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# Observing Christian faith during the childhood years

Sarah Holmes

Early Childhood, Liverpool Hope University, Liverpool, UK

## ABSTRACT

This paper presents the *treasure and cultivate* model as a research tool for observing Christian faith in the childhood years. The model seeks to treasure and preserve the natural and innate aspects of a child's faith and spirituality, whilst simultaneously seeking to develop and cultivate other facets. It is proposed that this balanced approach leads to a childhood faith that is both wholesome and a resource to the child. Observation and logging of a child's faith in this way provides a tool that allows surveying of characteristics that may influence faith. In the future, this research tool may be used to inform those who seek to foster a child's religious faith in order that such nurture may be both healthy and resourceful. The paper describes a research project of 61 children aged three to thirteen years old, from six Christian denominations in North West England.

## KEYWORDS

Christian faith; childhood;  
treasure; cultivate; nurture

## Introduction

This paper proposes a method of observing Christian faith within the childhood years. The word 'observing' has been carefully chosen since it implies interest and appreciation of the child's faith rather than the negative connotations that may be implied using words such as 'measuring' or 'assessing'. This model in no way desires to measure faith, in a similar way to attainment targets. Rather, it seeks to provide a tool by which observation of the nature of children's faith can take place for research purposes. An overview of existing research tools will first occur, followed by an outline of the *treasure and cultivate* model which seeks to both treasure the innate and natural aspects of faith, whilst simultaneously cultivating other facets of faith within children. The research tool surveys 17 different aspects of a child's faith, and subsequently provides the researcher with a numerical description of the child's faith at that moment in time. This is considered a useful investigative tool since it permits researchers to monitor, in depth, how the child's faith changes over time or in different settings and environments, or to gauge the effects of potentially influential factors upon a child's faith. This paper will finally present observations of a small scale research project comprising 61 children aged three to thirteen years old in actively Christian families, in North West England amongst six different church denominations.

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## Existing models of observing children's faith

Hay and Nye ( 1998) claimed that spirituality is natural to children. Yet children's spiritual experiences may frequently be dismissed or misunderstood (Hart 2003). It is therefore critical to clearly define and ascertain what is being observed for the purposes of this paper. Rather than 'spirituality', King ( 2013) preferred to use the term 'spiritual sensibility' or 'spiritual potential' since this reflects spirituality's capacity to expand and flourish, affirming the potential that is present in human beings. The notion of 'spiritual intelligence' is intriguing, describing an individual's potential for growth and transformation (Adams, Hyde, and Woolley 2008). However, although this seeks to convey inclusivity, unfortunately the language carries over-tones of something cerebral, hierarchical and requiring achievement in order to be successful, which is not the heart behind the *treasure and cultivate* theory. King ( 2013) promoted spiritual literacy; that which goes far beyond reading and writing, to a deeper dimension of insight and wisdom growing from both the heart and head, aiding one in engaging in deep-felt compassion and love for others and all of life. This is what the *treasure and cultivate* model seeks to uncover. Hay and Nye ( 1998) provided a useful categorisation of spiritual sensitivity that may be identified amongst children. These aspects of awareness-sensing, mystery-sensing and value-sensing are reflected to some degree in the *treasure and cultivate* model. The notion of the cyclical outworking of an inward and outward journey is helpful in monitoring the interplay between innermost and physically evident elements of spirituality (Yust 2004). This paper seeks to explore the connections between spiritual and religious experiences of children whilst this inward and outward journey takes place.

Hoffman ( 1992) believed that childhood spiritual experiences are not synonymous with religious encounters since they occur both inside and outside of religious structures. However, Yust ( 2006) argued that religious narratives, beliefs and practices are the means by which a child's spirituality may be shaped, experienced and expressed. This paper will seek to hold both notions in mind and is therefore open to exploring children's spiritual experiences outside of the Christian faith, as well as those expressed using Christian language, narrative and expression. Berryman ( 2013) helpfully distinguished between the two by describing spirituality as a general potential, which becomes religion when it is expressed in a tradition of language, practice and morality alongside a specific group of people. With this in mind, it is important that religious faith is not seen as solely an individual quest but rather as a communal experience that makes reference to mutually held narratives, beliefs and practices (Roehlkepartain, 2004).

With regard to religious faith, some have suggested that children are limited to a 'pre-religious' state due to their language and thought restrictions (Goldman 1966). The underlying notion of Fowler's faith development model is that faith is a development through stages, implying that faith is something to be accomplished rather than an individual relationship or experience ( 1976). In addition, the link that it has with Piagetan thinking, and therefore connecting faith to age and intellectual ability contrasts with an understanding of natural spirituality (Dykstra and Parks 1986). Westerhoff ( 1976) presented an alternative way of looking at faith. He contended that one style of faith is not better or greater than another, in a similar way to how a tree is a complete and whole tree in its first year, and in later years is merely an expanded tree, and not necessarily a better one. This mode of thinking about faith is considered helpful, since it conveys the consolidation, refinement and growth that occurs to existing faith throughout one's lifetime. This echoes the sentiments of Berryman ( 2013) in

recognising that children have an 'owned faith' from the beginning, which is part of a life long journey towards greater maturity. Coles ( 1990) provided insights into children's thoughts and feelings about the meaning of life, demonstrating the validity and quality of experiences at an early age. Berryman ( 2013) observed that at times religious traditions have stunted and distorted children's spirituality through religious education. Hart ( 2003) and Heller ( 1986), amongst others have however sought to illuminate a child's spiritual and religious explorations, respectively. The goal of this paper is therefore to provide a research tool which permits the illumination of such childhood experiences.

## A child-centred approach

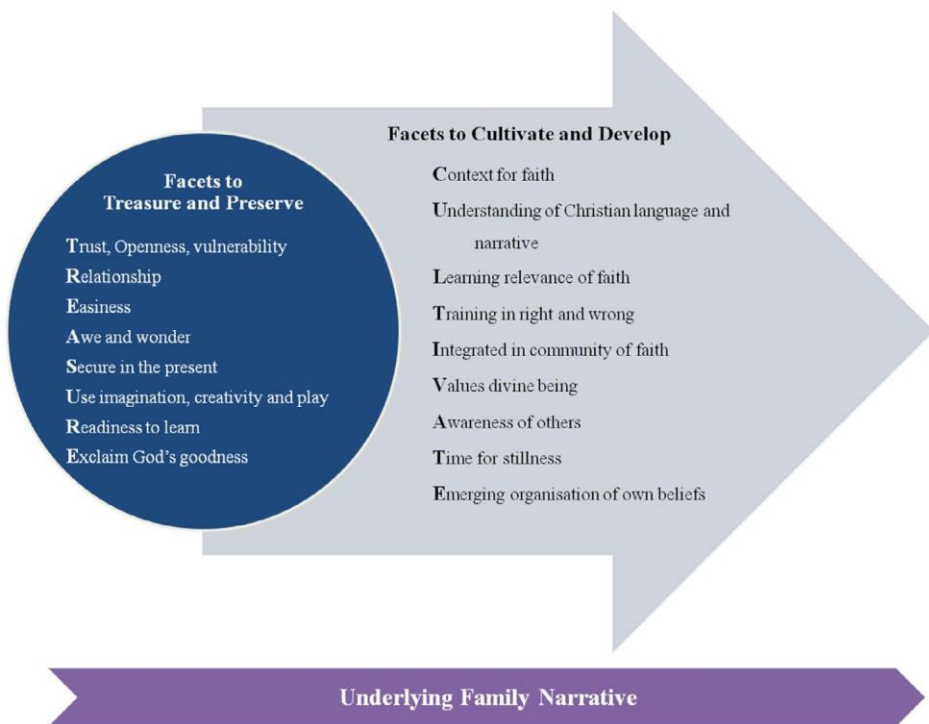
Robinson ( 1977) observed that when an adult viewpoint is the basis of a theory, this results in a child being unable to reach the required standards. It would be erroneous to promote a description of faith that is unattainable for a child. Stonehouse ( 1998) asserted that when the focus of religious education is cognitive understanding of God, the young child's experience of God is overlooked. Yet Nye ( 2009) argued that God and children have ways of being together due to how they were created. This unites with the historic Christ stating that there are characteristics of children which enable them to enter the kingdom of heaven:

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, 'Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: 'Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me'. (Matthew 18:1–5)

This passage indicates that an individual's cognitive understanding is not of primary concern, but that there is something of value within the faith of a young child that is less present in an adult. Rather than the traditional view of faith being an upward progression, in conjunction with an individual's growing intellectual capacities, the *treasure and cultivate* model seeks to capture an essence of the facets of childlikeness that are referred to in the Gospel writings. It may appear that preserving childlike traits is a 'backward' attitude since often the focus is to encourage a child's growth and forward movement. Despite this being counter-cultural, it appears to be what is promoted in Biblical writing; to retain some of the qualities of childlikeness.

## The *treasure and cultivate* model

This model (Figure 1) therefore promotes the simultaneous intentional preservation of innate and natural aspects of childhood faith, alongside cultivation of other faith characteristics. The circle in the diagram expresses that the preservation of these facets should occur at the same time as developing the factors listed within the arrow. The acronyms 'TREASURE' and 'CULTIVATE' were identified from the research findings in the initial pilot project, alongside consideration of literature concerning childhood faith. This preliminary research indicated the notions of preservation and conservation of existing and innate qualities, coinciding with factors that required developing, training and coaching from those seeking to nurture a child's faith. Once these two umbrella themes and their sub-facets became prevalent, all of the concepts were laid out and then possible alternative wordings considered. By re-wording, re-phrasing and grouping some of the concepts that had arisen from preliminary



**Figure 1.** The *treasure and cultivate* model.

research, it became apparent that the ideas could all be meaningfully contained into the two acronyms 'TREASURE' and 'CULTIVATE' which added significance to the diagram (Figure 1).

The balanced approach of observing facets to treasure alongside those to cultivate, pre-sents both parts of the diagram as equally valid and equally important in order that a child's faith may be deemed to be both healthy and resourceful to them. The underlying connota-tion is therefore that an unbalanced approach, namely one that only sought to preserve childlike traits, or conversely one that sought to train and develop a child, would result in an unhealthy faith that is not a resource to aid them in living. The diagram also conveys that the family narrative exists throughout the process of childhood faith journeying; the impact of which was highlighted by Westerhoff ( 1976). Initially this model was designed to explore the impact of family narrative on a child's faith, but in future other potentially influential factors could be included in the diagram. These factors will change in form and substance, and also the degree of influence over time.

Nye's ( 1996) description of spirituality, as recognising one's inner life in relation to physical reality, is helpful in explaining the role of the *treasure and cultivate* model. Namely that this model seeks to make use of observations of physical behaviours, attitudes, comments and practices in order to contribute to an understanding of a child's inner life. It is essential that an exploration of childhood faith begins both from a child's mindset, but also that the inner life is a starting point, rather than imposing physical formal religious restrictions or blinkers onto the form that the child's faith should take. The ultimate aim of the researcher would be to access and 'read' the lifscript of an individual, particularly during early childhood. As this

**Table 1.** Facets of childhood faith to treasure and preserve.

Trust, openness, vulnerability (with both God and others with whom child has contact)	4:Child trusts easily, is open to God and others and is comfortable being vulnerable 1: Child has difficulties trusting, being open and vulnerable
Relationship/attachment with divine being	4:Secure attachment with God. Constant and comfortable communication with divine 1:No attachment or personal communication with God. Child may observe but no personal participation
Ease of child in talking and engaging in matters of faith	4:Child talks and engages in faith matters comfortably in any context and setting 1: Child never mentions or responds to God or faith matters
Awe and wonder expressions	4: Child demonstrates awe and wonder frequently and spontaneously 1: Child does not respond with awe and wonder
Security in the present (content and happy in the present, contrasted with worries about past or future experiences)	4:Child is always content and happy in the present moment, rarely demonstrating worry about past or future experiences 1: Child worries frequently about the future and/or is troubled by experiences in the past. Never content or happy in the present
Use of imagination, creativity and play in everyday life	4:Child engages imagination and creativity effortlessly and seamlessly as integral to everyday life 1: Child is closed to using imagination and creativity or to playing
Readiness to learn during new or existing activities or experiences	4: Child keen to learn at every opportunity 1: Child unwilling to learn or try new activities or experiences
Exclamation of God's goodness (describes the degree to which child expresses praise of God)	4: Child freely instigates praise of God in everyday life 1: Child does not visibly praise God when encounters experience

(NB: Only 1 and 4 for each facet are displayed here due to space constraints.)

is not possible, one must settle for exploring aspects of a child's behaviour and character that may identify aspects of their faith. For this reason, listening to children must be the starting point for creating empirical accounts of childhood spirituality (Hay and Nye 1998). Consequently, the *treasure and cultivate* model is based on play-based interviews, providing the researcher with opportunities to listen to the child. The content of these interviews was the starting point of the theory, rather than imposing a remote and theoretical understanding onto the child's faith. In formulating the observation grid, it was important that there was not a significant requirement for language ability or understanding. This was of particular importance in the Christian language and narrative facet, where the interviewer sought to closely observe reactions and body language in addition to verbal responses, in order to take note of the child's awareness of Christian narrative.

The *treasure and cultivate* model deliberately does not give labels to different categories in Tables 1 and 2, in an attempt to state that a spiritually competent child is one who 'achieves' the top box in each facet, for example. This would imply that faith is a finite skill to be attained. Rather it is ongoing. It could also detract from the child-focussed approach that this model desires to be. It is critical that each child is viewed as unique and so there cannot be any single formula for nurturing a child's faith. Watson (2012) argued that an authentic spiritual education requires a recognition and acceptance of each child's individualised spiritual identity and potential for reflexive transformation. Similarly, Gellert (2013) observed that not everyone has the same aptitude to sense and express spirituality, so there are different modes of spiritual experiences and expressions. In a comparable line of thinking, King (2013) alleged that in the same way that everyone is not proficient at singing or dancing, not everybody is spiritually equally gifted and educators must take care to listen to children's own stories and voices, in addition to their real and imagined make-believe worlds. This is the reason that 17 different aspects of faith are observed, so that adults may see which areas of faith require enhanced support and nurturing.

**Table 2.** Facets of childhood faith to cultivate and develop.

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Context and relevance for faith	1: Child does not see any connection between Christian faith and their life, even when explained 4: Child finds their faith relevant to their everyday living
Understanding of Christian language and narrative	1: Child has no knowledge of Bible stories or Christian language 4: Child very familiar with Christian language, Bible knowledge and personal faith encounters of themselves and others
Learning and understanding of spiritual experiences	1: No spiritual experiences verbalised or communicated by child 4: Spiritual experience appreciated, communicated and explained by child
Training in right and wrong	1: Child completely unaware of difference between right and wrong 4: Child knows right from wrong and the consequences of this
Integration in community of faith	1: Child disinterested in others in faith community and not integrated 4: Child admires and genuinely imitates models of faith and is fully integrated into and involved in faith community
Valuing of divine being	1: Child does not value God. Disrespectful and irreverent. Or God is unknown to child 4: Child is fully respectful; and reverent of divine being. Values God
Awareness of others	1: Child demonstrates no consideration of needs of others 4: Child shows significant and spontaneous awareness of needs of others and seeks to meet their needs
Time for stillness	1: Child never has times of stillness or quiet 4: Child instigates times of stillness themselves and is very comfortable with such times
Emerging organisation of own beliefs	1: Child regurgitates beliefs of others but does not seem to have personalised them 4: Child has developed a set of personalised beliefs and realised that others may hold different beliefs

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(NB Only 1 and 4 for each facet are displayed here due to space constraints.)

It is important to highlight that since a child's faith journey is considered to entail a constant series of ephemeral moments which reshape and redefine their faith (Cavalletti 1983), any model which seeks to observe and describe the child's faith can only claim to do so for that moment in time and place. Consequently, any observations of this model must be considered to be valid for that instant timeframe alone. Having said that, the interviews have also been designed to provide the child with an opportunity to reflect on past experiences and communicate a general awareness or sense of beliefs to the interviewer. This will therefore contribute to a fuller understanding of the child's faith, regardless of ephemeral moments. During the interviews there were numerous occasions where the child was pondering a subject and whilst talking, they seemed to suddenly be enlightened and able to communicate it in a way they had previously not been able to. It is possible that these research interviews provide the child with an opportunity to stand outside of their ephemeral moments and everyday living and to reflect and appraise their beliefs, attitudes and spiritual experiences before returning to their daily life at the end of the interview.

## Method of data collection

The research consisted of 45 min play-interviews with the children in the home setting. The home setting was chosen due to the doctoral research question regarding the influence of the family context upon a child's faith. For reasons of consistency and reliability of the data collection, the same researcher visited each child. The parent was asked to be present in order to avoid lone working and to help the child feel comfortable and secure with the previously unknown researcher. However, the parent was asked to remain at a distance from the child and to avoid eye contact with the interviewee, so the parent usually sat behind the child. The parent was also requested not to intercept or suggest responses to the child. In families with more than one child, the siblings were interviewed together. This was necessary

due to time constraints and commitments of the families involved, although it did in many cases seem to provide siblings with more confidence to participate as they quickly became comfortable in the research setting. It did result in the researcher constantly needing to ensure that all siblings were able to give their opinion throughout the play-interview, and preferably without too much influence from each other. To enable the researcher to focus fully upon following the lead of the child without the distraction of note taking, the inter-views were all recorded by a camcorder placed unobtrusively in the corner of the room. The interviews were later transcribed and coded so that the *treasure and cultivate* grid could be completed for each child. This involved placing a mark in the box that most accurately described the child's present approach or attitude, according to the researcher's judgement.

Within the 'treasure' facets, the highest number (4) indicated that the facet was most preserved, with decreasing numbers demonstrating decreasing levels of this aspect being observed. Amongst the 'cultivate' aspects, the lowest number (1) indicated limited levels present and increasing as the number does. The descriptions in the boxes also enabled the antithesis in many cases to be recorded, for example 'always happy and secure in the present', and 'worries frequently and troubled by past experiences', were two extremes. Similarly, the antithesis of 'child is fully integrated in community of faith, admiring and imitating models of faith', is 'child disinterested in others within community of faith'.

In order that the child quickly felt comfortable talking with the researcher, the interviewer introduced herself and explained the format of the play-interview. Both child and researcher sat on the floor throughout. The nature of the interview activities also sought to put the child at ease. A range of activities were provided for the child to take part in, and these were observed using the guidelines listed in the second column (see Table 3). The child was permitted to dictate the order, length and pace of these individual activities, although the interviewer did take a lead in this where required in order to ensure that a range of factors could be observed. Donaldson (1978) highlighted the importance of experimental context and tasks being consistent with children's everyday experience, resulting in ease of understanding and participation in order to enable the child to reveal their true competencies. For this reason interview activities included hand puppets, ipad, building blocks and drawing. Since not all of the faith facets could be detected in the interview setting, parents were also asked to complete a questionnaire describing their child by indicating on a likert scale (five options ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree) how closely 21 statements described their child. This information contributed to the researcher's understanding of the child, and the nature of their faith and spirituality, aiding them in analysis. It also served as a back-up appraisal of some of the facets observed by the researcher during the interview. In order to gain insight into the reliability of this research tool, parents of 18 of the children were asked to complete the *treasure and cultivate* matrix about their child. The deviation from the interviewer's judgments was 9% for the 'cultivate' elements and 10% for the 'treasure' elements. Clearly it would have been preferable to have zero deviation, although this is unrealistic given that the chart is completed subjectively by both parent and researcher. It was apparent to the researcher through informal discussion with the parent after the interview, that in some of the cases the parents completed the grid in a more positive way than was reality, and possibly their 'wishful thinking'. If these three families are removed from the statistics, then the deviation falls to 6% for the 'treasure' facets and 9% for the 'cultivate' aspects.



## Data analysis

After the interviews had taken place, they were transcribed and coded. This transcription and coding enabled the researcher to return to the data once the *treasure and cultivate* matrix had been formulated, and to complete the grid for each child. This occurred in the form of a judgement being made by the researcher as to the most appropriate descriptive box for each of the 17 facets, according to the interview observations and the information on the parental questionnaire. This resulted in each child having a numerical value for the treasure facets, and another figure for the cultivate aspects. Analysis could then occur on the separate notions of 'treasure' and 'cultivate' or utilising the total figure, which was simply an addition of the two. The range of possible numerical values for the 'treasure' facets was 8–32. The range of possible 'cultivate' values was 9–36. Therefore, the possible totals ranged from 17 to 68.

The data could be utilised in two ways. (Two examples of this are shown in Tables 4 and 5.) Either the researcher could read across the 'treasure and cultivate' table and view an in-depth description of the child's faith at the present time, accessing detail about the child's integration into the community of faith or their demonstration of awe and wonder, for example. Alternatively, the numerical values could be utilised to enable either basic comparison across cases or observation of how an individual child's faith changes over time. In addition statistical investigations may be carried out using the numerical values, such as how closely items correlate with the child faith descriptors.

For the purposes of this paper, once these figures were available for each child, they were entered into a spreadsheet on the SPSS statistical package. This programme was used to analyse the data, carrying out bi-variate Pearson correlation calculations to generate the correlation coefficients of the different items included, namely age, gender and denomination attended. For an associated doctoral thesis, the child's faith nurturing environment was coded and examined statistically against their *treasure and cultivate* figure, to explore the extent to which family faith practices impacted a child's faith. It is proposed that this model could be used in future to research the influence a range of factors have on a child's faith, or the relationship between personality and faith. In addition, it could be possible to adjust the categories slightly in order that this model may be used to observe and document children's spirituality or other religious faiths. These will be explored further at a later date.

## Observations of the research project

Sixty-one children were interviewed as part of this sample, ranging from three to thirteen years old. Of these, 38 were girls and 23 were boys. 88% of the children were white British, with 12% being other ethnicities. Their parents had self-selected to take part in the research during research visits to churches across North West England. The participants regularly attend one of six different church denominations (34% Church of England, 27% Independent, 17% Baptist, 10% Pentecostal, 9% Evangelical and 3% Methodist).

## Investigating age

For analysis purposes, and to remove the effect of different numbers of participants in each age group, the children were sorted into one-year age bands. The mean value of each element for each age band is displayed in Figure 2. It depicts that whilst in places there are



**Table 3.** Interview activities.

Interview technique	Traits to be observed and documented
Introduction – look at information sheet and child's 'All about me' sheet (prepared by child in advance)	Ice breaker activity. Provides background information about the child
Using wooden building blocks (range of colours, shapes and sizes), ask child to produce a model of their family. Discuss their choices throughout. Towards end, ask them which brick could be God and where should he be placed	Provides insights into family network Establishes the place of God within the family, according to the child. Also some indication of the child's 'pet God' (Rizzuto, 1979). Who is God? What is he like? Have you ever felt God close to you? How is God involved in their own life story
Scenarios: Use hand puppet (or ipad). Who should the puppet (or ipad child) ask for help if sad, worried, poorly etc Provide drawing materials or ipad and ask the child to draw God	Examines child's relationship with God and parents Reveals insights of child's pet God (Rizzuto, 1979). Children's drawings are believed to reveal the child's inner mind (Greig and Taylor, 1999)
Show the child a range of pictures on ipad. Ask them to choose which one is most important to them. (Older children could rank remaining items)	Provides insights into child's values and their perception of values of others, and how they may differ
Ask them what their parents, teachers, grandparents would choose as most important	
OR – give them a toy camera. If they were going to take photos of people or places that were very special to them, who or what would they be?	
OR If you had 3 wishes, what would you wish for?	
Talk about spiritual matters throughout other activities. OR show flash cards: 'miracle', 'healing', 'Bible', 'prayer' and ask child to explain terms. OR puppet asks for explanation. How do they know this?	Tests whether they are familiar or taboo subjects Ascertain whether they have faith discussions in the home, or where/who they perceive their influences are
Hand Puppet depicts right and wrong scenarios and asks child what they think. 'Naughty' puppet concludes by saying they are sad because God does not love them as they have been naughty. Ask child what they think...does God no longer love the puppet because they have been naughty?	Examines child's awareness of right and wrong Examines child's view of God and divine response to wrong doing
On ipad: sort pictures of places you feel safe and not safe (or happy and unhappy). Discuss why	Facilitates understanding of the child's personality, preferences and securities
Give toy figure to child and ask:	Reveals the child's view of prayer and what their personal prayer approach is. To understand the child's observations and experiences of others praying
If I saw you praying, what would you be doing? Have they ever seen anyone else pray? Do they pray the same or different?	Ascertain the child's church experiences and the impact they may have upon the child
If I was in church with you, what would I see you doing? What do you see when you arrive at church? Do adults and children do the same thing at church?	Again provides insights into the child's pet God
Alternatively – use ipad...ask child to tell another child on ipad how to pray or who is God?	
Show child a range of Bibles and discuss whether Bible present in child's house and extent to which it is used. Read a Bible story together (chosen by child). Discuss why they chose that story and why they like it. 'Wonder' questions at end (e.g. I wonder how...felt? I wonder why...)	What is child's response to this activity? What do they look like during reading of the story? What is their familiarity with Bible narrative? Ascertain the child's perception of Bible
Alternatively provide figures who the child could use to act out the story	Does the child see any relevance of the story to their life? Do they see any meaning in it? Do they exhibit 'wonder'?
Interactive prayer activity: Box of items (prayer book, candles, bubbles, pebbles, palm cross, post-it notes, glow sticks, pictures of nature and animals). Child chooses an item to aid them in praying	What does child look like during this prayer activity? What is their response to it? Ascertain their familiarity with prayer

slight upward progressions with age, these are interrupted and there is no significant increase or decrease with age. Indeed, the correlation co-efficient of age with 'treasure' is  $-.09$ , with a low significance ( $.49$ ). However, the co-efficient of age with 'cultivate' is  $.66$ ,  $p < .01$ , demonstrating strong significance. This leads to the correlation between age and the total 'treasure

**Table 4.** Descriptions of the faith facets of a seven-year-old girl.

	Cultivate facets		Treasure facets
Context and relevance for faith	Child open to adult explanation of relevance of God in their everyday life and yours. (2)	Trust, openness, vulnerability	Child trusts easily, is open to God and others and is comfortable being vulnerable. (4)
Understanding of Christian language and narrative	Significant knowledge of Bible stories and understanding of Christian language. (3)	Relationship	Secure attachment with God. Constant and comfortable communication and relating with God. (4)
Learning understanding of spiritual experiences	Spiritual experiences partially verbalised, albeit confused or misunderstood. (2)	Easiness	Child talks and engages in faith matters comfortably in any context and setting. (4)
Training in right and wrong	Child displays spontaneous knowledge of right and wrong. (3)	Awe and wonder	Child demonstrates awe and wonder frequently and spontaneously. (4)
Integration in community of faith	Child admires and imitates models of faith. Child feels considerably well integrated into faith community and takes part in the community. (3)	Security in the present	Child is always content and happy in the present moment, rarely demonstrates worry about past or future experiences. (4)
Valuing of divine being	Values God in most circumstances. Significant respect and reverence for divine. (3)	Use of imagination, creativity and play	Child engages imagination and creativity effortlessly and seamlessly as integral to everyday life. (4)
Awareness of others	Occasional consideration of and seeking to meet needs of others spontaneously. (3)	Readiness to learn	Child keen to learn at every opportunity. (4)
Time for stillness	Child is comfortable with short periods of stillness when instigated/accompanied by parent. (3)	Exclamation of God's goodness	Child open and interested when observes an adult praising God and seeks to be part of the act of praise. (2)
Emerging organisation of own beliefs	Child realises that not everyone agrees and is beginning to think about their own beliefs. (2)		

(In brackets: the numerical value observed for that facet.) Total 'treasure' value of 30. Total 'cultivate' value of 24. Total 'treasure and cultivate' value of 54, out of a possible 68.

and cultivate' values being .39,  $p < .01$ . This indicates that increasing age results in increasing 'cultivate' values, which in turn reflects in the total values also. However, since the 'treasure' elements do not display a correlation with age, this supports the idea that cognition is not required for these elements and also denotes the individuality of natural faith in childhood rather than universal stage-like development. In addition, this suggests that nurturing environments may have more impact upon the 'cultivate' characteristics than on the 'treasure' elements, if it is assumed that faith nurture occurs in conjunction with childhood growth and development.

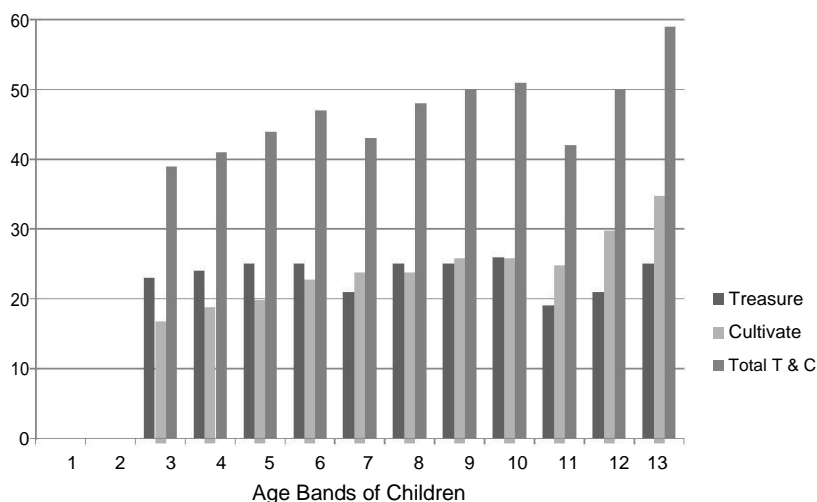
### ***Investigating gender***

To remove a gender bias due to unequal numbers of boys and girls being interviewed, the mean value of each category was calculated and is displayed in Figure 3. It is clear that in all categories, girls have marginally higher values than boys. It is interesting to note that in both girls and boys, the treasure values are higher than the cultivate figures. Statistical analysis shows a strongly significant relationship, with a correlation coefficient for gender and the treasure characteristics of .409,  $p < 0.01$ . This confirms that there is a relationship between

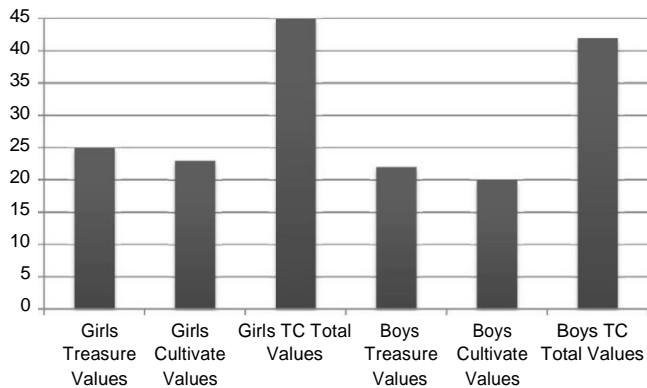
**Table 5.** Descriptions of the faith facets of a ten year old girl.

	Cultivate facets		Treasure facets
Context and relevance for faith	Child open to adult explanation of relevance of God in their everyday life and yours. (2)	Trust, openness, vulnerability	Child is occasionally trusting of and open to God and others. Occasionally allows oneself to be vulnerable. (2)
Learning understanding of spiritual experiences	Some knowledge of Bible stories and understanding of Christian language. (2)	Relationship	Uncertain attachment with God. Scarce and awkward communication with him. Distant relationship with God. (2)
Learning understanding of spiritual experiences	No spiritual experiences verbalised or communicated. (1)	Easiness	Child talks uncomfortably about faith, and only in selected settings eg at church only. (2)
Training in right and wrong	Child displays spontaneous knowledge of right and wrong. (3)	Awe and wonder	Child demonstrates awe and wonder when prompted. (2)
Integration in community of faith	Child is interested and warms to others who are models of faith. Slightly integrated into faith community, although observes. (2)	Security in the present	Child is occasionally aware/troubled by past or future experiences. Often happy and content in the present moment. (3)
Valuing of divine being	Values God in most circumstances. Significant respect and reverence for divine. (3)	Use of imagination, creativity and play	Child is awkward/uneasy in utilising their imagination, creativity or playing. (2)
Awareness of others	Significant and spontaneous awareness of needs of others and seeks to meet their needs. (4)	Readiness to learn	Child willing to try new experiences or activities when prompted. (2)
Time for stillness	Child occasionally has times of stillness but is awkward and uncomfortable in them. (2)	Exclamation of God's goodness	Child open and interested when observes an adult praising God and seeks to be part of the act of praise. (2)
Emerging organisation of own beliefs	Child regurgitates beliefs of others but does not seem to have personalised them. (1)		

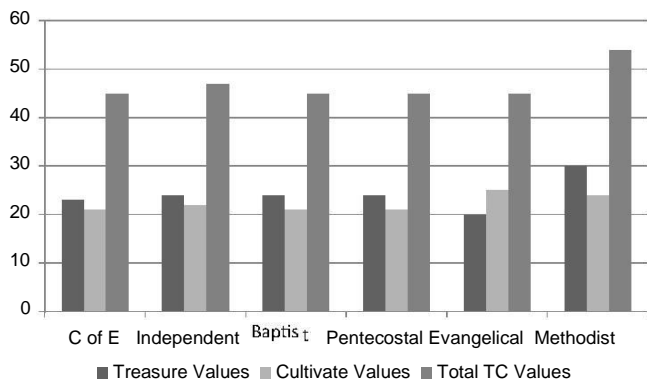
(In brackets: the numerical value observed for that facet.) Total 'treasure' value of 17. Total 'cultivate' value of 20. Total 'treasure and cultivate' value of 37, out of a possible 68.



**Figure 2.** Treasure, cultivate and total values in ascending age order.



**Figure 3.** Treasure and cultivate numerical values for children sorted by gender.



**Figure 4.** Treasure and cultivate values by denomination.

gender and the treasure category, whereby girls demonstrate higher numerical values of these traits. However, there was no statistical significance demonstrated in the relationship between the cultivate facets and gender.

### ***Investigating denomination***

Again, the mean was calculated for each group in order to remove any bias. Even though the mean was calculated for each denomination, it is important to emphasise that there were small numbers included within the sample from some of the denominations. Therefore, this is just providing case study findings that cannot be generalised. Nevertheless, Figure 4 exhibits no significant variations or patterns in the data when sorted by denomination. One observation is that for all of the denominations, except Evangelical, the treasure values were higher than cultivate. The children who regularly attended Evangelical church demonstrated significantly higher values for 'cultivate' facets than the 'treasure' ones. This may be due to the strong 'Bible teaching' approach adopted by that church, according to the parents and church leadership. Nevertheless, the statistical analysis concluded that there was no significant relationship between denomination and the child's faith since the co-efficient was .18,  $p = 0.16$ .

## Conclusion

The *treasure and cultivate* model has been presented as a tool for observing and researching religious faith in childhood, in a manner which promotes faith as healthy and resourceful to the child. It is hoped that this tool may be developed in order to facilitate the nurture of children's faith in an appropriate manner that maintains a balance between preserving natural spirituality and developing more formal aspects of religion. This small-scale study of 61 children raised in actively Christian families has shown the tool's validity and usefulness in correlating faith with age and gender and denomination. Further testing of this tool will enable its reliability to be monitored. However, parents who completed the matrix for their child displayed judgements that were close to that of the researcher, supporting the reliability of the tool. In the future, it could be utilised to explore the influence of many other factors on a child's faith. Another avenue for investigation is to use this model to explore other faiths and spirituality more generally, in order to ascertain the impact of different approaches upon the whole child.

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## Notes on contributor

**Sarah Holmes** is an associate lecturer of Early Childhood department, Liverpool Hope University, Liverpool, UK. Her research interests include Christian faith in childhood, children's spirituality and impact of family upon the child.

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