by the leading of the Spirit.

The third attitude is that of joy. Often, when individuals are unhappy with a church, they may choose to leave. The lack of unity within a church can cause members to feel unhappy. Similarly, when families dispute and split, children may also feel unhappy. Regrettably, even among Christians in East Asia, the relational unity of husband and wife is rare. In such situations where division prevails, the feeling of joy may not come naturally.

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<sup>15</sup> The quotation is a literal translation from a well-known saying in the discipleship training camps.

Paul's exhortation to the Philippians is an example teachers can follow (Phil 4:2-4). He encourages them to be joyful when they suffer from disputes between two influential sisters. The sovereignty of the Lord, who is near, is the source of the attitude of joy (Phil 4:5). When they trust God with their worries and make their requests known to Him, the peace of God will guard their hearts and minds in Christ (Phil 4:6-7). When they are in Christ, their joyful attitudes will help those in dispute. Children may experience conflicts, and they may also witness disputes between their parents. This is because in many local cultures, the relationship between parents and children is highly valued, while the biblical teachings about the unity of husbands and wives are often overlooked (Gen 2:24).

The fourth attitude is that of growth, as emphasized in Colossians 2:6-7, where Paul encourages believers to walk in Christ, be rooted, built up, and established in Him. It is essential for teachers to ensure that children have the conviction of their salvation in Christ and can follow Him as their Lord. This relationship between a disciple and the Lord reflects intimacy and obedience to His authority. The Father desires for His children to grow in Christ, regardless of their surroundings, whether friendly or adversarial. Teachers and parents have many opportunities to demonstrate such attitudes. They may have conflicts with co-teachers and spouses. The more each party expects or demands the other to change, the more they will end up disappointed. If they focus on growth of themselves, then their relationship or marriage will probably improve. Children are sensitive to conflicts between teachers and parents; they would like to follow teachers' examples when they see improvement.

To summarize, the law of God, to love God and others, is clear and helpful for his children know what is right and what is wrong. Teachers or parents who execute the rules should be merciful, then their discipline will not become excessive punishment. This mercy is grace. Teachers should remind children that God's grace is powerful in

their weakness, especially when they admit their sins before God. Thus, they give children hope that they can change.

A teacher who has a merciful heart embodies all four attitudes and understands that they also need mercy from God in their weaknesses. By showing mercy to children as co-disciples, they demonstrate the attitude of belonging and create a sense of unity within the body of Christ. When children do not change their behaviors immediately, teachers should not become impatient but should have hope and joy from the mercy of God, who never gives up on his children. They do not require children to change at once but find other ways to guide them. By doing so, they demonstrate an attitude of growth. When teachers show joy upon the mercy and power of God in Christ, they model an attitude of joy. When teachers are examples of these four attitudes, in God's mercy and power, children can follow their example and they would foster a koinonia learning environment in Christ.

### **Teaching Children the Word of God for Koinonia: Hermeneutical Emphasis**

#### **General Principles in Teachers' Demonstration of Receiving the Word of God**

The core of koinonia education is to demonstrate and teach children how to understand the Bible as a literature for them to experience koinonia. As stated in 1 John 1:4, John's letter aims to help recipients to experience koinonia with the Father and the Son. This core has two parts: understanding the Bible as literature and experiencing God in his Word as koinonia. Young children learn language quickly through imitation. Sometimes, children respond directly to biblical words when teachers teach them; at other times, children may already know how to speak the words but their definitions may not be the same as those in biblical contexts. Therefore, Thus, teachers need to demonstrate these words in biblical contexts and help children discern if they have understood them correctly. At the same time, to a large degree, the Scriptures are

literature, and have internal consistency expressed through the connectors of the words, such as and, but, because, etc. Teachers must emphasize the importance of connectors in hermeneutics. They need to demonstrate to young children the connectors and how to define the words/phrases to determine the true meaning of the verses.

Moreover, teachers should not focus on merely the nominal knowledge of the Scriptures but on communicating with the divine author. They should respond to God's logical and emotional flows in the Scriptures with the attitude of a new self, his beloved born-again child. Such response will end in koinonia, fellowship with the triune God.

Furthermore, teachers play a crucial role in helping children apply biblical verses in their daily relationships with others, including parents, teachers, and fellow children. As young children are still learning how to communicate, it is essential to emphasize the presence of the Triune God in their interactions with other people, as demonstrated in many examples throughout the Scriptures. Teachers not only teach children about the knowledge, literacy, and literature of the Scriptures but also demonstrate how to listen to God and others to express their thoughts and feelings. By listening and speaking through God's Word regularly, children can develop a godly character.

Two general principles of hermeneutics are essential to demonstrate the receiving of the Word of God for koinonia. The meaning of words/phrases leads to the true meaning of verses; only the true meaning can provide a proper application to life. Only when children understand the meanings of the words can they naturally understand the meaning of the verses. Teachers can guide children to understand the true meaning of the verses, which helps them comprehend God's empathy before applying the teachings to their daily lives. By demonstrating empathy through their actions, teachers can help children understand the relevance of God's character to their everyday experiences. This approach can foster a willingness in children to not only acquire knowledge of the

Scriptures but to fulfill God's will. Ultimately, by experiencing God's empathy, children will recognize that God cares for them and is always near.

### **Four Steps for Practicing Koinonia in Teachers' Demonstration**

In practice, four steps demonstrate the reception of God's Word. The first step is to understand the meaning of words in their biblical contexts. At age 2, children start to learn words and make sentences, and they learn quickly. From 2 to 6 years-old, they learn an average of forty-seven new words or expressions per week, nearly seven words daily.<sup>16</sup> There are many techniques educators can use in teaching biblical words.

Young children use "fast mapping" to learn a new word or expression over just one or two exposures.<sup>17</sup> Teachers can use related techniques to help children learn biblical words in their contexts. The first technique is to use concrete ways to introduce words or concepts. For example, to teach, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Ps 19:105), teachers can ask young children to their close and open their eyes to learn the words light and darkness, then they can deepen the experiences by creating a dark room for young children to walk in with a lamp. Walking with a lamp displays the phrase "a lamp to my feet." Teachers can also connect this phrase to children's daily experiences. For example, teachers can ask young children, "When do you need a lamp to your feet, a light in your path?" Through these questions, children can figure out the definitions of the phrases and the emotional impact. For instance, they may understand that during the daytime when there is light, they would not need a lamp. Similarly, when they are asleep at night, they do not need light. Teachers can then make the connection that the verse highlights someone walking through the darkness of the night. The

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<sup>16</sup> Joan Littlefield Cook and Creg Cook, *The World of Children* (Boston: Pearson/Allyn and Bacon, 2007), 256.

<sup>17</sup> Cook and Cook, *The World of Children*, 256.



questions can lead students to contemplate how only the Word of God is a light-giving lamp for King David.

The second technique of fast mapping is to define a word by comparing what it is and is not, especially the logical opposite. The logical opposite of light is non-light, which is darkness. Because young children do not have as many life experiences as adults, teachers can create short stories and dramas to explain the meanings of biblical words. In the previous paragraph, a dark room shows this.

The word light and the related word darkness also have feelings attached. The Scriptures contain both logical and emotional flows, as both the divine and human authors are not devoid of reason or emotion. Therefore, teachers should explore and respond to God's feelings in sentences and paragraphs.

Meanwhile, they should not limit their exploration to emotion words or specific biblical genres like Psalms as labels for emotions. Linguistic anthropologist James Wilce points out, "Studies on language and emotions tend to focus on 'emotion words', lexical labels, over which realists and nominalists have fought, at times in relative ignorance of the huge scope of other linguistic phenomena that convey emotional meaning."<sup>18</sup> Teachers can start even deeper with non-emotional words that carry feelings for young children. For example, in the discussion of receiving gifts (John 3:16), common words like father, son, love, perishing, everlasting, and life have many feelings attached. To many East Asian children, the word father represents a distant, if not angry, figure, but a mother is a close and warm word.

In the case of Psalm 119:115, Teachers can use various methods to demonstrate the emotional flow of the Scriptures to children. One approach is to read the verses with passion or create a drama to illustrate them. Afterwards, they can explain the reason for their passionate delivery. For instance, students can discuss their personal

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<sup>18</sup> James M. Wilce, *Language and Emotion: An Introduction*, illustrated ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2009), chap. 2, sec. 1. Kindle.

experiences with darkness and how it makes them feel. In emotion classes, they can explore different feelings related to darkness such as confusion, depression, or fear, and compare them to emotions associated with the light of the Word of God such as joy, relaxation, hope, connection, and creativity. Finally, teachers can explain the emotions they demonstrated in their delivery of Psalm 119:115.

The second step of the four is to understand the meaning of the verse through connectors. By defining and enriching words through connectors, the meaning naturally emerges. In this step, teachers can start with understanding the richer meanings of words through connectors. Children begin to make sentences at two; they analyze grammar by connecting words. Teachers can demonstrate to them how to define a word through the connectors. For instance, “more shrewd” in Luke 16:8<sup>19</sup> compares the sons of the world with the sons of the light. The latter’s opposite is the sons of the darkness; this comparison implies that the sons of the world are in darkness. For another, in John 3:16, the connectors “for,” “so . . . that,” “that,” and “not . . . but” link word to make sentences and connect the sentences. The connector “so . . . that” links the action of giving his only begotten Son with God’s love. Teachers can start with the action of “giving” first and then connect it with love.

The word “give” appears often in the book of John. Most of the time, it carries the meaning of giving generously, which is the idea of a gift in young children’s experiences. A son is a person; the phrase brings more profound meaning: the experience of receiving a person as a gift. In Jesus’s case, his disciples can touch, talk to him, receive a hug, teaching, training, compassion, and even food and job from him. Teachers can use living examples to show the experience of receiving a person as a gift. During recess, I told the children I would give them a gift. Only a few lined up before me because I showed them my empty hands. Then I gave them various options I could do for them,

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<sup>19</sup> All of the verses are from The New King James Version because the NKJV is a parallel translation, similar to the East Asian version of translation used in training.

such as a fatherlike hug or a playful lifting up as if they were flying like a phoenix. This illustration helps children experience the richness of a human person as a gift. If they can appreciate such a gift, how much more can they experience when they trust the Father to receive His only begotten Son?

Moving on to the connectors, the phrase ‘so that’ answers the question of why the Father gives his children his Son. The son of man is a gift of love from God, and it also indicates how much God loves the world. Children can cognize that God cannot give anything more precious to Him than his only begotten son. This cognition lays the foundation for children as the beloved ones of the Father; if they believe in God and receive his gift, then they can have eternal life and enjoy the father-son relationship.

As young children learn new vocabulary, their knowledge may be incomplete or inaccurate in the context. Teachers must explore children’s word definitions to determine whether they are out of context. For example, in the “give generously” discussion in John 3:16 as gifts, children began to excitedly talk about many experiences. Through these conversations, I found two interesting facts: the gifts they care much about and would like to discuss in class are not precisely gifts, and they receive many gifts that they take for granted (sacrifice of parents, air, water, etc.). Many children took rewards, exchanges, purchases, and even bribes as gifts. But Jesus is not any of these in John 3:16. By clarifying the differences between gifts from God and other mistaken life experiences of gift, teachers can help shape children’s cognition of God’s gift of love.

After teachers discuss the deeper/richer meanings of words through connectors, the meaning of the verses emerges naturally. In the case of John 3:1-16, through the connectors, Jesus was inviting Nikodemus to accept Him as a gift from God when he could not understand and did not trust him. When children’s communication abilities increase, they can learn one paragraph, chapter, and book; they can understand literature structures, different genres, the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament, etc. Connectors also play an essential role in determining the meaning of verses because they

connect phrases, sentences, and paragraphs; hence, they drive the logical flow of the text. More importantly, connectors help bring out the emotional flow of the context so readers can empathize with God's feelings. Without such empathy, teachers cannot experience or demonstrate *koinonia* to children through God's Word.

Because of compassion, children feel that God cares for them and understands their negative feelings, especially in temptation and weakness. He also humbles himself to invite children to understand his feelings. At Gethsemane, Jesus asked his disciples to watch with him as he was very sorrowful (Matt 26:38-40). When they failed, Jesus told them that the spirit was willing, but the flesh was weak. The connector "but" shows that Jesus understood why they could not be watchful for Him. In his exceeding sorrow, he still empathized with the disciples' weakness (see also Heb 4:15-16). Likewise, God understands children's weaknesses because of the difficulties of the flesh (2 Cor 12:7-8). However, they have the indwelling Spirit and the examples of teachers who have the life of Christ; they can understand that God has empathy for them and encourage them to continue their journey of faith by God's grace (1 Cor 12:9).

The third step of four is to guide children in experiencing the practical applications of the verses; only then do the verses become meaningful. For example, the verse "for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life (2 Cor 3:6)" is relevant to children's everyday life because Christian schools/families have rules that help them know what is wrong and right and to love God and others. The letter, the Law of God,<sup>20</sup> helps Christians know what sin is, but they cannot fulfill the requirement because of the weakness of their flesh. Teachers need to explain rules, not only what rules are but why children should obey such rules. When teachers only explain the rules and their consequences, then use consequences to persuade children to obey, teachers are probably in the ministry of the letter. But when they demonstrate why they should abide and the

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<sup>20</sup> Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 176-77.

presuppositions of why they can, they are perhaps in the ministry of the Spirit. The why questions remind them who God is, who they are, and the koinonia they have.

The old covenant with God presupposes the Mosaic Law (Exod 19:4-6, 8; Exod 20). God was their only Lord, who would be dwelling among them, and they would be his people. Israelites, the chosen people, should obey the Law to stay in the covenantal relationship with the Lord and his blessings (Deut 6:1-4). Doing so also fulfills their given identities (Exod 19:5-6). Likewise, teachers should demonstrate to children that Jesus's commandment to love each other is to keep them in the love of God, a new covenantal koinonia (compare John 15:9, 15:10 with 15:12). When they trust in the love of God, they will rejoice (John 15:11).

Jesus also sent the Spirit to remind disciples of his teachings (John 16:13-14). When they remember, they will echo with the Spirit because Jesus has already taught them (John 14:25-26). When teachers are in the ministry of the Spirit, they will also echo with the Spirit. For example, as observed and described in section two, when children are confident in their identity in Christ, they feel enthusiastic and joyful, and they are willing to love God wholeheartedly and others as themselves. Because the Father loves them, Jesus sacrifices himself so they can be born again, and the Spirit lives inside them. The rules ensure that they live in fellowship with God. The "why" questions serve to explain the hearts of the Father and the Son, as they desire for their children to remain in their commandments. The Spirit echoes the reasons why Jesus gave his disciples his commandment to love one another, as seen in verses such as John 2:17-22, 14:26, 15:12-17, and 16:7-15. In these verses, we see that Jesus not only provides the logical reasons for this commandment but also the love and emotions behind it.

Teachers can demonstrate 2 Corinthians 3:6-7 in children's discipline every day. Whenever children violate rules and conflict arises, it indicates that they do not love one another. Instead of condemning and isolating them, teachers should remind them that they are not abiding in Christ. As ministers of the new covenant, teachers can echo the

Spirit and understand the children's weaknesses in temptation. They can guide them towards repentance and encourage them to return to koinonia.

When children lose their tempers and start shouting and yelling at each other, teachers can remind them of their identity in Christ by asking questions such as, "Who are you? Are you still the beloved born-again child of the Heavenly Father? If yes, where are you? Are you abiding in Christ? If not, what can you do?" The focus is not on condemning or isolating the children to change their behavior, but rather to help them repent so that the Spirit can work in their hearts. Since they have the life of Christ, the Spirit's work in them will help them fulfill the requirement of the Law to love one another.

In the fourth step, teachers repeat the application of the verses on various occasions, enabling children to make inferences about other situations based on one instance. In the case of 2 Corinthians 3:6-7, children violate rules and have conflicts from time to time; teachers have many opportunities to demonstrate the applications to children. When others violate rules, they may forget the teachers' demonstration and condemn them, as if they do not have any weaknesses in loving others. If they do not help those who sin, they break the commandments to love one another. Teachers need to remind them that they are also under the new covenant and can be ministers to others who are struggling. They need the power of the Lord's grace to love others and obey all the rules.

At the same time, when they violate some rules or fail others' expectations, they may fall into guilt and shame, especially when peers, parents, or teachers scold them as if they can never achieve them. East Asian parents and teachers often motivate children to change with shame and guilt: they convince children's sins or mistakes, trying to make them feel guilty and ashamed so that children change their behaviors. This approach is worse than the ministry of death and condemnation because Moses never intended so. Under such circumstances, children get discouraged and give up hope in

obeying God's rules (Col 3:21), believing they can never obey God's commandments, which is the opposite of the Heavenly Father's will.

Meanwhile, if children violate rules or fail to meet others' expectations, they may experience feelings of guilt and shame. This is especially true when peers, parents, or teachers scold them and make them feel like they can never achieve their goals. In many East Asian cultures, parents and teachers use shame and guilt to motivate children to change their behavior. However, this approach can be harmful because it convinces children that their mistakes and sins define them and that they can never live up to God's commandments. It is much worse than the ministry of death and condemnation in 2 Cor 3:7, because Moses did not intend to instill shame and guilt in the hearts of the Israelites. This approach is the opposite of the Heavenly Father's will, and it can discourage children and make them give up hope in obeying God's rules (Col 3:21).

Teachers need to prepare children to apply these verses (2 Cor 3:6-7) when they face such circumstances by themselves; children can be ministers/counselors of the new covenant to themselves. Teachers can demonstrate how they come out of shame, guilt, and hopelessness because God's grace enables them to trust Him, overcome their weaknesses, and obey his commandments. Then teachers can ask children to practice self-ministering when they are not at school and report their experiences in the following class to help each other. When teachers show the applications of 2 Corinthians 3:6-7 in different occasions, children can experience the meaningfulness of the verses.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter explores how the principles of koinonia education outlined in Chapter 2 can be applied in an East Asian context. For children to experience koinonia, teachers must not only possess knowledge but also demonstrate their trust in Christ. By trusting in Him, teachers present themselves as spiritually resurrected lives to God and their members of the body as instruments of righteousness (Rom 6:12-13). Teachers should also emphasize responses to the Triune God, which are often neglected in this context. God

sends His children to serve in local churches to practice koinonia. In times of persecution, teachers and parents can form small, united family churches to foster a koinonia environment for children.

Discipline is also essential for achieving koinonia. The focus of koinonia discipline is on fostering attitudes rather than just behaviors. By echoing the mercy of God in discipline, which combines the Law and grace, teachers can model four koinonia attitudes to achieve unity in a local church.

The core of koinonia discipling and teaching is modeling receiving God's words for koinonia. Teachers must know how children learn a language and develop intimacy with the triune God through communication. They can use techniques that apply basic hermeneutical principles to demonstrate to children how to receive God's Word. In an East Asian context, teachers should emphasize both the logical and emotional flows in the context so children do not have mere knowledge but also echo the empathy of God in the Scriptures. When children follow their teacher to respond to God in the scriptures, they will experience koinonia.



## CHAPTER 4

### IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MINISTRY PROJECT

This chapter presents the preparation of the project and a detailed discussion of the completion of project goals. This project aimed to develop a children’s discipleship curriculum for educators in East Asia. The three project goals included writing a curriculum, assessing leader’s convictions and core beliefs in children’s koinonia discipleship, and teaching them in an online camp. The implementation of the project began in December 2022 and continued through February 12, 2023. It took longer than I expected to begin because of the following difficulties. The first difficulty was the breakout of the COVID-19 pandemic in the target area in East Asia. I used to travel to East Asia to teach educators’ camps several times a year. However, because of the pandemic, I changed the project to an in-person camp to an online camp, which required different ways of delivering the curriculum. A second difficulty was the strict online censorship that required much research to find a video conference tool and online survey tool. A third difficulty was the translation work involved. Because English is not my first language, drafting the curriculum and a lengthy questionnaire, and translating them to English, every revision required translation back and forth.

#### **Goal 1: Pre-Camp Curriculum Development**

I developed and wrote the Children’s Koinonia Education curriculum 2020 through 2022. I completed it in December 2022. I wrote the curriculum as a textbook with more one-hundred pages in the East Asian language. An expert panel reviewed the curriculum. The panel included the founder of a global discipleship training network, who was also a seminary professor at an evangelical seminary in the US, a pastor with extensive experience in counseling and teaching at the network, and the current director

of the network. Most of the outline presented in the curriculum's eight chapters follow the structure of chapters 2 and 3, with some modifications. The book has eight chapters, similar to the nine sections of chapters 2 and 3 except I combined the first two sections of chapter 2 as one chapter in the book. The panel offered feedback using an evaluation rubrics form,<sup>1</sup> and also provided many suggestions. I changed the book accordingly before the online camp.

### **Goal 2: Pre-Camp Survey: Questionnaire of Koinonia Education (QKE)**

The purpose of the pre-camp survey<sup>2</sup> was to assess the educators' understanding of koinonia discipleship for children as the second goal of the project required. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the participants, the pre-camp survey consisted of four sections, including a demographic information section, an evaluation section, a major section with six parts where participants scaled about one-hundred statements, and a feedback section. The survey took approximately two months to design, and approximately forty minutes to one hour for participants to finish.

The second section aimed to assess participants' confidence levels in biblical teachings, practices, and children's psychology related to koinonia discipleship. The major section of the survey, section 3, covered six major areas and asked participants to scale almost 100 statements, including convictions, wrong core beliefs, contradictory facts (later as CWC, the initials of convictions, wrong core beliefs and contradictory facts), awareness, willingness, and affirmation (later as ARA) in each area of koinonia education. The final section collected feedback on whether the survey helped participants become aware of wrong core beliefs, convictions, nominal convictions, and affirmations of koinonia discipleship for children. It asked, "yes or no" questions, like "this survey or training (after the training) helps me to be aware of some Biblical convictions." The

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<sup>1</sup> See appendix 2.

<sup>2</sup> See appendix 1.

second goal would be considered successful if a three-quarters majority of the participants (more than 75 percent) believed that the survey helped them achieve awareness of these factors (in section four of the survey).

The design of survey took almost two months, I worked out almost three-hundred statements in more than twenty areas of koinonia discipleship for children. Then I reduced the statements to a more concise version, which was used in this research. It took participants almost one hour to complete the survey. Participants were determined to finish the survey as part of training, and fifty out of more-than-sixty participants finished the pre-survey. Their contributions were valuable in generating further insights into koinonia discipleship for children, paving the way for future improvements of the survey and the training. Moving forward, I plan to incorporate the feedback collected from the survey to revise and enhance it for similar camps in the future.

### **Goal 3: Implementing the Online Educators' Camp**

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, travel restrictions, and internet censorship, the “Koinonia Children’ Educator Training Camp” (KCETC) was scheduled and rescheduled before it was offered in an online format for February 3 and February 10, 2023, for two days, six hours a day. The one-week gap in between was an opportunity for participants to practice koinonia with children. Two networks of teachers’ training and children’s discipleship training helped to recruit the participants. More than sixty teachers and church leaders signed up for the training.

The training consisted of three parts. The first part was the one-hour pre-camp survey, which emphasized the focus of the training conference. The second part involved textbook chapters that I provided after participants completed the survey. The objective of this part was to familiarize them with the essential areas of koinonia discipleship for children, including convictions and wrong core beliefs. This process of preparation enabled me to concentrate on teaching biblical verses that could foster koinonia experience and transform their convictions.

The third part was an online camp to help participants experience koinonia while teaching them the principles and practices of koinonia discipleship for children. To prepare participants' hearts for the biblical teaching, I scheduled a worship and inspirational preaching session at the beginning of the online camp. This session reinforced the major convictions in each chapter of the textbook. Drawing from my experiences in adult discipleship training camp, only the work of the Spirit through God's Word could help establish participants' convictions.

Following the teaching, a question-and-answer session provided an opportunity for in-depth discussion. This was important so that educators could be adequately prepared to apply the verses in their daily practices with children.

### **Post-Camp Survey: QKE**

The post-camp questionnaire was like the pre-camp survey, except for an additional question asking if the participants experienced koinonia during the eight-day training period. To help facilitate this experience, I sent out reminders and reflections on key verses and chapters from the textbook for participants to read and reflect on during the week between the two Saturday camp days. In the pre-camp survey, I also emphasized the importance of prayers and responses to God (also included in every ARA part of section three of the survey). My goal was to encourage participants to prioritize responding to God in their daily lives, as people often prioritize responding to other human beings or themselves and neglect God. These efforts aimed to provide greater opportunities for them to experience koinonia during the eight days of the training.

### **Instrument Feedbacks: Textbook and Questionnaire**

I received valuable feedback from experts and my supervisor during the drafting of the textbook. I used the structure of chapters 2 and 3 of this project for the textbook, so whenever I changed the structure of the two chapters, I also had to change the textbook. As a result, it took me a year and a half to write the textbook and the two

chapters. My supervisor helped me adjust my focus and the way of communication in the two chapters. Since I tend to talk and think in a circular way, which is typical of East Asian culture, I did not know how to communicate with linear logic. He helped me be more logical and coherent in my writing. One expert from the panel also helped me with the structure of the textbook and the chapters, which improved its coherence. My initial draft of the textbook was more than two-hundred pages, and chapter 3 alone was one-hundred pages. I revised chapter 3 almost ten times, as well as the textbook accordingly. My supervisor and the expert helped me make them concise and coherent. During the process, my understanding of the subject and training improved, which resulted in better implementation of the project in the teaching and design of the online camp and questionnaire. For instance, I would not have been able to design the questionnaire based on the conviction, awareness, responsiveness, and affirmation process alone, although I followed this paradigm from time to time. Drafting the textbook also helped me generate the three-hundred statements for the questionnaire. The slow process of drafting allowed me to become aware of my own learning and change paradigm, which, in turn, enabled me to facilitate change in others during the online camp using the curriculum

I also collected feedback from a focus group in designing the questionnaire. First, I focused on their knowledge of the related biblical verses (as discussed in chapters 2 and 3). Later, some experts in teaching discipleship camps suggested that I focus on their convictions because participants in East Asia may be good at guessing the right answers. They also suggested that I use sliding scales to measure convictions, wrong-core-beliefs, and contradictory facts (as CWC) and their awareness, responsiveness, and affirmation (as ARA). I aimed to help the participants focus on these areas and improve their awareness of the CWC and ARA throughout the entire training period. As a result, the one-hour questionnaire became lengthy due to this focus. However, I reassured them that the questionnaire was a helpful part of the training and that the time they spent on it was worthwhile.

My seminary supervisor and ethics committee also suggested that I be more concise with the questions and be careful with wording. As a result, I deleted two sections and many other questions in the survey. By the end of the project, I had to finish drafting of this D.Ed.Min project in a short period, so I wrote most of chapters 4 and 5 in advance while waiting for the data to be collected in the camp. This unique situation helped me focus on what I needed to evaluate at the final step in my teachings and implementations, which helped the implementation to be much more effective than I expected.

### **Data Collection**

Over the past fourteen years, I have developed a relationship with some children's discipleship networks in East Asia. I have also been doing different training programs among them. The network coordinators helped recruit participants for the online camp through Zoom. I provided them with a link to the questionnaire website via Microsoft Forms, an online survey tool. As mentioned, the questionnaire was lengthy. I communicated through the e-mails they provided and tried to convince them that the questionnaire itself could be helpful for them to figure out key convictions and help them be aware of the CWC and motivate them to improve their koinonia relationship with God and others (the ARA). As a result, 50 out of more-than-60 participants finished the pre-camp survey. The questionnaire was designed to be a part of the learning process, with the intention of helping participants understand that God's Word is meant to transform their hearts, convictions, and awareness, rather than just imparting knowledge. This was done to ensure that there were no obstacles in their koinonia or relationship with the Triune God.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

After collecting data from both the pre- and post-camp surveys (QKE), I analyzed the data using various methods. For goal one, I focused on analyzing the rubrics

provided by the three experts. For goals two and three, however, one data analysis expert suggested that the QKE was a complex and lengthy dataset. Therefore, for the quantitative data collected, I conducted a t-test for section 2, which would indicate the overall effectiveness of the training (including questionnaires, written materials, and online camps). Additionally, I conducted six t-tests for the six parts of the conviction section (section 3), as well as an overall t-test for this section. I also conducted a correlation test between CWC and ARA questions in the pre-camp survey to evaluate the validity of my presumption regarding the logic of the training. By doing so, I aimed to improve the design for future training. In the following chapter, I will discuss these results and reflect on the overall effectiveness of the project.

## CHAPTER 5

### EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

The purpose of this project was to equip educators from Discipleship Training Camps in East Asia with a foundational understanding of theological and spiritual principles, as well as the necessary skills and tools to disciple children in an educational setting through an educator’s camp. The camp prepared educators to disciple children in their homes, church Sunday school, and Christian schools, despite facing persecution, pandemic lockdown, post-trauma syndromes, and isolation, by fostering intimate koinonia with the triune God and with others.

#### **Goal 1: Pre-Camp Curriculum Development**

The first goal was to develop an eight-session curriculum covering fundamental biblical teachings and practical principles for children’s koinonia discipleship/education, and then to have a three-person expert panel review the material. This curriculum was written as a textbook to be published in the East Asian language. The expert panel was comprised the founder of a global discipleship training network, who is also a seminary professor at an evangelical seminary in the US, a pastor with extensive experience in counseling and teaching at the network, and the current director of the network. The panel members were given a copy of the curriculum and a curriculum evaluation rubric in December 2022.<sup>1</sup> There were four targets for the curriculum:

1. To be familiar with the convictions of biblical teachings and practical principles in at least eight key areas of koinonia discipleship for children.
2. To be aware of the wrong core beliefs they may have in these areas.

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<sup>1</sup> See appendix 2.



3. To be affirmed in the convictions they should have as educators to demonstrate koinonia to children.
4. To experience koinonia when teaching this curriculum.

A seven-question, four-point scale rubric was used to assess the effectiveness of the curriculum (1 = insufficient and 4 = exemplary). Of all the fifty-six items in eight chapters, none received an evaluation lower than 3 (sufficient). The average score for one chapter was 25.96 out of 28, which is a 92.5 percent positivity rate by the panel.<sup>2</sup> The panel recommended the curriculum to the discipleship network for educators' training. During the drafting process, an expert panel member, the former professor, made significant effort to me organize the structure, logic flow, and exegesis of the curriculum and the textbook. He also assisted in designing the logic of the related survey so participants could understand their readiness as educators for koinonia discipleship. The current director of the network thoroughly read the textbook and helped me refine the details of the sentences and connecting words, which significantly improved the clarity of the textbook.

### **Goal 2: Assessing the Participants in the Pre-Camp Survey**

The second goal of the project was to assess the understanding of children's koinonia discipleship. Firstly, I assessed their confidence levels of participating educators in three key dimensions of koinonia discipleship for children. Secondly, I assessed their convictions in six essential areas of KDC (Koinonia discipleship for children), and their ARA in KDC, with an additional hope that the CWC and ARA co-relation test would be positive so that the feedbacks in section four could be validated. To this end, participants were first required to complete the four-section pre-camp survey. The first section collected demographic data and information on previous experiences with koinonia discipleship training camps.

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<sup>2</sup> See appendix 2 for the summary of all the feedback received.

The second section of the survey utilized a six-point Likert scale to gauge participants' confidence level of understanding of biblical teachings and practical application of koinonia discipleship/education, and related children's psychology. On average, participants rated their confidence level as 3.37 out of 6 (with 1 indicating no confidence at all and 6 indicating high confidence), indicating a low level of confidence given their ministry background, as the average number of adult koinonia camps attended was 11.67.

These results suggest that despite completing four adult koinonia camps over a period of at least six years, participants still have relatively low confidence levels in KDC. While they have a somewhat confident understanding of the fundamental teachings, with an average rating of 3.92, they exhibit less than somewhat confident levels in their understanding of children's psychology, with an average rating of 2.73. Their confidence level in practice fell between somewhat unconfident and somewhat confident, with an average rating of 3.45. Overall, the results of the survey demonstrated a low level of confidence among participating educators, affirming my presumption that additional training on KDC is necessary, particularly in the practical application of koinonia education and in understanding children's psychology from a biblical perspective. These results also support my survey design, which focused only on questions related to the practice principles of KDC (chap. 5 of the textbook), the biblical psychology of children (chap. 1, the cognitive foundation of children, and chap. 2, the temptations children are facing). By doing so, the questionnaire design effectively identified participants' weaknesses.

The second goal of the project was successful in that the participants reported the survey to be helpful in four areas of their training: awareness of their wrong core-beliefs (85.71 percent, the lowest), awareness of the biblical convictions (97.96 percent), awareness of nominal convictions (93.88 percent), and affirmation of their personhood (100 percent). These results demonstrate that the survey was effective in assessing the

participants' awareness and affirmation, and that the second goal of the project was accomplished.

### **Goal 3: Teaching the Curriculum in the Online Camp**

The sample size for the post-camp survey was limited to 31 participants who turned in their responses in three days, with only 25 of them paired with the pre-camp survey. It took much time for participants to complete the questionnaire after they had left the Zoom meetings, so finishing the post-camp survey online immediately after the training may have resulted in a larger sample size. The training evaluation was conducted using three *t*-tests and an assessment of whether the participants experienced *koinonia* during the training period and if their awareness of CARA (Conviction, Awareness, Response, and Affirmation, as discussed in chapter one) improved.

First, the results of the *t*-test on the overall effectiveness of the training show a significant correlation between pre-camp and post-camp self-confidence (see appendix 3). The average score increased from 3.33 to 3.80, indicating an improvement in participants' confidence levels. The most significant improvement was observed in the understanding of children's psychology, which increased from 2.76 to 3.44, an increase of 0.68, indicating a shift from somewhat unconfident to somewhat confident. These results suggest that teaching of the curriculum at the training camp was successful.

Secondly, 100 percent, all 31 respondents, indicated that they experienced *koinonia* during the camp. Regarding the effectiveness of the training, 93.5 percent of the respondents stated that the training camp helped them become aware of their incorrect core beliefs, while 100 percent reported that the training helped them become aware of related biblical convictions, their nominal convictions, and their affirmed personhood. These scores indicate the success of the third goal.

Third, I conducted paired *t*-tests on correct convictions and ARA in the six weak parts of participants' practice of *koinonia* discipleship for children (section 3 of the QKE). The average score for ARA increased from 3.93 to 4.57, a shift from less than

somewhat agree to more than halfway to agree, and the pre-camp and post-camp scores were significantly correlated (see appendix 4). The ARA increase indicates that the practice of koinonia improved.

Fourth, the *t*-test over twelve key correct convictions (two correct convictions from each six areas) showed a decrease from 4.68 to 4.28, indicating a shift from nearly “I believe and often remember. When I remember, I usually practice” to “I believe but forget sometimes, and when I remember, I practice sometimes.” The pre-camp and post-camp scores were significantly correlated (see appendix 5). While the decrease in correct conviction scores may seem concerning, this may be due to the participants’ increased awareness of their nominal convictions, which was a notable finding as many East Asian Christians would mistake their knowledge as their convictions. Furthermore, the decrease in correct conviction scores was accompanied by an increase in ARA scores, indicating that the training successfully contributed to changes in participants’ convictions and practices. This analysis suggests that the training helped participants become more aware of their nominal convictions, which is an essential step in changing convictions and practices. Overall, these results support my presumptions that changes in convictions start with an awareness of nominal convictions and putting affirmed convictions into practice.

Five respondents initially scored themselves as nearly the highest score for all the twelve convictions: “Remember most of the time and practice most of the time” for all twelve convictions, which I believe were not accurate evaluations. After the training, the scores of these five respondents dropped by an average of 0.84, suggesting that they became more aware of their convictions after the training. Despite the decrease in correct conviction scores, their ARA increased by 0.1, indicating that the training successfully contributed to changes in participants’ convictions and practices. Overall, these results suggest that the training helped participants become more aware of their nominal convictions and put their affirmed convictions into practice. It should also be noted that

these results may reflect the difficulty of accurately assessing confidence levels based on self-reported data.

In conclusion, the *t*-test results showed that the training was successful in enhancing participants' confidence levels in three major areas of koinonia education for children. They also became more aware of the four important dimensions of CARA and experienced koinonia through the online camp. Their understanding of koinonia education practice improved as well. Additionally, they became more aware of their nominal convictions.

The success of the project is a testament to the participants' dedication and effort, as well as my commitment to promoting koinonia education for children. These results highlight the potential for this approach to have a positive impact on individuals and communities and underscore the importance of ongoing efforts to promote koinonia education and discipleship.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses of the Project**

One of the strengths of this project is the textbook, which is a comprehensive guide to koinonia discipleship for children. It took one and a half years to write and is soon to be published in an East Asian language. The textbook's detailed and coherent approach allowed participants to preview and review the material before and after training, which improved learning efficiency. The textbook also provided a clear and logical framework for the training, allowing me to focus on combining the emotional and logical aspects of the Scriptures to effectively teach koinonia education for children.

The questionnaire (QKE) used in the project was both an advantage and disadvantage. On the one hand, the questionnaire was designed to help participants focus on the key points of the course, which can improve learning efficiency. However, the questionnaire's length may have caused participants to lose focus and motivation. To overcome this issue, I emphasized the importance of the questionnaire and its benefits in

pre-course communications, resulting in most participants dedicating over fifty minutes to carefully fill it out.

Another advantage of the questionnaire was that it includes multiple dimensions of evaluation, which allows for in-depth data analysis. Despite its length, participants evaluated the questionnaire positively, providing an opportunity to improve its conciseness for use in future large-scale training sessions. This could be particularly beneficial, as there appears to be a great need for large-scale training in koinonia education for children in the East Asian region.

Project participants were committed and eager to learn, as demonstrated by their diligent completion of the questionnaires, pre-class reviews, active participation in lectures, worship, discussions, and post-class reviews. Their level of dedication was essential for the training to be effective, and their commitment was reflected in the post-training questionnaire analysis. It is worth noting that the COVID-19 outbreak in the area caused many deaths and illnesses in the participants' families and churches just weeks before the camp training. To address this, I prepared two inspirational preaching sessions in the training camp to comfort participants at this difficult time.

One weakness of this project was the length of the questionnaire, particularly in the post-camp survey, where the size of the responses decreased. Despite efforts to emphasize its importance, some participants may have found it overwhelming, which could have affect the accuracy and completeness of the responses. To address this issue, future training sessions could consider shortening the questionnaire or breaking it down into smaller, more manageable parts as before and after class quizzes. Additionally, the small sample size may limit the generalizability of the results. Finally, while participants' dedication was a strength of the project, it is possible that this level of commitment may not be present in larger-scale training sessions (100 to 500 people). In which case, a lengthy questionnaire may not produce good response rates and may need to be modified for greater efficacy.

## **Theological Reflection**

The project of koinonia education emphasized the importance of intimacy with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as well as with others in an educational context marked by persecution and pandemic. This context of both persecution and pandemic lockdown created much distrust, disconnection, and isolation in churches, schools, families, and communities in East Asia, especially in the weeks before the training during the Lunar New Year festival, when illness and death swept the whole region in a short period of time.

Through the mutual endeavors of myself and the participating educators, the project demonstrated the potential role of educators in fostering reconciliation and koinonia and transforming the lives of children in their communities. Sixty educators attended the online training from churches in major cities in the region, as well as from communities abroad whose members fled from the region due to persecution and lockdown. Hopefully, the koinonia they experienced during the training will bring healing, reconciliation, and hope for the discipleship of their children and students.

The political climate and the pandemic represented much distrust and isolation among communities, creating physical and psychological suffering, both individually and collectively. Therefore, the project highlighted the themes of isolation and disconnection, as well as the crucial role of koinonia intimacy with God and others in overcoming these challenges. Despite facing personal and environmental obstacles such as the pandemic and persecution, the participants' dedication and willingness to engage with the material allowed for deep connections and transformative experiences, both with one another and with the Triune God.

This emphasis on intimacy and connection in discipleship has the potential to bring about healing and transformation not only for educators and children, but also for their broader communities. By showcasing the power and importance of koinonia in such challenging contexts, this project provided a valuable example for educators seeking to bring about trust in God in the lives of children and their communities. Many endeavors

by my supervisors, spiritual mentors, friends, and church members also fostered the courage and love to continue.

Toward the end of the project, a mentor encouraged me to incorporate koinonia love in the questionnaire. With the help of many others, I spent an extra two months doing so. By making this change, participants were evaluated in a way that enabled them to engage with the Scriptures and the love of God behind them, rather than just having knowledge of them. This was why I chose the paradigm of 1 John 1:1-2:1, which includes convictions, contradictory facts, wrong beliefs, and affirmations, as discussed in the methodology chapter. John, the author of this book, loved the recipients and wanted to engage them in koinonia with the triune God, which would fill them with joy.

The koinonia that the participants and I and experienced during the training was the fruit of the endeavors of many Christians. As one elderly participant indicated, koinonia with God in suffering and persecution was “like a lily among thorns” (Songs 2:2), which represented many such witnesses historically in the region during the past seventy years, and theologically emphasized the intimacy with God through Christ in persecution.

### **Personal Reflection**

This project was a great grace from God for me, a pastor who needed reparenting through koinonia by the Father in times of great changes, suffering, and isolation. Being born into a pastor’s family at the end of the previous great persecution in the late 1970s, a time of great revival despite persecution, I had faced considerable difficulties in developing intimacy with God and others due to the absence of a father during my crucial years of childhood development. Despite possessing many skills developed through years of self-striving, as a survivor of enormous life changes during the pandemic, coming to a new country as a seminary student, and planting a church in a cross-cultural environment while engaging in ministries with educators and pastors in my home country, I had to rely on God and others. It was overwhelming for me as a father of two daughters, husband to a wife, and son to elderly parents to fulfill the expectations of



my various roles. When I had to rely on my self-striving abilities to fulfill my responsibilities, I would fall back to isolation from God and others, making it challenging, if not impossible, to demonstrate intimacy in koinonia to educators and children.

However, when feeling unworthy or overwhelmed during this project, I cried out like the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15:27: “Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.” This project then became a feast under the table for me, made possible through the mercy and support of many, including my seminary supervisor, mentors, fellow educators, and their children, as well as my own family, wife, and members of my church plant. It was amazing grace that someone with deficiencies in intimacy could still serve others with the koinonia of God, the ultimate intimacy one can experience in eternity and on earth.

During the organization of the camp, I realized that I could have cooperated more with the leaders among the participants to facilitate small group discussions. I could have also provided training for these group leaders and discussion groups to improve their teaching and leadership skills. Additionally, I could have recruited more talents from my church to assist in teaching some of the chapters and leading worship. This type of cooperation is koinonia service, as every member of the body can contribute to ministry in their unique way.

Meanwhile, I focused on those with experience in adult koinonia camps during the development of the textbook and training program. Some participants suggested re-writing the material for a larger audience. With feedback from my supervisor, I improved communication and conveyed koinonia education to a wider audience. The region showed a significant need for this training, so expanding the program’s audience could be my next step.

## APPENDIX 1

### KOIONONIA EDUCATION SURVEY

This appendix is mostly a literal translation of the Chinese Survey; it may lose some subtleness of wording in the Chinese language because of the translation. The survey uses everyday language so that even not-well-educated Christians can participate. Hopefully, the translation reflects such a style.

#### **Questionnaire of Koinonia Education (QKE)**

The questionnaire is voluntary and takes about 15-30 minutes. You can withdraw at any time if you feel uncomfortable. This questionnaire aims to evaluate your current situation and future progress in children's in-Christ education. Please try to fill in the form according to your actual position, and don't try to guess the correct answer, so as not to weaken your self-evaluation. Meanwhile, the adults and children mentioned below refer to believers.

#### **Agreement to Participate**

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify and assess your conviction, awareness, responsiveness, and affirmation of the principles in koinonia discipleship of children (or children's education in Christ). In this research, you will answer the same questions before and after the training project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and your name will never be reported. Participation is strictly voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time.

By completing this survey, you are giving informed consent for using your responses in this project.

I agree to participate

I do not agree to participate

### **Section 1**

Email:

Name:

Please enter your first and last name; if you want to stay anonymous, please provide a memorable 5 digit personal identification number: \_\_\_\_\_

Biological Gender:

Female

Male

How many times you have attended the adult discipleship training camps (if you attended too many times to remember, just give a rough number)

### **Section 2 Overall Self-Assessment**

Directions: About Children's Education in Christ--Koinonia Discipleship for Children (later on as koinonia education). Please select a number from 1-6, 1= not confident at all, 2=not confident, 3=not confident to some degree, 4=confident to some degree, 5=confident, 6= very confident.

1. I have a substantial understanding of the fundamental biblical teachings of such. please select 1-6 (1=not confident at all, 6=very confident);
2. I am confident in practicing koinonia education. please select 1-6 (1=not confident at all, 6=very confident)
3. I have a substantial understanding of related children's psychology; please select 1-6 (1=not confident at all, 6=very confident)

### **Section 3: My Conviction, Awareness, Responsiveness, and Affirmation**

Direction:

1. For the following assessment, please do not guess the correct answer; the purpose of the questionnaire is only to evaluate yourself before and after training.

2. In addition to choosing a score, you can write down your thoughts after some questions;

If your conviction or core beliefs change significantly, please fill in the scriptures that cultivate such changes.

3. Use the Bible and any reference books in this survey.

4. Special attention should be paid to: Conviction means that you believe it is the truth in your heart and often practice it.

I will also list some phenomena to remind you that you may actually believe in some wrong or false core belief even if you can guess the correct answers.

These false core beliefs, which I listed, may help you figure out what needs to be changed.

For the conviction questions, please select a number from 0-6, 0 =don't believe, or don't acknowledge at all; 1= "I acknowledge such conviction but never practice," 2=" I believe but forget most of the time; and even I remember, I find it hard to practice, and I only practice once a week, "3=" I believe but forget often. When I remember, I practice twice or three times a week ", 4=" I believe, but forget sometimes; when I remember, I practice sometimes." 5=" I believe and often remember. When I remember, I usually practice.", 6=" I believe. I remember most of the time. I practice most of the time".

5. For the Awareness, Responsiveness, and Affirmation Questions

Please select a number from 1 to 6, 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Disagree

Somewhat, 4=Agree Somewhat, 5=Agree, 6=Strongly Agree

**3.1 Regarding teaching children to know God, I believe and always practice; please select 0-6:**

R: Teachers need to become the likeness of a child to teach children to trust in God truly.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
W: I unconsciously believe in self-striving <sup>1</sup> because God helps those who help themselves.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
R: In the teaching of Jesus, the likeness of a little children is their humility and trust in the Father.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
CF: Little children have to rely on parents, they also make silly mistakes, I am resentful about the idea that I should become the likeness of them.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
R: Teachers who do not trust in God may unconsciously demonstrate and teach their children justification by works.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
R: The root of man's self-striving is to cover up the sense of shame brought about by sin since the fall of Adam.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6

**If you have any questions, please state; if you have changed your views after the training, please list the scriptures that made you change your convictions, attitudes, or practices.** \_\_\_\_\_

**Awareness, Responsiveness, and Affirmation**

Over the past week, I was often able to discern when I have returned to the likeness of a child to be among children and when I have not.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Over the past week, I often returned to the likeness of a child to be among children.	1	2	3	4	5	6
In the coming week, I am very willing to return to the likeness of a child to be among children.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Over the past week, I often thanked and praised God that I returned to the likeness of a child to be among children.	1	2	3	4	5	6

**3.2.Regarding the temptations a born-again faces, I believe and always practice; please select 0-6:**

R: The temptations of children are essentially the same as those of grown-ups.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
W: The temptations of children are very different from those of us grown-ups.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
W: If he had not experienced temptation, Christ would not know why man cannot stand temptations.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
R: Christ could not have appreciated why a human could not stand temptation if he had not experienced it himself.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
R: Understanding the nature of Jesus' temptations can help teachers lead young children out of temptation.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
CF: I feel that there are not many times when I really encounter temptation.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6

<sup>1</sup> Self-striving in Chinese language may not be a negative expression, therefore it may not sound negative to believe in so.

R: Christ willingly came to earth and was tempted in every aspect as a human being so that He can empathize with our weaknesses.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
R: If a born-again fails many temptations, he may doubt his identity and personhood and even doubt whether he is reborn or not.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
W: I don't think knowing myself as a new creation has anything to do with facing temptation.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
R: If a born-again does not fall into temptation, he can experience fellowship/koinonia with God.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6

**If you have any questions, please state; if you have changed your views after the training, please list the scriptures that made you change your convictions, attitudes, or practices.**

**Awareness, Responsiveness, and Affirmation**

Over the past week, I was often aware when I was tempted, I could discern the nature of such and knew how to face it.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Over the past week, when I disciplined them, I was often willing to understand the temptations children face with the heart of Christ and help them come out.	1	2	3	4	5	6
In the coming week, when I discipline children, I am very willing to understand the temptations children face with the heart of Christ and help them come out.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Over the past week, I often thanked and praised God for my willingness to understand the temptations they face with the heart of Christ and help them come out.	1	2	3	4	5	6

**3.3 Regarding demonstrating responding to the Heavenly Father's love and acceptance in koinonia, I believe and always practice (please select 0-6):**

R: The triune God loves and accepts us; I need to demonstrate to children how to respond.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
CF: The Heavenly Father loves me, but most of the time, I am indifferent because there is no response.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
R: I believe I am born of the Heavenly Father, so we are intimate.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
CF: I feel the Heavenly Father is not as vivid and loving as Jesus; he is a vague and distant figure to me	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
W: The heavenly Father is strict, cares more about the Law, and it is hard to please him.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
CF: I find it hard to call Him, Abba Father, with intimacy.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
R: The authority to forgive belong to my heavenly Father; I do not have the authority.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
CF: If the one who offends me does not apologize and changes his behavior, I usually do not forgive.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6

**If you have any questions, please state; if you have changed your views after the training, please list the scriptures that made you change your convictions, attitudes, or practices.**\_\_\_\_\_

**Awareness, Responsiveness, and Affirmation (please select 1-6)**

Over the past week, I was often aware when I offered my sovereignty <sup>2</sup> to the Father and trusted him and when I was not.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Over the past week, I often demonstrate to children how to respond to Heavenly Father's acceptance, offer him sovereignty, and trust him.	1	2	3	4	5	6
In the coming week, I am very willing to demonstrate to children how to respond to Heavenly Father's acceptance, offer sovereignty to him, and trust him.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Over the past week, I often thanked and praised God for demonstrating to children how to respond to Heavenly Father's acceptance, offer him sovereignty, and trust him.	1	2	3	4	5	6

**3.4 Regarding demonstrating responding to Jesus Christ in koinonia, I believe and always practice (please select 0-6):**

R: I believe I died with Christ and was raised with Him to have a new life so we can live the newness of life together.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
W: I believe that I died with Christ, but I could feel that I live with Christ.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
CF: When I sin or fall into weakness, I feel embarrassed to come to Jesus, even I know he is my high priest in heaven.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
R: Jesus is my atonement, so when I admit my sin before the Father, He will forgive me, and I will enjoy koinonia with the Triune God.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
CF: I care more about reconciliation with human beings than reconciliation and koinonia with God in Christ.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
CF: Children do not even know what a high priest is; I find it hard to demonstrate responding to Jesus as our high priest.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
R: It is essential to demonstrate Jesus as our high priest and atonement to children.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
CF: Some sins or addictions make me shameful; I do not know how to come to Jesus as my high priest in these cases.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6

**If you have any questions, please state; if you have changed your views after the training, please list the scriptures that made you change your convictions, attitudes, or practices.**\_\_\_\_\_

**Awareness, Responsiveness, and Affirmation (please select 1-6)**

Over the past week, I was often aware when I remembered Jesus Christ as my atonement, looking to Him as my high priest in heaven, and when I was not.	1	2	3	4	5	6
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<sup>2</sup> "Offering sovereignty" is a literal translation, meaning acknowledge the sovereignty of God in forgiveness and etc.

Over the past week, I often demonstrate to children how to respond to Jesus Christ as my atonement and high priest in heaven.	1	2	3	4	5	6
In the coming week, I am willing to demonstrate how to respond to Jesus Christ as my atonement and high priest in heaven.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Over the past week, I often thanked and praised God for demonstrating to children how to respond to Jesus Christ as my atonement and high priest in heaven	1	2	3	4	5	6

**3.5 Regarding demonstrating responding to the Holy Spirit in koinonia, I believe and always practice (please select 0-6):**

R: I am born of the Spirit; he also indwells in me; we are intimate, so I echo the Spirit's guidance.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
CF: I am scared to hear some stories of seeking the Spirit and becoming possessed by demons, so I keep away from interacting with the Spirit.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
CF: I feel burdened to walk by the Spirit because often I love the things of the flesh.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
W: I think the Spirit is a mysterious power, so it is hard to be intimate with Him.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
R: The works of flesh stop me from loving God and others; I always repent immediately.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
R: The works of the flesh are obvious; I can be aware and repent.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
W: I do not know the meaning of discerning the works of the flesh moment by moment; I feel it makes a fuss of the trivial things.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6

**If you have any questions, please state; if you have changed your views after the training, please list the scriptures that made you change your convictions, attitudes, or practices.**

**Awareness, Responsiveness, and Affirmation (please select 1-6)**

Over the past week, I was often aware of when I followed the Spirit and the works of the flesh.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Over the past week, I often demonstrated to children to follow the Spirit, not to follow the works of the flesh.	1	2	3	4	5	6
In the coming week, I am very willing to demonstrate to children to follow the Spirit, not to follow the works of the flesh.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Over the past week, I often thanked and praised God for demonstrating to children to follow the Spirit, not to follow the works of the flesh.	1	2	3	4	5	6

**3.6 Regarding Law and Grace in discipline, I believe and always practice (please select 0-6):**

R: Discipline requires a combination of grace and Law.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
R: The purpose of the Law is to convict children of their sins, not to empower them so that they may not to sin.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
W: Grace is something I do not deserve: I break the rules; God did not punish me according to the Law and spared me the consequences.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
R: I became a born-again new creation by God through death and resurrection with Christ so that I may not sin; this is the grace I should remember when disciplining them.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6



CF: I often feel happy that I did not have misfortune or punishment when I sin, but I do not focus on being a born-again and that I may not sin.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
W: The focus of discipline is to help children be moral people.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
R: I will not sin because I am under the grace of God whenever I see myself as the resurrected life and offer myself and my members of the body to God.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6

**If you have any questions, please state; if you have changed your views after the training, please list the scriptures that made you change your convictions, attitudes, or practices.**

**Awareness, Responsiveness, and Affirmation (please select 1-6)**

Over the past week, in self-discipline, I was often aware when I reminded myself that I was a born-again, I could love God and others as myself; then I did not.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Over the past week, in disciplining children, I often reminded them with the mercy of God that they were born-again and they could love God and others as themselves.	1	2	3	4	5	6
In the coming week, I am very willing to remind children with the mercy of God in discipline that they are born-again and that they can love God and others as themselves.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Over the past week, I often thanked and praised God for the privilege that I could demonstrate to love Him and others as myself to children.	1	2	3	4	5	6

**Section 4 Overall Assessment about the Survey**

Directions: About the helpfulness of this survey (section three), please select yes or no.

This survey or training (after the training) helps me to be aware of some possible wrong or false core beliefs I practice in children’s discipleship.

Yes.

No.

This survey or training (after the training) helps me to be aware of some Biblical convictions.

Yes.

No.

Some facts in the conviction questions help me to be aware some correct convictions are just nominal to me in my practice of children’s discipleship.

Yes.

No.

Despite of the contradictory behaviors reminded (in section three), I am still affirmed by the survey or training (after the training) that I am a born-again new creation, a beloved one of the Triune God, being able to love God and others as oneself if I offer myself as such and my members of body as instruments of righteousness to God.

Yes.

No.

I experienced koinonia during the training.

Yes.

No.

APPENDIX 2

CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC 1/8 AND  
SUMMARIES OF THE FEEDBACKS FROM  
THREE EXPERTS OF THE  
EXTERNAL PANEL

<b>Educators for Children Discipleship Curriculum Evaluation Tool</b>					
<b>Lesson One Evaluation</b>					
<b>1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary</b>					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The lesson is clearly relevant to the principles of children discipleship.					
The material is faithful to the Bible's teaching					
The thesis of the lesson is clearly stated.					
The points of the lesson clearly support the thesis.					
The lesson contains points of practical application.					
The lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.					
Overall, the lesson is clearly presented.					

Table A1. Summary of feedback from the expert panel

Expert Name	Dr. Thomas Chow	Rev. Y.C. Mok	Rev. Jeremy Ju
Chap 1	27	26	23
chap 2	26	27	23
Chap 3	26	27	28
Chap 4	27	26	26
Chap 5	27	27	25
Chap 6	28	27	27
Chap 7	27	26	22
Chap 8	26	27	22
average	26.75	26.625	24.5
overall average	25.95833333		

APPENDIX 3

T-TEST OF OVERALL CONFIDENCE OF KOINONIA  
DISCIPLESHIP BEFORE AND AFTER TRAINING

Table A2. T-test of overall confidence of section 2 of the survey

Paired T-Test: Paired Samples Correlations					
		N	Correlation	Significance	
				One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
Pair 1	preoverall & postoverall	25	.430	.016	.032

APPENDIX 4

T-TEST OF OVERALL AWARENESS, RESPONSIVENESS  
AND AFFIRMATION BEFORE AND AFTER TRAINING

Table A3. T-test of ARA of the six parts in section 3 of the survey

Paired Samples Correlations					
		N	Correlation	Significance	
				One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
Pair 1	Pre-ARA-all & post-ARA-all	25	.542	.003	.005

APPENDIX 5

T-TEST OF OVERALL CORRECT CONVICTIONS  
BEFORE AND AFTER TRAINING

Table A4. T-test of correct convictions of six parts in section 3 of the survey

Paired Samples Correlations					
		N	Correlation	Significance	
				One-Sided p	Two-Sided p
Pair 1	Pre-correct-convictions & Post-correct-convictions	25	.670	<.001	<.001

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## ABSTRACT

### DEVELOPING A DISCIPLESHIP CURRICULUM FOR EDUCATORS OF EAST ASIAN CHILDREN AT CHILDREN'S EDUCATION IN CHRIST NETWORK EAST ASIA

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This thesis aims to develop a curriculum for educators in East Asia to enhance their ability to disciple children, starting with the creation of a textbook and followed by teaching the curriculum at an online camp. Pre- and post-surveys evaluated the effectiveness of the curriculum and equipped educators to engage in koinonia education with children. Chapter 1 provides the context of the project in one area of East Asia and presents the rationale, purpose, goals, research methodologies, and definitions. Chapter 2 establishes the theological foundation of koinonia education for children. Chapter 3 addresses the application of koinonia education in East Asia and the development of methodology. Chapter 4 details the implementation of the project, including the creation of the curriculum textbook, the design of pre- and post-camp surveys, and the online camp. Chapter 5 presents an evaluation of the project, with an in-depth analysis of survey data and an assessment of the project's strengths and weaknesses. The chapter concludes with theological and personal reflections.

## VITA

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BS, University of Peking, 1997

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Leading Brother, Beijing Church of New Creation, Beijing, China, 2010-2016

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