Nurturing Spiritual Development in Children

Summer 2009
Lipscomb Campus: June 1-5

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Course Description:
This course explores current definitions of children’s spirituality, examines biblical and theological foundations of children’s spirituality, and critiques four current theories on children’s spiritual development. It also compares/contrasts Christian education and spiritual formation and analyzes emerging research focusing on children’s spirituality. Most importantly, it explores a variety of ways to nurture spiritual development in children.

Objectives:
Students who take this course will be able to:
1. Articulate a coherent, cohesive definition of children’s spirituality.
2. Offer biblical and theological support for the idea that children are spiritual beings.
3. Explain four current approaches/theories regarding the phenomenon of children’s spirituality.
4. Analyze data from children’s interviews for insights into their spiritual lives.
5. Identify and describe at least seven ways to promote, nurture, or enhance spiritual development in children.

Required Textbooks:
- Allen, H. C. (Ed.). (2008). *Nurturing children’s spirituality: Christian perspectives and best practices*. Eugene, OR: Cascade. Available at [http://wipfandstock.com](http://wipfandstock.com); also available on Amazon; Dr. Allen also has several copies.

In addition, the following reading selections will be made available online on Blackboard:
Course Requirements:

1. **Childhood reflection paper**: (20 points; see Assignment #1 at back of syllabus for detail; *no course reading required for this assignment*)
   - **Due Date**: Sunday, May 17, 11:59pm (Blackboard submission)
   - **Submit to Blackboard**: at least five dated “entries” in your journal—typed, double-spaced (4-5 pages).

2) **Interview with a child**: (30 points; see Assignment #2 at back of syllabus for detail; *no reading*)
   - **Due Date**: Wednesday, May 20, 11:59pm (Blackboard submission)
   - **Submit to Blackboard**: A copy of the interview protocol, with the child’s responses inserted (typed) in the correct places, followed by an evaluative paragraph, probably 3-4 pages typed altogether.

3) **Definitional work**: (40 points; see Assignment #3 at back of syllabus for detail; *includes some reading from most course sources*)
   - **Due Date**: Sunday, May 24, 11:59pm (Blackboard submission)
   - **Submit to Blackboard**: About three pages, with four subsections, exploring definitions for spirituality, Christian spirituality, and children’s spirituality, as well as your own final definition. Reference section required.

4) **Approaches to children’s spirituality** (50 points all together; see Assignments 4a and 4b at back of syllabus for detail; *involves reading, assimilating, evaluating material from several course sources*)
   - **Due Date**: Wednesday, May 27, 11:59pm (Blackboard submission)
   - **Submit to Blackboard**: Assignment 4a: Cognitive Development Theory, 1-2 pages (20 points) and Assignment 4b: Relational Consciousness, two pages (30 points). Reference section required for 4a; for 4b, note which edition of the Hay/Nye book you have—1998 or 2006.

5) **Biblical and Theological Support for Children’s Spirituality** (30 points; *no reading required; biblical integration from your own resources and understanding; see Assignment #5 in the syllabus*).
   - **Due Date**: Sunday, May 31, 11:59pm (Blackboard submission)
   - **Submit to Blackboard**: A one-page summary of your thoughts offering biblical/theological support for the idea that children might be considered to be spiritual beings from birth.

6) **How to Nurture Spiritual Development in Children**: (30 points; see Assignment #6 at back of syllabus for detail; *skimming across all course sources*)
   - **Due Date**: Sunday, May 31, 11:59pm (Blackboard submission)
   - **Submit to Blackboard**: A one-page document noting three specific ways recommended in the literature for nurturing children’s spiritual development, including a one-paragraph description of each recommendation, citing two sources from our course literature for each recommendation. Reference section required.

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**IMPORTANT**: Compile all these short papers in one 3-ring binder. Bring this with you to turn in on the first day of class on June 1; for our class discussion, we will be drawing on every assignment at some point during the week.

**GRADING**: The first six written assignments are worth 200 points all together. The final project is worth 150 points, for a total of 350 points. Rubrics for grading are embedded in the “Assignments and Grading Rubrics” section beginning on page 6 of the syllabus.

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7) Final Project: Nurturing Spiritual Development in Children (150 points; Final Project guidelines will be distributed near the end of the week)

Due: we will set a date when we gather in June
Submit to Blackboard: Approximately 15-page research paper that explains children’s spirituality to a congregation and recommends three practices that especially nurture children’s spiritual development. Reference section required.

Grading Scale:

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Statement on Academic Expectations
Please submit assignments double spaced with 1” margins all around. Times New Roman 12-point font is preferred. The following standards will be used to assign grades to written work:

“C” means the paper meets minimum expectations. (You did just what was expected.)
“B” means the paper exceeds minimum expectations of quality. (I can see evidence of good writing, critical thinking, clear understanding, and proofreading.)
“A” means the paper is of exceptionally good quality. (Excellent writing and reflection.)

Spelling, grammar, and style are taken into account. See guidelines per assignment. You are in a professional degree program and will be expected to develop your communication skills appropriately. APA website:
Reference works concerning spiritual and faith development in children:


Assignments and Grading Rubrics

Assignment #1
CHILDHOOD REFLECTION PAPER
20 points
Due Sunday May 17, 11:59pm

Childhood reflection paper: (20 points)
Several times before this course begins, take a few minutes (at least 10-15 minutes) to reflect and journal on your childhood experiences and how they impacted your spiritual development. The following questions [from Catherine Stonehouse] may prompt your reflection. You may address ideas and issues not reflected in these questions also.

General:
- What during childhood gave me the most satisfaction—the greatest sense of “specialness” or joy?
- What made me uncomfortable or caused pain?
- What do I remember from school experience with pleasure? With pain?
- How did my relationships with other children impact who I am?
- How did my early relationship with my parents impact my self-image and the kind of person I am?
- Who were the persons outside my immediate family who most impacted me during childhood?

Spiritual/Religious:
- How did my relationship with my parents during childhood shape my image of God?
- In my experience in the church, what was most meaningful and formative? What was most painful and destructive?
- What memories do I have of prayer?
- Were there times when I felt God’s presence?

Submit to Blackboard: at least five dated “entries” in your journal—typed, double-spaced (4-5 pages).

Grading Rubric: Assignment #1 (20 points)

Reflect and journal on your childhood experiences and how they impacted your spiritual development. (Response questions above.)

To aid me in determining your grade, I will be asking the following questions.

At least 5 dated entries?

4-5 pages, double-spaced?

Themes addressed?

No outside reading required; requires five dated entries—cannot be done the night before.
Assignment #2
INTERVIEW WITH A CHILD
30 points
Due Wednesday, May 20, 11:59pm

Interview with a child: (30 points)
Before you arrive for the on-campus part of the course, you must interview an 8-to-12-year-old child, using the interview protocol below. Print out a copy of the interview protocol, and as you interview the child, write down what the child says after each question. If child says, “I don’t know,” or “I don’t think so,” put that down. (You may wish to tape-record the interview to facilitate later transcription.)

Submit to Blackboard:
A copy of the interview protocol, with the child’s responses inserted in the correct places. (Copy the interview protocol into a new document—then simply type in the child’s responses.) The whole interview will probably be 3-4 typed pages.

At the beginning of the written assignment, give the child’s first name (or a pseudonym if you wish), age, and gender as well as the date of the interview.

THEN—at the bottom of the interview protocol, compose one full paragraph (half a page), describing your understanding of the child’s relationship with God. How would you describe that relationship (e.g., distant, intimate, warm, formal, etc.)? Support what you say with examples from the interview responses.

Bring this assignment to class in June—a typed copy of the interview—both questions and answers. We will use the interviews in class, analyzing responses, noting themes that emerge from the data.

Grading Rubric: Assignment #2 (30 points)

Interview an 8-to-12-year-old child, using the Interview Protocol provided on next page.

To aid me in determining your grade, I will be asking the following questions.

First name of child stated?

Age of child stated?

Gender of child stated?

Date of interview stated?

Interview Protocol questions typed?

Child’s responses typed?

Two questions that you created and asked:

3-4 pages in length?

Full paragraph describing child’s relationship with God? Support for description from the interview responses? (This paragraph is worth 10 points)
Interview Protocol*

Child’s Name: _________________________  Your Name: _________________________

Get parental permission. Ask permission to tape record the conversation.

Get Acquainted, chit-chat
Maybe demographic information: (e.g.,)
- Who lives at your house or apartment? (parents, names and ages of siblings, pets)

People who know God
- Of all the people you know, who do you think knows God the best?
- Why do you think that person knows God?
- Are there other reasons why you think _____________ knows God?
- Is there someone else you know who knows God really well? Why do you think so?
- Anyone else?
- Do you have any questions you want to ask me?

Feelings about God
- When you think about God, how do you feel?
- Can you tell me about a time when felt surprised or amazed about God?
- Sorry or guilty toward God?
- Happy about God?
- Sad about God?
- Scared about God?
- Angry at God?
- Ever feel love for God?

Knowing God
- What is the difference between someone who knows about God and someone who knows God?
- How do you think someone gets to know God?
- Do you think you know God?
- How do you know God? (or What are some things that you do that help you know that you know God?)
- Do you talk to God (prayer)? In your mind, in your imagination, out loud?
- What sort of things do you talk to God about?
- Can you think of other ways you can get to know God? *(allow time)*

- In what ways do you listen to God?

- In what ways does God talk to us? Have you ever thought God talked to you? Would you tell me about that?

- Have you ever felt God close to you? Would you tell me about that?

*Questions that may get at the same idea, to dig a little deeper:*  
- Were you ever afraid or alone, and you think God helped you? Would you tell me about that?

*Or:*  
- Has your family ever needed special help and you think God helped? Would you tell me about that?

*Or:*  
- Have you ever been at the mountains, or in a park, or at the ocean, and thought God was nearby? Would you tell me about that?

Your questions *(You must ask at least two questions that you have created)*

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-  

- Do you have any questions you want to ask me?

Thank child and mention that you will be writing a report, though you will not be using names. In your report, please use a pseudonym for the child.

*This interview protocol is taken from Dr. Allen’s doctoral dissertation and was the instrument used for the field research in the dissertation.*
Assignment #3
DEFINITIONAL WORK: Constructing a definition of children’s spirituality
40 Points
Due Sunday, May 24, 11:59pm

3) Definitional work: (3 pages; 40 points)
Several of our texts offer definitions for spirituality, Christian spirituality, and children’s spirituality. Your task is to compile a selection of the best definitions for each of these concepts—general spirituality, Christian spirituality, and children’s spirituality—noting common themes, assumptions, and issues that emerge in attempting to define these concepts. Ultimately you must choose (or construct) an operational or working definition of children’s spirituality that, at this point, you consider the best approach, and offer a rationale for that definition.

One purpose of this assignment is to facilitate familiarity with the course texts and online sources. Locate definitions in at least five of the following sources:
- Roehlkepartain et al. (2005), Chapter 1 on Blackboard
- From the Allen text (2008), Chapter 3, the Boyatzis chapter
- From Ratcliff (2004), e.g., Chapters 1, 8, 10, 11, 16 or others on Blackboard
- Hay with Nye (2006), Chapter 1 and pp. 108-109
- Stonehouse (1998), Chapter 1

Write a three-page paper that includes the following sections, with about 2/3 page for each section. Indicate each section in your paper with the appropriate subheading.

Section 1: Definitions of Spirituality in General
Choose two or more of the definitions for this type of definition (no reference to Christ or God, though the definition may mention the sacred)
Determine why you chose these definitions. Do they share a common theme? Are they opposites of each other, providing contrasting ways of looking at spirituality? Do they build upon each other, each contributing a different aspect to the definition? Do they represent a range of meaning? Did you think these were the clearest definitions?
Write 2/3 page about the definitions that you chose. Describe, analyze, critique, respond to, and/or summarize them. Interact with them in meaningful ways.
When you quote a definition, be sure to attribute it to the author who actually said it. This is not necessarily the author of the chapter or book in which you found it.
What do these definitions, taken together, say about the topic?

Section 2: Definitions of Christian Spirituality
Repeat the steps in Section 1 above, but for definitions of Christian spirituality (must refer to Christ).

Section 3: Definitions of Children’s Spirituality
Repeat the steps in Section 1 above, but for definitions of children’s spirituality.

Section 4: Operational Definition of Children’s Spirituality
Write your own definition of children’s spirituality. In your own words, what is it?
Defend your definition with at least two different rationales—two different kinds of argument, or two different types of evidence. Why do you think this is a good definition? Rationales might include references to previously-quoted definitions, or biblical evidence, or your own personal experiences, or other arguments.
References
In your paper you must cite from at least five different sources. List the sources you cited in APA, MLA, Turabian, or SBL format on the reference page (whichever style you know). I will mark and correct (though not count off) omissions in references. (I will count off for reference errors on your final paper.) This assignment (#3) should help you understand the requirements for references. Essentially, you must give the author’s name, the source (title of book), the copyright date, and the publisher. For the citation within the text, give the author’s name and page number.

Bring a copy of this assignment to class in June; we will be working in small groups constructing definitions for each of these ideas. In fact, we will be using all of your written assignments in class; all assignments should be printed out and assembled into a 3-ring notebook for class in June. All should be submitted to Blackboard also.

The grading rubric below should help as you work through this assignment.

Grading Rubric: Definitional Work Assignment #3 (40 points)

General spirituality
At least 2 definitions (4 points)
Ordered in some way* (3 points)
(rationale, focus, etc.)

Christian spirituality
At least 2 definitions (4 points)
Ordered in some way* (3 points)

Children’s spirituality
At least 2 definitions (4 points)
Ordered in some way* (3 points)

Operational definition of children’s spirituality
Definition stated (5 points)
Rationale for definition** (5 points)

Reference page (4 pts)

At least 5 different sources cited (5 points)
(You may cite from Roehlkepartain, Hay/Nye, and Stonehouse as well as chapters in the Allen text that you own or the Ratcliff text online; each chapter in both the Allen and the Ratcliff texts is a separate source; to see how to cite from various chapters and how to place in your reference page, see examples below***)

* In the first three subsections, you must offer a rationale for your choice of definitions. I am looking for evidence of sorting through the definitional process, locating definitions that follow a pattern or show a theme, or represent breadth, or exhibit the most clarity—in other words, a way of ordering the two, three, or four definitions you have chosen to share in each sub-category.

** In the last subsection, state your operational definition of children’s spirituality, then offer a rationale for choosing (or constructing) this definition, building on earlier proffered definitions, personal experience, biblical support, or other forms of rationale.

**The Allen and Ratcliff books are edited books—ones in which each of the chapters is written by a different author. To cite (in your paper) from an edited book, you cite the author of the chapter, not the editor of the book. See below:

Citing from a chapter in the Allen text:
Boyatzis (2008) says that “a fundamental task for our field is to generate valid, comprehensive definitions of our terms” (p. 45).

In your reference section, this entry would be: (the following is APA format; you may use MLA, Turabian, SBL, or APA)
Assignment #4a
COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT THEORY
20 points
Due Wednesday, May 27, 11:59pm

Assignment #4b
RELATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS
30 points
Due Wednesday, May 27, 11:59pm

Approaches to Children’s Spirituality
During our week on campus we will explore several theories that currently inform the dialog about children’s spirituality. Among these are Piaget’s cognitive developmental theory and David Hay and Rebecca Nye’s concept of “relational consciousness.” Before the on-campus part of this course, you will need to become familiar with these concepts and what they contribute to our discussion.

4a) Cognitive Development Theory (1-2 pages; 20 points)
Jean Piaget, over his long lifetime (1896-1980), developed what is known as the cognitive (i.e., how we think) development theory. This theory has profoundly influenced Christian education in the past 40 years. First read Plueddemann’s brief overview of Piaget’s work and influence (on Blackboard); then read Cheryl Fawcett’s short sections (also on Blackboard) entitled “Cognitive Ministry Implications” for various ages (Prenatal-24 months, Toddlers, Preschoolers, Primary, Pre-Adolescence). Fawcett’s work reflects typical Piagetian application in Christian Education. Next read Stonehouse’s chapter on Piaget (Chapter 4, Stonehouse text), which offers a more nuanced and multifaceted treatment of Piaget. In less two pages or less:
- briefly describe the four stages of Piaget’s theory, citing from course sources
- describe at least two experiences with Christian education—either from your own childhood or more recently with your experiences with children—that reflect Piaget’s influence (must note connection to Piaget’s ideas)
- Though Piaget’s work has primarily been used to facilitate teaching children the basic biblical information, in your opinion how might Piaget’s ideas help facilitate spiritual growth in children? (Think back to the definitions of spirituality you looked at in Assignment #3)

Grading Rubric: Assignment 4a (20 points)

Describe four stages of Piaget’s theory
Title of four stages (2 points) ______
Four age ranges (2 points) ______
Descriptions (4 points) ______

Experiences that reflect Piaget’s influence
Experience #1 (4 points) ______
(must relate to and accurately interpret Piaget)
Experience #2 (4 points) ______
(must relate to and accurately interpret Piaget)

Application to spiritual growth (4 points) ______
Well-considered, relevant, well written
4b) Relational Consciousness (2 pages; 30 points)

Hay/Nye’s groundbreaking book *The Spirit of the Child* (Rev. ed., 2006) does not define children’s spirituality from within a Christian context (though both authors are explicitly Christians). Hay and Nye are working in Great Britain, attempting to help the public schools there teach spirituality (a 1988 educational mandate) without reference to religion. Though ours is a different task, Hay and Nye have some important insights we can utilize.

Chapters 1 and 2 establish three premises that I will outline below:

Chapter 1 establishes two of Hay’s main premises:

1) *Spirituality is universal.* Hay's main claim is that spirituality has its origin in biology and thus exists in every human being (p. 22).

2) *Spirituality is the source of morality.* Hay's research over the last 30 years has convinced him that there is a strong connection between spiritual awareness and ethical behavior or morality (p. 29).

Chapter 2 describes what Hay calls the “social destruction of spirituality.” From his perspective (the post-Christian world of Western Europe), Hay postulates that

3) *Spirituality has been privatized.* Hay attributes the privatization of spirituality to factors such as the decline of religious institutions and the perceived conflict between science and religious belief. Hay posits that over the past century spirituality has become increasingly hidden, half-forgotten, implicit, and vague.

Read/skim each of the following chapters, and then respond to the questions about them in complete, well-organized paragraphs. Answer these questions in your own words. Do not use direct quotes from the book. However, please indicate in parentheses the page number(s) from the book where you found the ideas that you discuss. *(You may copy this document into your computer and type into it.)*

**Chapter 3: “Children’s Spirituality—What We Already Know” (4 points)**

Hay critiques developmental approaches (like the cognitive developmental theory we just wrote about in Assignment 4a). Read his critique in the short section on pages 56-59 in the 2006 book (or pages 49-53 in the 1998 text).

- Offer your understanding of Hay’s critiques of this previous research—at least two ways that Hay finds developmental theory problematic as a tool for understanding spirituality in children. *(one paragraph, no more than half a page; 4 points)*

**Chapter 4: “A Geography of the Spirit” (15 points altogether)**

Explain each of the following aspects of Hay and Nye’s “starting point” (the concepts they were initially looking for). Demonstrate that you understand them. No quotes; use your own words here. Also, give a personal example of each of these “sensings” from your own experiences.

- Awareness-sensing: (4 points)

- Mystery-sensing: (4 points)

- Value sensing: (4 points)

Why are these ideas such key ideas in the area of children’s spirituality? (3 points)
**Chapters 5 and 6: “How Do You Talk with Children about Spirituality?” and “Listening to Children Talking”**

Describe in one paragraph (no more than half a page) how Rebecca Nye gathered her research data. (4 points)

**Chapter 7: Relational Consciousness:** Rebecca Nye ultimately describes/defines children’s spirituality as “relational consciousness.” What does she mean by this term? Write a full paragraph, at least half a page, explaining this phrase. I’m looking for evidence that you understand what it means. **No quotes—your own words.** (7 points)

**Grading Rubric: Assignment 4b (30 points)**

Ch. 3: How are Hay and Nye moving away from the ways spirituality has been studied in the past? (one paragraph; 4 points)

- Hay’s critique of development approaches ______

Ch. 4: Hay and Nye’s starting point; also give a personal example (about a page)

- Awareness sensing (4 points) ______
- Mystery sensing (4 points) ______
- Value sensing (4 points) ______
- Why are these ideas key? (3 pts) ______

Ch. 5-6: Nye’s research method (one paragraph; 4 points)

- General description ______

Ch. 7: “Relational Consciousness” (full paragraph, at least half a page; 7 points)

- Explanation of term ______

No reference page needed for Assignment 4b, though please indicate which edition of the Hay/Nye text you have used, the 1998 or 2006 edition.
Assignment #5

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN’S SPIRITUALITY

30 points

Due Sunday, May 31, 11:59pm

5) Biblical and Theological Support for Children’s Spirituality (1-2 pages; 30 points)

A basic assumption of this course is that children are spiritual beings, that is, they are able to have a relationship with God, even before they make a personal commitment or are baptized. In our class discussion we will explore the rationale for such an assumption.

Write one or two pages addressing why children might be considered to be spiritual beings. I would expect some biblical support. Other possible sources for ideas could be theological concepts in general (e.g., sin, guilt, image of God) or support from church history. We will be discussing this concept in class; this preliminary assignment is designed to “prime the pump.” I want you to offer at least two rationales in this paper.

The following questions will shape some of the class discussion. These may give you ideas for your paper. (You need not address these questions specifically.)

What is the status of children before God?
Are children in the kingdom?
What role does baptism play?
What does the concept of original sin have to say about children’s spirituality?
What does the concept of imago dei have to say about children’s spirituality?
What biblical passages offer insight into these ideas?
What is “spirituality” in Scripture?
Does Scripture offer any guidelines regarding the age when children may be accountable for their sins?

No reference page is needed for this assignment, though if you cite a source, please include the reference information.

Grading Rubric: Assignment #5 (30 points)

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN’S SPIRITUALITY

___/10 Evidence of grappling with key issues; scope/coherence/argument; biblical support
___/20 Discussion of at least two different biblical or theological arguments that could support the idea of children as spiritual beings
Assignment #6
THREE WAYS TO NURTURE SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT
30 points
Due Sunday, May 31, 11:59pm

6) Three Ways to Nurture Spiritual Development in Children: (1 page; 30 points)
The texts and authors we are reading offer a variety of ways to nurture spiritual development in children. Choose three ways or approaches that are recommended and described. For each of the three:
- describe/define this recommendation and cite at least two sources from the literature for each approach.
- title your recommendation (see suggestions in box below)

You own three texts that offer a plethora of ideas here:
- Beckwith (2004; pp. 55-162)
- Stonehouse (1998; Chapters 8 and 9 as well as ideas from Chapters 3, 4, 6, and 7)
  Rich, textured information is available from over a dozen authors.

Also Yust and the Ratcliff text offer good sources for you:
- Yust (Chapters 3 and 5 on Blackboard)
- Ratcliff (Chapters 12, 15, 16, 17, 19, 21 on Blackboard offer support for a wide variety of ideas)

Grading Rubric: Assignment #6 (30 points)

Approach 1 (8 points) use descriptive subheading title—not “Approach 1”
  a. description (cited) (8 points) ______
  b. at least two sources ______

Approach 2 (8 points) use descriptive subheading title
  a. description (cited) (8 points) ______
  b. at least two sources ______

Approach 3 (8 points) use descriptive subheading title
  a. description (cited) (8 points) ______
  b. at least two sources ______

Reference page (6 points) ______

At least four different sources must be cited; Yust, Stonehouse, Beckwith offer good ideas here; also remember each chapter in Allen can be a source—several chapters offer excellent ideas; also each chapter in Ratcliff is a separate source. Each entry on the reference page must give author, title of book, copyright, and publisher. The citation (in the text) must give author and page number.