

TOWARDS RESILIENCE: ENHANCING ACCESS TO SPIRITUALITY  
AMONG SELECTED CHILDREN IN NAGALAND, INDIA

BY

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A Dissertation

Submitted to

Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary  
In Partnership with Asia Graduate School of Theology  
Philippines

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Holistic Child Development

December 2023

ASIA-PACIFIC NAZARENE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE  
ASIA GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

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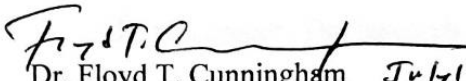
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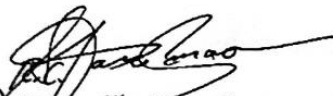
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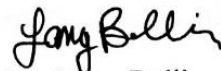
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## ABSTRACT

Because children live in a world filled with complexities, problems, and challenges of many kinds, they need spirituality for the sake of resilience when faced with day-to-day challenges as well as larger problems. Being raised in a Christian home with an acquaintance of spirituality does not automatically guarantee true accessibility. In light of these realities, this study sought to explore methods that allow access to spirituality towards resilience.

Rebecca Nye's six criteria foundational for children's spirituality, namely, *space*, *process*, *imagination*, *relationship*, *intimacy*, and *trust* provided the theoretical foundation in this study for exploring methods that would allow children access to spirituality towards resilience.

This qualitative case study employed non-probability sampling technique that included a sample selection based on selected criteria to choose eight children, their parents, and two Sunday school teachers. The data from the total of 26 participants was collected using in-depth interviews, non-verbal observations, and journal reflections of the researcher. The research used MAXQDA software to analyze the findings and identify themes.

Research results demonstrated that the six criteria—space, process, imagination, relationship, intimacy, and trust--provided the means for gaining valuable insight on methods that allow access to spirituality towards resilience. The six criteria are distinct yet interrelated aspects of the indicated methods. The six criteria can serve as distinct methods that can be applied separately, yet they are also intertwined and interrelated, with each aspect being equally essential in allowing access. The research results also

indicated that methods of access to spirituality require caution, a balanced approach, intentionality, a reflective and unhurried approach, freedom of space (emotional, auditory and physical), innovative interfaces, creative tools, interactive cultivation in the form of ongoing conversations, vicarious experiences, and taking children's perspectives into account. Children's access to spirituality was also found to be highly relational and dependent on the attitudes, behavior, and lifestyles of significant adults.

The study recommends that adults in the church, parents at home, or students in the seminary should recognize and take the spirituality of children seriously. Adults can ensure that children have the necessary spiritual resources through their own awareness and resources.

**CERTIFICATION OF PROOFREADING**

I, WOBENI LOTHA certify that this dissertation has undergone

proofreading and editing by Prof. Marie Osborne, an authorized proofreader  
of the

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Wobeni April 3, 2023  
Signature of Researcher Date

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No portion of the work referred to in the dissertation has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to

**Dr. Catherine Stonehouse**

who inspired me to ceaselessly pray and walk with children in their spiritual journey.

**My Mom and Dad**

who introduced me to Christ and nurtured my relationship with Christ to the best of their ability. I could not ask for more.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Soli Deo Gloria*

*It was solely God's grace that sustained me and helped me thrive though the process of writing my dissertation--maraming salamat po, Panginoon!*

Finally, I have arrived on the other side of the bridge and as I look back, my heart is filled with gratitude for the unrelenting love, support, and ceaseless prayers of so many people that carried me through this venture.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude...

to Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary and to Asia Graduate School of Theology, Philippines.

to Asbury Theological Seminary for granting me the opportunity to be a visiting scholar, allowing me to work on my exhaustive literature research using their rich library resources.

to my wonderful advisor, Dr. Beverly Johnson-Miller; I can never thank you enough for the guidance, unwavering support, love, prayers, patience, and encouragements, and for always being an email away whenever I needed you. You have been instrumental in shaping and refining my research work.

to the brilliant panel of Dr. Beverly Johnson, Dr. Nativity Petallar, Dr. Catherine Stonehouse, Dr. Floyd Cunningham, Dr. Esther Zimmerman, Dr. Romerlito Macalinao, and Dr. David Ackerman for all the valuable feedback and helpful suggestions, insightful comments, and ideas that significantly contributed to the quality of my research.

to my exceptional program Director, Dr. Nativity Petallar, whose unwavering encouragement, support, and guidance have been a constant source of motivation throughout this PhD journey. Thank you for also giving the opportunity to work in the PhD department. I am grateful for time and effort you took to guide me; I will forever cherish the experience. I am always inspired by the way you encourage students and bring out the best in them. It is no exaggeration to say that your life has been a true inspiration for me to excel academically and simultaneously be Christlike, and to continue to advocate for holistic development of children.

to the awesome PhD Program Directors Dr. Nativity, Dr. Catherine Stonehouse, Dr. Fletcher Tink, and Dr. Irene Yang, who were very kind and gave me the opportunity to work with the PhD dept as part of my Student Work Assistant Program throughout my PhD journey. I consider myself blessed to have had the opportunity to work with such prominent and intelligent academicians who love the Lord.

to my spiritual director, Rev. Susan Scott for consistently and faithfully mentoring me from the beginning of my PhD journey.

to the faculty of APNTS. Knowing that my professors were praying for me was a great source of encouragement for me.

to the dedicated library director Ma'am Noreen and staff member Ma'am Ruth for always being there to assist me whenever I needed help in the library. Your knowledge of the library resources and your willingness to go above and beyond in assisting me to find specific articles was truly invaluable.

to the Rev. Dr. Benry Lotha, senior pastor of Kohima Lotha Baptist Church, who granted me the permission for the research. The Christian Education director, Mrs. Zubeni Lotha, was immensely supportive of my research and tirelessly made an effort despite my meticulous research selection criteria, searching for the right participants and connecting me with them in the midst of her hectic ministry schedule. The Sunday school

teachers, the ten families, and the three Sunday school teachers generously shared their time and experiences to make this research possible.

to pastor Mr Nongothung kikon, his wife Jandeno Tungoe for assisting me with all the translations and my dear friend Miss Kanitoy Assumi for her willingness to evaluate my research questions during my pilot test.

to Dr Eileen Ruger, Dr. Ae-Sun, Jill Land, and Chita Thurr for giving me your valuable time, insights, efforts, and perspectives, and for providing me with helpful feedback on my research.

to my proofreader Professor Marie Osborne, for your patience, sharp eye for detail, and competence in increasing the clarity, structure, and coherence of my work.

to my family, Mom, Dad, Baby, Kaka, Mymo and Ango for your love, prayers, unwavering support, and encouragement, taking care of all my financial needs during my course of study, and for your belief in me that kept me motivated to pursue and complete this academic journey.

to my Discipleship group, D12, Daughters of the King Almighty, the United Geneva Ladies, Anaw, Chacha, Cindy, Esther, Jojo, Kim, Lili, Merry, Park, and Thazin-- thank you for your prayers and support all through this journey.

to the wonderful families, classmates, dormmates, friends, and the awesome children on campus whose lives have been a great blessing to me in this journey: the Batings, the Jins, the Kims, the Modines, the M. Petallars, the J. Petallars, the Thurrs, Asar, Athang, Biak, Cing, Esther, James, Lili, Martha, Merry, Mu Do, Naomi, Nway, Peram, Priscilla, Shalom, Thazin, and Thawng.

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# **CHAPTER I**

## **THE PROBLEM AND ITS BACKGROUND**

### **Introduction**

A wonderful Christian home is where my siblings and I were raised. I am a third generation Christian. My paternal grandfather was a deacon in the church. My dad is a Sunday school teacher, and a deacon too. My mother and father, in addition to giving their best to nurture our physical, emotional, social and academic life, made sure that our spiritual life was also nurtured. Under a prayerful mother and a dedicated father there was hardly a day my family would go to sleep without praying together. As part of our night-time devotions, my siblings and I were to recite by heart a Scripture verse every single night. I am immensely thankful to my parents today because they gave their best to instill the importance of God in our lives and to rely on God during difficult times.

In one very clear childhood memory, I was thinking, if God is in heaven up there in the sky and hell is deep down below the soil, what about outside of the earth? I wondered if God was only God of the earth for the people because, as a young child, the earth was already too big for me to comprehend. In our family, we did not talk about those, “I wonder” kind of things; not because it was forbidden, but it was just like that. So, naturally, I was not inclined to ask my parents these kinds of questions. When I asked my peers they told me “If you think too much about God, you will go insane, lunatic.” That terrified me. I did not want to go insane. That encounter forced me to accept what I was told about God and not to raise any questions whatsoever. But I also remember, as

the days went by, I found myself gripped with fear due to frequent talk by the people that surrounded me that the world would be destroyed by fire. The reasoning behind the fear-driven belief was that if God already destroyed the world with water during the time of Noah, the world that we knew would come to an end by the year 2000. I did not want to enter the year 2000 because, although I knew who God was, I could not reconcile my concept of God with my fears. My faith was like learning algebra in school but not knowing where to use algebra in my life. It was a stressful and anxious time despite being a Christian and growing up in a Christian faith community. Thankfully, I did not go insane and today as an independent adult, I am still learning to trust in God. Those experiences as a child make me wonder about what difficult questions and challenges children may have today, especially children in Christian homes. Growing up in a Christian family or Christian environment does not exempt children from challenges that they must wrestle with as they grow up (Kock 2020, 225). Challenges or difficulties are a part of life that cannot be avoided. My childhood struggle to connect my faith with my fears leaves me with a compelling question: how can children who grow up in Christian homes have access to the spirituality needed for resilience in the midst of challenges and difficulties? Can children access spirituality needed for resilience, or is spirituality just another academic subject that has nothing reality-relatable that prepares them for difficult or challenging situations?

### **Background of the Problem**

Spirituality from a Christian perspective has over the years been studied extensively by experts. Spirituality is innate and present within the child from the moment of conception (Copsey 2005, 24). Children are complete human beings and

active makers of spiritual meaning—“deep thinkers” (Stonehouse 1998, 70). Every child can search for purpose in their lives (Reynaert 2014, 179). Children's spirituality is also understood as experiential, “the experience of a God who is believed to engage in time and space” (Champagne 2003, 46). The concept of spirituality in children is not a one-way relationship. It involves communication with God, and researchers have proven that children can communicate with God because they are spiritual beings.

The studies of children’s spirituality that have emerged explore beyond the fact that children can sense God and have a relationship with him. There are numerous studies on the spiritual resiliency of *at risk* children. However, there is a lack of research regarding access to spirituality among children who are not considered *at risk* and in the context of children who grow up in Christian families. A particular reason for focusing on the context of the Christian homes is because the reality today in the context of Nagaland is more like what John Westerhoff would call “institutional religion,” which may be taught but lacks the maturation of faith (Westerhoff 1976, 38). In this generation, the problem is not about a lack of spirituality awareness. Church and Sunday school are part of Naga spirituality, and every Naga child is considered a Christian by birth. The problem however is the inability of children to access spirituality towards resiliency.

Knowing about God and knowing God are two different realities and grasping the reality of God’s presence, which is integral to knowing God, makes a difference for children when they are facing crises in their lives (Stonehouse and May 2010, 33). Essential questions abound: Are the children able to discover that God is their ever-present help? Are they given enough spaces to express this? Is God a God who is found only in the Sunday school? How open are the children to talk about their spirituality? Can

they freely talk about their spirituality? Do they ever realize that spirituality can be a source of joy, comfort meaning, and interpretation of life's trials? And, are children rightly provided access to a spirituality towards resiliency?

While numerous formal studies as well as informal accounts provide substantial and indisputable evidence of life-nurturing spirituality (providing personal care, comfort, wisdom, and courage) in children, little attention has been paid to the ways in which children access that life-nurturing spirituality. How do children who grow up in Christian homes have access to their spirituality when needed in order to be spiritually resilient in response to life's challenges and difficulties? This essential question served as the driving focus of this study.

This study will be conducted in Nagaland, which is located in the northeastern part of India. Nagaland is a predominantly Christian state. Christianity came to Nagaland as early as the 1870s, and today 90% of the Nagas are Christians despite differences in tribes and denominations (Jamir 2017 (a), 387). Along with some other northeastern states in India, Nagaland experienced Christian revival in the 1950s and 1960s. Because of the expanded number of converts, Nagaland today is the largest Baptist state in the world.

### The Culture

One of the gaps of research in children's spirituality is the failure to consider the culture and the context of the children where they are studied (Csinos 2018, 54). The question "how" needs attention rather than "what" (Csinos 2018, 60). The process by which children make meaning should be considered instead of only focusing on the "what" (Dillen 2020, 240). My present study is not about understanding what spirituality

means to children, yet it remains crucial to explore the culture because it reflects how children make their theological or spiritual meanings either individually or when they are in a group (Csinos 2018, 60).

Religion is one of the strongest cultural considerations that needs to be appraised because Nagaland is predominantly a Christian state and the culture in itself is embedded in religion. For instance, on Sundays and all other official holidays such as Christmas, New Year's Day, and Good Friday, all shops remain closed, and Nagas go to church regardless of whether or not the church holy day involving special church services falls on a Sunday or any other weekday when there is a regular church service. There is a church in every nook and corner of Nagaland. According to the 2001-2011 census by the Government of India, Nagaland along with two other Northeastern states have been declared as states where Christianity has emerged as a major religion. Nagaland celebrated its 125 years of Christianity on April 15, 2022. The religious nature is so embedded in the Naga culture that the term Christianity and the term Naga cannot be separated: "the whole sociopolitical and economic life of the Nagas was founded on religious belief and practices" (Pongen 2016, 293). Nagas have strong allegiance to being Christians.

Despite Christianity playing an essential role throughout the state, the concept of children gaining access to spirituality towards resiliency is not a focus of study because spirituality is generally viewed as common knowledge that Nagas acquire (Rhakho 32, 2017; Longchar 69, 2016). The nominal Christian life led by Naga parents is usually replicated by their children (Rhakho 2017, 60). Strong evidence exists among Nagas of a disconnection of learnings and preaching on Sunday from the other days of the week

(Jamir 2017b). Children growing up amid these emerging problems may be negatively influenced because children learn by observation: “Children may or may not study their Bibles, but they study the lives of the adults they meet in the church” (Westerhoff 1976, 83). Christianity in Nagaland is more of a tradition that has been passed automatically to the next generation without having any personal relationship with God (Thonger 2019, 134). Despite the role of the church as a significant factor to strengthen spirituality, the church has become insignificant in the lives of the many youth who either go to church out of compulsion or leave the church altogether (Thonger 2019, 134). These realities provide a glimpse of the spiritual situation in which the Naga children are raised. For many, the detachment from genuine experiences with God results in shallow or superficial faith, and this prompts the question as to how children can rely on their spirituality when they face difficult situations in life. The situation of nominalized Christianity at this juncture in church history points to the danger of passing the same to children.

School and academics play a crucial role in the life of every Naga child’s household, and parents put forth a lot of effort for their children to have the best education (Thonger, 2019, 116). In the midst of the various life challenges children experience, “A high mental tension among the school students is emerging due to constant academic stress, poor academic performance, underachievers, fear of failure, family and school pressure for high-level academic performance” (Rume 2017). The need of counseling for emotional health and behavioral issues is on the rise among school-going children (Rume 2017).

Kelhouletuo Keyho, Nilesh Maruti Gujar, and Arif Ali (2019) studied the mental health status of adolescent children in Kohima District Nagaland. This study also mentioned that no systematic studies had previously been carried out on the mental status of children in Nagaland. This study was conducted with a total of 702 students studying in private and public schools in Kohima district from grades 8-12, and 97.2% of them were Christians. It is alarming that this study implies that “a significant proportion of school-going adolescents had mental health problems” (Keyho, Gujar and Ali 2019, 40), with 28.8% on the borderline and 17.2 in abnormal range. This study also pointed out that the main causes of the mental problems were “school-related problems or pressures; problems with peers, family issues, or parents; and their own thoughts, feelings, or behaviors, for instance feeling depressed or lonely, getting into trouble because of their behavior” (Keyho, Gujar and Ali 2019).

P. T. Kizhakumpurath (2012) also carried out a qualitative study of risk and protective factors for substance abuse among the young adults in Nagaland. This study reported that the young adults resorted to drugs because of low self-esteem and inferiority complexes during childhood and adolescence. Low capacity to cope with stress has also been one of the reasons to resort to substance abuse (Mere 2011). It was also reported that drug use was the response to loneliness and anxiety as well as lack of love, care, and emotional support from parents.

The nominalized form of Christianity passed down to children, along with the stress-filled demands of education experienced by children, the rise of mental health problems, and risk taking behaviors among the adolescents and the youth signal concern and perhaps alarm regarding the spiritual well-being of the Naga children. This situation



raises the question of whether children can truly draw comfort from God or if knowing God is just an abstract notion instilled in them by parents. It is crucial to make an environment for children to be able to access spirituality during their adversities. Unless an intentional environment is created for the children to be able to access their spirituality for spiritual resiliency, spirituality will be just one of the subjects to be learned mechanically.

In light of the religious realities and daily life challenges faced by children in the Nagaland culture, this study identifies how children access spirituality towards spiritual resiliency. Despite the uniqueness in each culture, challenges or difficulties are universal and cannot be avoided by children nor adults. Navigating life's challenges usually requires inner strength in the form of courage, hope, security, wisdom, comfort, and peace, which are all qualities integral to Christian spirituality. That being the case, spirituality has the potential to be cultivated in the Christian home environment to help children deal with the unavoidable challenges and difficulties they face.

### The Context

Because the fluidity of the term spirituality today makes a precise definition difficult, spirituality can be best understood when studied in context. Annie Dillen (2020), working as faculty among students from 60 countries, offers three reasons why researchers tend to neglect studying the context: first, because of the urge to contextualize their findings; second, because the researcher and participants belong to the dominant class, race and ethnic part of the society and fail to recognize or give consideration to minority groups; and third, because of the concept of “intersectionality” which means that people are at the intersection of various axis not only in matters of gender but even

socio-economic status, religion, ethnicity and race (Dillen 2020, 241) . Thus, the various axis that make up the child's circumstances have not been taken into consideration.

Dillen states that in most cases of the study of the uniqueness of children's spirituality and giving them a voice and a representation of that uniqueness, only one axis is considered, that is, the age of the child. However the author emphasizes that other axes of the child also need to be considered:

One person is at the same moment also positioned on the axis of socio-economic status (with less or more financial means), on the axis of religion (related to belonging to a majority or to a minority), or the axis of ethnicity or race (related to all kinds of privileges or experiences of powerlessness). The way power is attributed depends on their position on these constructed axes. On some they might experience many privileges, on others not (Dillen 2020, 242).

Considering age as the axis to examine children's spirituality has been beneficial, but the time has come to expand by including multiple other axes in the makeup of children for the study of spirituality. In an effort to demonstrate the effects of context in a child's spirituality, Dillen compared the responses from her interviews with the children in the Philippines with Rebecca Nye's interview responses from children in England. Dillen interviewed children living in the garbage area, Payatas, Philippines, whose fathers were victims of president Duterte's "War on Drugs." These children experience trauma, poverty, and stigma. Their responses towards the notion of their spirituality is colored by their context of concerns related to survival, safety, food, and shelter. In contrast, Rebecca Nye interviewed middle class school children from diverse religious backgrounds living in England whose idea of spirituality was discovered to be relational consciousness; the child's relationship with themselves, others, nature and transcendence. The comparison of these two studies demonstrates the importance of clearly defining the

context of study. Due to the crucial significance of context for understanding children's spirituality, this study aims to clearly spell out the role of context in the discussion that follows.

First, this study will focus specifically on the context of children who are *doing well*, i.e., without major trauma. Because this study specifically focuses on children who have not experienced life-threatening or other major challenging circumstances, the goals of the study cannot be met if children with major trauma are included. The context of the participants will be meticulously scanned because the entire environment that surrounds the child will deeply impact the child. While resiliency for the child on the street facing starvation might mean looking to God for survival needs, provision and protection (Wartenweiler 2017), resiliency for children from stable homes who are *doing well* may be able to articulate their thoughts on the nature of God's love. An example of this is the following narrative:

I sometimes think that God doesn't take care of or ignores me because I like orange juice and sometimes there is no orange juice left. But I sometimes think it's God's fault because there is none left, but it's my fault because I drank all of the orange juice. So I know that God will help Mom to get the money to buy more, so I can stay healthy. And so I stay healthy and this is how God watches over me (Reimer and Furrow 2001, 16).

Second, the Sunday school context and children who attend Sunday School have been selected for this study. The context of Sunday school suggests that children are acquainted with the idea of God and the researcher believes that being acquainted with God in the context of a religious community is in itself a major available resiliency resource to be considered in the study. An examination of spirituality for the sake of resiliency in context will allow for the determined resiliency resources to be tailored in

alignment with the context (Kaye-Kauderer et al. 2021). A Nagaland researcher, using interviews conducted with youth as well as professional counselors and other church leaders, determined that, since Christians make up the majority population in the Nagaland states, religion has the potential to be a significant protective factor that should be harnessed for the purpose of resiliency (Kizhakumpurath 2012).

Third, in the context of Nagaland, the meaning of the term *spirituality* varies. The spiritual life from one perspective could also have a different meaning from a different perspective. Before the invasion of the British in the Land of the Nagas, animism was practiced and nature was revered as the source of the divine. Going back to the roots of being a Naga, cultural ancestral stories, myths and folklore give a glimpse of a life that was engulfed with spirits, both evil spirits and benevolent spirits (Kire 2016). The spiritual world in the context of Nagaland would literally translate to a supernatural understanding of human souls residing in animals, or calling back souls from the forest when the people are sick because of the belief that the sickness resulted from the missing soul (Hutton 1920). The arrival of Christianity in Nagaland brought an end to the Naga embrace of animism, however, the concepts of spirits and the supernatural today are still talked about, and testimonials exist of harm unfolding upon persons who do not give reverence to particular gods (Longkumer 2018). Some understand spirituality to involve encountering multiple spirits. For them, the context of the usage of the term ‘spirituality’ is related to studying spirits or being able to talk to spirits. This could present a challenge for defining the term spirituality in Nagaland. Spirituality in some societies is often understood as the ability to talk to the spirits (Haugen 2018, 308). Even this study of Christian spirituality would have some acceptance in the broader Nagaland context

because of the history and the present understanding of spirits in the culture. However, this study does not in any way relate to a spirituality that is defined by animistic spirits. This study looks at spirituality specifically from the standpoint of a relationship between the child and God, the trinitarian God. The understanding of spirituality in this study is in the context of a particular religion, Christianity, and involves the child's acquaintance with God through the parents, the church, and the Sunday school. The understanding of spirituality under investigation is in no way a reference to the extraordinary or mystical experience which could be dark, scary, and mystifying for a child (Hyde and Wooley 2018, 62-64).

### **Statement of the Problem**

This study explores the question: What methods enable access to spirituality towards resilience among selected children in Nagaland?

### **Objectives of the Study**

How do the following criteria allow accessibility to spirituality among the selected 9-12-year-olds for spiritual resiliency?

#### **Sub-objectives**

1. To find out ways *space* allows selected children in Nagaland to access spirituality towards spiritual resiliency;
2. To establish knowledge of how the *process* allows accessibility to spirituality towards spiritual resiliency among the selected children in Nagaland;
3. To explore how *imagination* allows accessibility to spirituality towards spiritual resiliency among the selected children in Nagaland;

4. To identify how the role of *relationships* makes spirituality accessible towards spiritual resiliency among the selected children in Nagaland;
5. To analyze how *intimacy* allows accessibility to spirituality towards spiritual resiliency among the selected children in Nagaland; and
6. To gain knowledge as to how *trust* allows accessibility to spirituality towards spiritual resiliency among the selected children in Nagaland.

### **Research Questions**

1. In what ways does *space* allow access to spirituality towards spiritual resiliency among the selected children in Nagaland?
2. In what ways does *process* allow access to spirituality for spiritual resiliency among the selected children in Nagaland?
3. In what ways does *imagination* allow accessibility to spirituality for spiritual resiliency among the selected children in Nagaland?
4. In what ways does *relationship* allow accessibility to spirituality for spiritual resiliency among the selected children in Nagaland?
5. In what ways does *intimacy* allow accessibility to spirituality for spiritual resiliency among the selected children in Nagaland?
6. In what ways does *trust* allow accessibility to spirituality for spiritual resiliency among the selected children in Nagaland?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The exploration of methods that bring understanding of how spirituality can be made accessible towards spiritual resilience among selected children will be guided by

Rebecca Nye's six principles that she identified as foundations to spirituality. This study will focus on Nye's six criteria among 8-10 year-old children as methods of access to spirituality towards spiritual resiliency. The six criteria are in the form of the acronym SPIRIT. It refers to Space, Process, Imagination, Relationship, Intimacy, and Trust.

Nye is a psychologist, yet her research on children's spirituality from a psychological perspective has contributed much to the understanding of spirituality from the Christian perspective. Nye argues that spirituality is inborn and innate, a quality which every person possesses as a child, and one of the aims of her dissertation study of spirituality from the psychological perspective was to refute the notion that children can be considered spiritual only if they manifest extraordinary spiritual proclivity for their age. Nye states that although most of the research on children's spirituality is conducted from a pluralistic perspective, most of those studies have documented and described "the rich natural capacity children have for spiritual processing" (Nye 2004, 90). In addition, Nye voices a concern that these empirical research findings have "often been neglected by Christian communities whose concern has been installing spiritual comprehension software to the awkward hardware with which children are equipped" (Nye 2004, 91). Nye's discovery of relational consciousness as the core of understanding children's spirituality and the rich capacity for spirituality that children possess, reveals the need to take seriously children's spiritual nurture

In this study, each of these criteria- Space, Process, Imagination, Relationship, Intimacy, and Trust - will be implemented at the operational level and these criteria will also be integral to the instrument in the form of an interview, drawing, observation, and

journaling to yield an understanding of how children's access to spirituality towards spiritual resilience among the selected children can be enhanced.

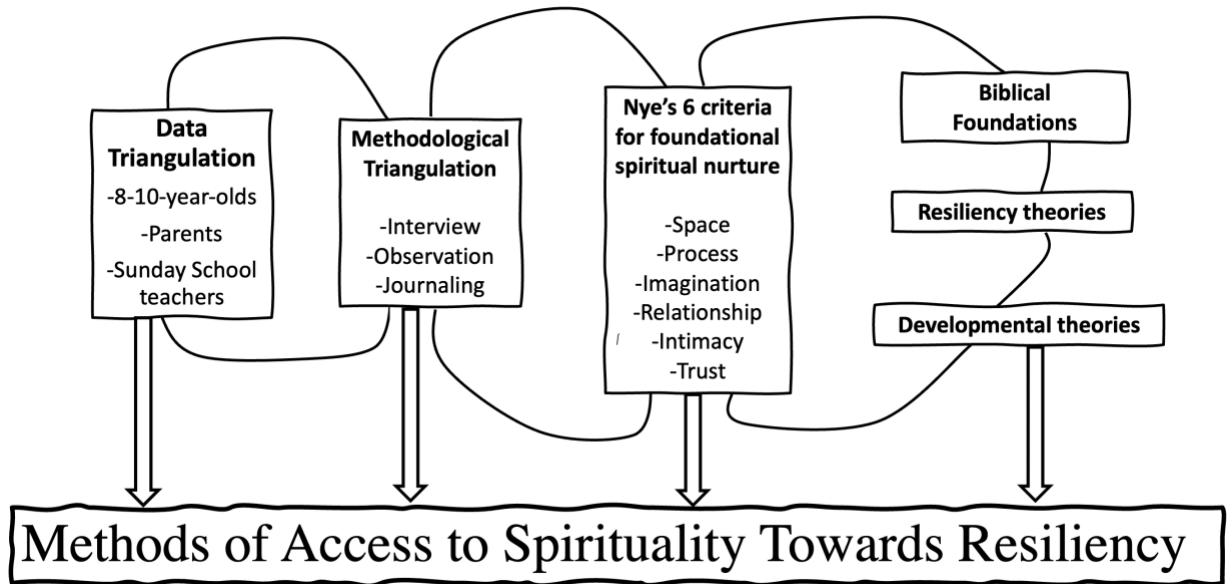
### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework demonstrates the manner in which the flow of research will integrate Rebecca Nye's six criteria of practices that are core in ensuring spiritual foundations as methods for access to spirituality towards spiritual resiliency. This study will employ two kinds of triangulation namely, data triangulation and methodological triangulation. Data triangulation will include data from the three populations namely the children, parents, and Sunday school teachers. The methodological triangulation will include in-depth interviews, observation, and journaling. The research will begin with interviews of the selected primary class students from a selected Baptist church in Nagaland who will serve as the main participants, followed by parents and the Sunday school teachers from the same church in Nagaland. These interviews will glean data by the exploration of spiritual resiliency through the lens of the six criteria, namely: *Space, Process, Imagination, Relationship, Intimacy, and Trust*.

In addition to the data derived from the respective populations, i.e., the children, parents, and Sunday school teachers, I will refer to my journal reflections for insight, and to the video recordings for non-verbal observations. The findings will also be backed by a study of developmental theories, resiliency theories and biblical foundations pertaining to the research. Based on the information derived from the data triangulation as well as the methodological triangulation, the adequacy and appropriateness of the methods employed and explored for allowing access to spirituality towards spiritual resiliency will be determined. The insights that emerge will inform the recommendations to the church, and



to any parents, teachers or other adults who care about nurturing the resiliency of children in the light of spirituality.



**Figure 1. Conceptual Framework**

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of the study can be stated in the following ways. To begin with, this research will allow the readers to ponder the attitudes and actions which they put forth when they are working with children, and to validate whether their attitudes and actions serve as a hindrance or a stepping stone towards children's access to personal spirituality.

Secondly, many studies and corresponding literature exist relating to resiliency from a spiritual perspective with regards to children. However, a major gap exists in the literature because the studies were focused on resiliency as a reactive concept, meaning that, in these studies, resiliency is understood as a healing instrument to harm done, and based on the perspective of respondents who are children at risk. This study aims to fill

the gap of understanding resiliency as a proactive concept and with children who are doing fairly well and have not been through major challenges.

Thirdly, although there are numerous studies done on children's spirituality, there is a considerable gap when it comes to recognizing the significance of the context. This research will contribute to the larger arena of literature coming from, and with attention to the role of, the context of the children in Nagaland.

Fourthly, this research will also benefit Sunday school ministries and other non-governmental organizations that are particularly involved with children, providing the possibility to either challenge or enhance their practices, or possibly give them fresh perspectives for working with children.

Next, the researcher hopes that this study will impact theologians who are preparing to serve as professional ministers in churches. The researcher believes that all ministry leaders equipping themselves in Bible colleges will certainly come across children: children of their own; children in their extended family; children as neighbors; and children in their ministry contexts, such as churches where they serve as pastors. This research will give ministry leaders an idea of what it means to have a relationship with God from a child's perspective, which differs greatly from an adult's perspective.

Finally, this study aims to increase openness among parents or any adult working with children so that they may be encouraged to be comfortable talking about spirituality with children and also be intentional in sharing their spiritual insights with them.

## Definition of Terms

**Access** refers to the process of the child being able to connect to God personally, in their own way, in addition to having an acquaintance of God.

**Challenges and difficulties** refers to the situations/tasks that bring discomfort to the child and which could be related to emotional, physical, spiritual, or social aspects as a result of a developmental stage crisis or the demands of context, and not necessarily trauma, abuse and grief (Stonehouse 1998, 47).

**Children doing well** refers to children who “have not been affected by extraordinary or even commonplace hardships; they have good enough parents, neighborhoods, faith communities, schools, friends, and health” (Allen 2021, 35).

**Journaling** refers to the journal of the researcher based on qualitative research journaling guide (Anninik 2017).

**Observation** refers to non-verbal observation that will be identified, analysed and reported using the conceptual frame work that is devised specifically for non-verbal observations (Onwuegbuzie and Byers 2014).

**Proactive or Proactive resilience** refers to the state of being equipped and prepared (Dillen 2012, 62).

**Reactive or reactive resilience** refers to the process of healing and recovery after harm has been done to a child (Dillen 2012, 62).

**Resiliency or spiritual resiliency** refers to the state of being proactive, focusing on how “child’s ways of being with God and God’s ways of being with children” (Nye 2009, 5) can be stimulated, fortified and enhanced in order to prepare children to face difficulties and challenges.

**Rich description** refers to the detailed descriptions of the findings with “adequate evidence presented in the form of quotes from the participant interviews” (Merriam 2009, 257; Merriam and Tisdell 2016, 257) data with an aim to allow readers “to feel as if they are there, seeing what the observer sees” (Merriam and Tisdell 2016, 151) through in-depth interview, non-verbal observation and journaling.

**Spirituality** refers to the child’s acquaintance with God and the process of “God’s ways of being with children and children’s ways of being with God” (Nye 2009, 5). Spirituality in this study is also viewed from a religious perspective, specifically the Christian understanding of God.

### **Scope and Delimitations of the Study**

The scope of this study involves exploring methods of access to spirituality towards resiliency among selected children in Nagaland. This study employs non-probability purposeful sampling. The study was conducted in a church among children aged 8-10 years children, their parents and their Sunday school teacher. Children aged 8-10 years were specifically selected because: at this age, they are beginning to understand that they will have to venture by themselves into a competitive world, be competent and be acceptable to society (Stonehouse 59, 2001); The child at this stage is also experiencing the state of being able to navigate independently and make right decisions; “his [the child] conscience must develop as the reasoning factor of the soul so that he will know what to do even when you [the parents] are not there” (Tripp 163, 2005); The child is also at a spiritual juncture of understanding God and can be detrimental if the perception of God does not fit in their criteria, “When the situation doesn’t change, according to their wishes, they many conclude that God hardly listens and may feel personally rejected by

God” (Logan and Miller 99, 2020). So, it is all the more crucial to pay attention to this experience and make an intentional effort to provide an access to spirituality to prepare children for challenges and difficulties ahead.

Although the focus of the study is to hear from children, their parents and Sunday school teachers will also be interviewed. The Sunday school teachers and the parent population are involved in the study because this allows a range of perspective which can enlighten, increase understanding, and corroborate the opinions of the children.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The responses from children are limited to the perspective of the selected 8-10 year old children who are doing well and so the findings might not be generalizable to the population of children at risk. This research will, however, be an in-depth study with ample details that will allow the reader to be the sole judge for deciding what from this research is pertinent to, and could be implemented in, their contexts.

Although the general understandings around the term spirituality can include supernatural or mystical things related to spirits or paranormal activities which can be dark and scary, in this study the concept of spirituality does not include any of those meanings. Clearly defining the boundary with the concept of spirituality is ensured because of the following reasons: Firstly, this study is not about the children’s understanding or perception of the term spirituality. Instead, spirituality in this study is clearly defined as the child’s relationship with God. Secondly, the research questions are tailored in a way that basically explores how to allow a child to access their relationship with God specifically from a Christian perspective.

The researcher understands her own limitation in finding the right sample selection within the case because, although she is a member of the church, she does not work with the children in the church. However, to minimize this limitation, the researcher approached the Christian Education Director of the church for the recommendation of the children, the parents, and the Sunday school teachers to be interviewed.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND STUDIES**

#### **Historical Background**

It would be unrealistic to determine that only children in crisis have exclusive need for spiritual resiliency. Extensive research makes clear the efficacious relationship between spirituality and resilience (Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health, 2018), and the resulting significance of spiritual resilience for children in crisis (Pandya 2018). It may not be common, however, to understand that even those children attending Sunday school and who are brought up in Christian homes need access to spiritual resiliency. Children who attend Sunday school and learn about the Bible are not automatically spiritually resilient. The problem arises when they are not able to access spirituality in times of challenge or difficulty. Stress is a normal part of daily lives and children, despite having friends or loving family members, are not exempted from challenging situations (Coles 1990, 121). Robert Coles's study with children from Christian homes gives a double-sided view that while, on one hand, it is not difficult for them to understand the concept of spirituality (Coles 1990, 212 ), on the other hand, this concept of spirituality is not always accessible in terms of spiritual resiliency (Coles 1990, 127). For example, "Children are rewarded and punished in the name of God, told what to do and when" (Coles 1990, 127). The apprehension of spirituality is perplexing for children to understand because it is used as a moral scale and as a way to get things done, like principles and rules to follow without the essence of transformation. Children need a

spiritual perspective to be able to journey through and process any given situation (Coles 1990, 21; Miller 2015, 36). In order to reinforce spiritual resiliency, it is crucial to make sure that spirituality is available, for if it is not accessible, then children cannot be expected to be spiritually resilient (Miller 2015, 97). Depending on the environment that children are in, spirituality needs to be personally accessible and not just an idea of acquaintance.

Adversities are a part of life and children are not spared from it, but they can be taught about how to face adversity. There is more to teaching than simply telling about God; presenting information about God as a protector without involvement from teachers and parents will do little in helping children develop strong enough understanding to enable them to become spiritually resilient (Stonehouse 1998, 54). Children's ideas of seeking God as a protector does not apply only for children in crisis or children at risk. Although a children may have lived in a Christian family with supportive parents, there will still be times that they have to face their own struggles, such as fear of the dark, or asking God to heal them when they are sick, or when looking to God in the face of school competition. (Coles 1990, 48-49). The children's relationship with God is on a very personal level and expressed in statements such as "I wanted Him to listen to me. I know it was selfish of me to throw all my silly troubles at Him, but I wanted to" (Coles 1990, 88). Children at a young age are usually learning to move away from their dependency on parents. For example, when there is a lack of physical presence of the parents and the child might stop feeling safe and feel anxiety and fear, the child's ability to understand that God is accessible is most important (Stonehouse and May 2010, 33).



Spirituality is a “vast untapped resource” (Miller 2015, 27). This implies that spirituality might be available, but it also needs to be made accessible so that it can be an instrument to help navigate difficult situations by providing a means or “a framework and vocabulary for understanding and describing difficult or stressful experiences” (Grossoehme et al. 2011, 424). Being able to have access to spirituality while navigating through difficult situations makes way for spiritual resiliency.

### **Justifying the Usage of the Term “Access”**

Why use the term ‘access’ and not ‘spiritual nurture’ or ‘spiritual practices’? The *Cambridge Online Dictionary* states the meaning of access as “to be able to get to or get inside a place.” It is a concept that is different from just knowing that a place exists. It is the concept of actually entering the place. For example, even though children are aware that a park exists in a nearby neighborhood, they do not have access unless their parents or others are willing to bring them, swipe their pass card at the gate, and only then actually provide them with *access*, meaning to actually go inside the park and play. The concept of access in this study refers to the process of the child being able to connect to God personally, in their own way, in their own space, in addition to having mental knowledge of God.

Without any doubt, spiritual resiliency may also be achieved through spiritual nurture or spiritual practices. However, in this study the term *access* is preferred instead of spiritual nurture or spiritual practice. Two reasons justify usage of the term spiritual access when talking about spiritual resiliency.

## Spiritual *Nurture* Does Not Necessarily Imply “Access” to Spirituality Towards Resiliency

Ro Thuam Liana conducted a study on how the church can influence spiritual development among 8-12 year old children in selected Nazarene congregations in Myanmar. As Liana elaborates on the context of the study, he mentions that the Sunday school uses a banking method (Liana 2016, 3). In Liana’s study, interviews with persons who are responsible for the children’s ministry revealed that the church nurtures children’s spirituality in the form of guiding, protecting, training and instructing children, but at the same time, the interpretations of these concepts of nurture fails to include the practice of involving the children’s ideas, opinions, desires, and questions (Liana 2006, 116). Liana also discovered that children feel pressured by their teachers to accept Jesus as their personal savior (Liana 2016, 103). This type of spiritual nurturing can be self-thwarting. Adams, Hyde and Wooley state:

Indeed, over-encouragement and enthusiasm to ‘know’ on the part of adults can be counter-productive; if children feel that they are constantly expected to ‘produce’ spiritual experiences and profound reflections upon life, the consequences could be negative, and children may fabricate answers which they think the adults want to hear, or else feel pressured and choose to disengage (Adams, Hyde and Wooley 2008, 40).

This nurturing style may not help children to be spiritually resilient because spiritual nurture for the sake of cultivating spiritual resiliency needs to allow for active engagement with the children which includes space for empathy, awareness, and active experience. This will result in a more internalized and owned learning by the children. Spiritual nurture that facilitates internalized and owned learning makes spirituality accessible to children.

## Spiritual *Practices* Does not Necessarily Imply ‘*Access*’ to Spirituality Towards Resiliency

It is commonly assumed that being raised in a Christian home with regular Bible reading, prayer, and church attendance practices provides strong evidence that the child is growing in a healthy spiritual environment and thus would be spiritually resilient.

Existing studies have confirmed the role of religious practices as an aid to spiritual resiliency (Kaye-Kauderer et al. 2021; Ovwigho and Cole 2010).

However, we cannot assume that spiritual practices will automatically allow children to be spiritually resilient. Caution is needed when measuring spiritual resiliency via church attendance or Bible reading because these practices may have been forced upon the children (Mahony, Pendleton and Ihkre 2006, 344) or passively adopted from their parent’s religious beliefs and practices (Carter, Flanagan and Caballero 2013, 156). Neither may reflect a true expression of spirituality because children can externally pretend for acceptance and approval (Csordas 2009; Rhakho 2017, 103).

Spiritual practices such as going to church could be a nominal habit easily passed down to following generations. Although many who attend church do not have a personally owned faith, it has not been a concern among these families for two reasons: First, many parents believe that regular church attendance and their children participating in the children’s ministry is a positive result of their parents’ modeled practices. Second, many regular church attenders who lack authentic spirituality do not see the need for their children to become spiritual champions (Barna 2003, 79). Churches like this, where the idea of spiritual nurture is so clearly defined by nominal spiritual practices, only succeed in passing down these same nominal Christian practices to children in the church and this may negatively affect the children in terms of access to and application of spiritual

practices to be resilient. To be spiritually resilient, children need to be able to comprehend that spiritual practices have the capacity to offer solace (Melia 2020, 118).

Resiliency cannot be determined solely by external expressions (Susan 1991). Active religious life, like going to church, does not necessarily mean that the child has access to spiritual resources which can enable resiliency. Spiritual practices could eventually make a way for developing a personal relationship with God. However, spiritual practices imposed on children could pave the way for the child to eventually reject their faith and trust in God. Moreover, the literature focused on how faith needs to be proactively utilized in order to face challenges has also been least studied (Mahony, Pendleton and Ihkre, 2006).

Challenges or difficulties are a part of life that cannot be avoided by children or adults. Navigating life's challenges usually requires inner strength in the form of courage, hope, security, wisdom, comfort, and peace—internal qualities integral to Christian spirituality. Spirituality cultivated in the Christian home environment may potentially help children deal with the unavoidable challenges and difficulties.

In conclusion, spiritual nurture or spiritual practices can lead the way towards spiritual resiliency. However, as elaborated above, spiritual nurture and spiritual practices do not necessarily give children access to spirituality. In line with this, in this research on the subject of spiritual resiliency, rather than using the terms spiritual nurture or spiritual practice, the usage of the term spiritual access is more appropriate.

### **Justifying the Children's Need for *Access To Spirituality Towards Resiliency***

*Access* to spirituality is the focus of this study. Based on the insights described above, access to spirituality needs to be studied in the Christian home environment. This

is because of the attitude or mindset of adults who lack openness about spirituality. Not all adults are willing or comfortable talking about spirituality, especially with difficult realities and unusual questions raised by children. Adults may not be ready to allow children to express their ideas, or be open to questions or discussions because they may lack confidence in their own faith knowledge (Okholm 2020, 106; Logan and Miller 2017, 19). But despite adults feeling uncomfortable or inadequate, children need adults to help them navigate their many questions (Stonehouse and May 2010, 27 and 33). Parents' sense of inadequacy and avoidance of difficult questions may potentially hinder a child's access to spiritual resiliency if talking about spirituality becomes embarrassing for children who fear being ridiculed or rejected (Hay and Nye 2006, 103) and therefore prefer to keep their spirituality private (Nye 2006, 125; Adams, Hyde and Wooley 2008, 34). Talking comfortably about spirituality may not come naturally to school children, therefore it is imperative that a space be initiated to journey with children in their discernment of God's presence as the antidote (Borgo 2020, 41-47) to the stigma; and, because spiritual sensitivity in children is not permanent, it could become "insignificant" (Stonehouse 1998, 133). Spirituality is similar to other dimensions of human development (Miller 2015, 27), in that each human faculty thrives when given attention (Yust 2004, 123). A child's spirituality could either flourish with support or weaken due to lack of nurture (Miller 2015, 51).

### **Resiliency and Spirituality**

Regardless of the context's changing and challenging situations, spirituality is viewed as a practical instrument for thriving among young people. Children go through difficult situations, and in the midst of their chaos and challenges, they need to be able to

access a secure base of spirituality in order to experience resilience in the midst of the difficult situations. Children need protection but it is unrealistic and impractical to think that they can be shielded from life's challenges (Stonehouse and May 2010). They need to be able to navigate the challenges in a healthy manner. This is where the role of spirituality comes in.

Studies have demonstrated spirituality as a powerful resource for children in stressful situations. Spiritual resiliency has been identified among children in the following contexts: overcoming social problems such as racism and poverty among African-American children (Edwards and Wilkerson 2018; Haight 1998); coping with academic pressures among 8-12 year old school children (Nauli and Mulyono 2019); coping with bereavement and the trauma of divorced parents (Pandya 2018); experiencing social and psychological support among children with special needs (Zhang 2013, 34); buffering against anxiety among youth at risk (Davis, Kerr and Kurpius 2003); protecting adolescents from choosing bad habits such as resorting to drugs (Miller 2015, 42); preventing violence in schools (Allen and Coy 2004); helping migrant or displaced children create meaning from their difficult situations (Nanji 2017); coping with chronic health issues such as asthma (Benore, Pargament and Pendelton 2009); and coping with major trauma and suffering (Bhagwan 2009, 64).

One common implication that can be drawn from all of the studies mentioned above is the fact that spirituality is of great value in the face of difficulties or crises that are externally visible and emotionally damaging. Because spirituality has proven to be consistently beneficial, researchers have recognized the need to nurture children's

spirituality (Minor and Grant 2014, 213). It can be concluded that spirituality is an instrument of resiliency to prevent and heal emotional damage.

### Defining Resilience

A Google search for the meaning of resilience yields two results: “the capacity to recover from difficulties;” and, “the ability of a substance or object to spring back into shape.” The study of resilience spans the disciplines of clinical psychology, psychiatry, neuroscience, medical anthropology (Southwick et al. 2014), environmental studies, (Paulraj and Andharia 149, 2015) and children’s spirituality (Dillen 2012). Resiliency based in spirituality can be understood from two perspectives, the “reactive” and “pro-active” (Dillen 2012).

### Reactive Resilience

Reactive resilience involves the ability to bounce back from a difficult situation (Dillen 2012). Similarly, studies of pertinent literature reveal that resiliency can be used either reactively or proactively (Dillen 2012; Jackson and Ferris 2015). Reactive resiliency is the ability to “recover from disturbance” (Jackson and Ferris 2015, 2). A reactive concept of resilience from a spiritual perspective implies that spirituality is a type of reactive agent, a recovery balm that enables children to thrive, even after trauma.

Reactive resilience can also be understood as a journey with a person who is in a difficult situation, and being able to empathize with that person, allowing the recovery from hardship that enables the individual to thrive in their own time (Werner and Brendtro 2012; Dillen 2012, 64). Resiliency theorists define resiliency as a “good outcome in spite of serious threat to adaptation or development” (Masten 2001, 226); a “good outcome for someone despite their experiences of situations that have been shown

to carry a major risk for the development of psychopathology” (Rutter 1999, 120); and, a “dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity” (Luthar et al. 2000, 543). Resiliency is measured in the form of a manifestation of “positive adaptation under extenuating circumstances” (Foy, Kent and Patricia 2011, 91), finding meaning in unexplainable situations (Kaye Kauderer et al. 2021), and being able to cope with difficult situations without emotionally withdrawing (Sifers, Warren and Jackson 2012).

Based on the definitions above stated above, it is clear that the term resiliency cannot be applied if there is no significant threat. If my study must comply with this definition, it will be invalid because my context of study is that of children who have not been through any major crisis like grief or trauma. However, the need to extend the concept of resilience to include children facing everyday challenges, not simply those facing major threats to their well-being, has been recognized as valid. In the words of Allen, “The study of resilience is an emerging field that once focused primarily on those who had overcome severe hardship but now recognizes that all children need to be resilient, since facing trials and setbacks is a universal experience” (Allen 2021, 10). This recognition by Allen validates my use of the term resiliency for children who have not been through major difficulties or trauma. This requires consideration of resiliency in a proactive manner.

### Proactive Resilience

Resilience understood in the context of being proactive involves taking charge to be prepared and equipped before adversity strikes, i.e., to “anticipate and plan” (Jackson and Ferris 2015, 2) in order to “avoid or reduce the effect of the disturbance” (Jackson



and Ferris 2015, 2). Proactive resiliency can look like responding to challenges by identifying the strengths or the source of strengths and channeling them in the face of challenges (Gartrell and Karen 2014), identifying caring adults to foster resilience (Kersey and Malley 2005), fostering protective factors and positive relationships and environments that support the holistic nurture of children (Pizzolongo and Hunter 2011), and reducing adversity by “focusing on how positive elements in children’s lives can be stimulated in order to teach them how to deal with difficulties” (Dillen 2012, 62). The concept of the term ‘stimulated’ is worthy to look at. By using this word, there is an understanding that something is already present. Dillen does not use the word ‘add,’ but instead uses ‘stimulate.’ Spirituality is an element that is already present in the child (Nye 2004, 93) and can be stimulated in order for it to be a major part of the proactive resilience process.

Proactive resiliency may also be found when there are “necessary resources” (Paulraj and Andharia 149, 2015) that will allow individuals to fortify themselves prior to and during a disaster. In addition, the focus is on strengthening the current situation rather than focusing on the needs that arise when a disaster strikes. In the development of spiritual resiliency, children need to be prepared before they actually face difficulties, and they need to have resources that can help them access spirituality. Especially in the case of Christian children, having knowledge of God is one strength that needs to be vitalized so as to provide access to spirituality before challenges arise so that there is preparedness before and during the challenges that children will face.

One of the most recent works in the area of proactively nurturing spiritual resiliency in children is the book, *Forming Resilient Children, the Role of Spiritual*

*Formation for Healthy Development* by Holly Allen. Allen agrees that the concept of resiliency mainly resonates with the children who are at risk, “children who have faced extremely difficult situations” (Allen 2021, 35). Yet Allen also identifies two groups of the population when it comes to spiritual resiliency among children. First are the ones who have been through extreme difficulties such as traumas, abuse, divorce of parents and chronic illness. The other are those who are doing well, who “have not been affected by extraordinary or even commonplace hardships; they have good enough parents, neighborhoods, faith communities, schools, friends, and health” (Allen 2021, 35). Allen emphasizes the need for all children, whether they are doing well or are at risk, to be resilient because challenges and difficulties are an inevitable part of life. “Nevertheless most children will experience roadblocks in one form or another on their way to adulthood” (Allen 2021, 36). And one way to prepare the child mentioned by Allen is being proactive in the form of strengthening the relationship of the children “with themselves, with others, and with God” (Allen 2021, 36), which she terms a “foundational spiritual resource” (Allen 2021, 36). Allen’s concept of giving children access to spirituality towards spiritual resiliency emerges through her definition of children’s spirituality. Allen defines children’s spirituality as “a quality present in every child from birth, out of which children seek to establish relationship with the self, others, and God (as they understand God)” (Allen 2021, 26). These three aspects of the relationship, with the individuals themselves, others, and God needs to be fostered, according to Allen, to achieve spiritual resiliency. Parents, grandparents and the intergenerational community in the church are also identified as the key people who must nurture spirituality to foster spiritual resiliency (Allen 2021, 54-59). The relationships

surrounding children have a huge impact on making spirituality towards spiritual resiliency accessible to children.

Promoting proactive resilience within the church has also been understood in the form of the church creatively helping children to be aware of the society they live in and proactively inviting children to experience that church is a place where safety and security can be found (Junker 2006). Caring adults, supportive environments, and adults modelling respect and resilience are also qualities identified as promoting proactive resiliency in children through spirituality (Kersley and Malley 2019).

#### Similarity Between Reactive and Proactive Resiliency

Firstly, the term resiliency whether reactively or proactively understood, is applicable to an individual child in the family or even in the context of multiple children such as in the church or educational institutions (Dillen 2012, 62). Secondly, resiliency, whether in a proactive or reactive understanding, is a trait that can be developed and strengthened (Alvord and Grados 2005). Thirdly, resiliency in a reactive or a proactive form is not an individual task. It requires the family, the community and the broader context in order to avoid negative influence and risk factors (Dylan 2012), or to strengthen the protective factors (Wenner 2012). The capacity of resiliency requires support from the environment and is a process that develops over time (Egeland, Carlson and Sroufe 1993, 518).

#### **Religion and Spirituality**

The terms ‘religion’ and ‘spirituality’ have often been used both synonymously and separately in spiritual resiliency literature. In much of the realm of resiliency literature, researchers are on a quest to develop developmentally appropriate spiritual

measures in order to use spirituality as a protective factor without the religious influence. This is because, according to them, although there are studies done on resiliency, they are mainly from a religious perspective which could limit their application in the case of non-religious children (Sifers, Warren and Jackson 2012). Spirituality is also often understood as a personal affair whereas religion is a public affair (Foy, Drescher and Watsons 2011, 91). A study concerned only with spirituality may view religion as a limitation; however, the study of spirituality without religion may be futile. Spirituality and religion are different, yet according to the context, they can either be seen as the two sides of a coin or have nothing to do with each other, and this may depend on how a person defines them. In this study, the researcher will be discussing spirituality in the light of religion and not spirituality and religion as separate entities.

Although they can be viewed as separate entities, it is impossible to study spirituality and religion separately when beginning with the context of religion: “Religion is infused with spirituality, though it can exist without it” (Allen 2020, 131). When studies are conducted within a religious setting, spirituality is “deeply abiding and embedded within the participant’s religious tradition” (Natsis 2017). In a context where religion is embedded in the culture, studying about spirituality is understood in the context of the religion. It may be argued that in my context of study, Nagaland, where Christianity is embedded in the culture itself and where religion is so much a part of spirituality, the concept of spirituality is best discussed in the light of religion (Pongen 2016).

The relationship between religion and spirituality can be expressed in several ways. Religion is seen as the external factor, an outward expression of certain beliefs

which can be quantifiable in, for example, in the duration of prayer time, in Bible study, church attendance, tithing, and church membership (Ovwigbo and Cole 2010). On the other hand, spirituality is seen as an internal factor, which is personal and abstract, for example, in reverence, awe and wonder, and emotions (Ovwigbo and Cole 2010).

Religion allows children to access a ‘vocabulary’ to freely express their spiritual ideas in words (Scott 2003, 120). However, religion cannot be used as identical in meaning to spirituality (Sagberg 2017, 204) because spirituality is also about understanding that human beings are not limited to the physical aspect. The outer expression of practicing what religion teaches contributes to the inner strength to endure and overcome difficult situations: “Spirituality reminds us of our capacity for revelation, enlightenment, a sense of God’s presence. Religion is what carries us through the valley of shadows, when we are neither uplifted nor empowered and God’s presence seems hidden” (Sasso 2019, 22). This excerpt anticipates the probable outcome of futile results when spirituality and religion are viewed as separate entities. Religious practices and spirituality go hand in hand even in the area of spirituality resiliency (Natis 2017).

Resiliency studies have also emerged that view the vital importance of understanding the potential positive contribution of religion to the spiritual well-being of individuals. Hok-Ko Pong (2018) conducted a study in Hong Kong about how religion could potentially contribute to the spiritual well-being of students in the university. Despite the limitation of the study’s small sample, one thing was clear, namely, that religious beliefs and practices such as going to church, praying, and taking part in church activities had a positive effect on the spiritual well-being of those from religious backgrounds. The principles practiced in life, attributes of hope, and sources of joy and

comfort were derived from the religious beliefs and the practices. This finding also indicates the importance of, and the motivation to, make a space for religion in the area of spirituality. Spirituality and religion need to go hand in hand. Spirituality without religion can be confusing and can point out to certain dangers when they are treated separately (Yust et al. 2006). Religions and spirituality are vague without reverence for God in the hearts of the people (Stonehouse 1998, 32).

### God as the Essence of Children's Spirituality

In this study the term 'spirituality' is considered from a religious point of view, specifically the Christian perspective. The God as the essence, means putting God as central to understanding spirituality is crucial because excluding God from spirituality is pointless (Anthony 2006, 11). Since my study is about exploring methods of access to spirituality towards resiliency, it is all the more important to study what researchers have to say about 'God' as the most important aspect of spirituality.

There are numerous studies that have been conducted to understand the spirituality of children, but very rarely have studies been conducted to see which aspect of spirituality matters most in the lives of children. John Fisher, a researcher with expertise in the area of spiritual health and well-being, has conducted several studies to see which component or aspect of spirituality is paramount. Fisher (2013a) conducted a study with 460 Australian secondary school teachers and concluded that the relationship with God is the strongest factor when it comes to spiritual well-being of youths. Fisher also conducted a global study comparing the influence of God with the other transcendent aspects of spiritual well-being. The study involved 409 participants who were mainly professionals working with people. It reported that, when it comes to the transcendent

aspect of spirituality, the theistic or God aspect plays a very strong role in spiritual well-being, more than other non-theistic claims such as fate, force. This study also cautions that not believing in a God has a negative influence in relating with oneself (Fisher 2013b). Another findings of Fisher conducted with 453 respondents from 13 geographical regions and different religious backgrounds also states that the concept of transcendence is the most important factor among the four domains (relationship with the self, the others, environment and transcendence) for spiritual well-being although the transcendent aspect is not the only criteria to determine spiritual well-being (Fisher 2014). Another study with 1455 children ranging in age from 5-13 years old also demonstrated that relating to God (Fisher 2015) contributed as the greatest variant in the spiritual well-being.

Elkonin along with others. conducted a study with 15 psychological therapists, 14 of them Christians, which also revealed that the idea of spirituality—specifically the concept of God—as a coping resource among the clients proved to be a strong coping mechanism even though the therapists are trained not to involve spirituality in psychotherapy (Elkonin et al. 2014). This sense of interrelation with the transcendent is also what Miller would term as the essence of spirituality (Miller 2015, 53).

Spirituality without focusing on God could be vague and unclear. However the understanding of God can differ from an adult's concept of God and how children understand God.

### The Child's Understanding of God

Children born in Christian homes construct an image of God that eventually conforms to their parents' concept, something that transfers to the child deliberately or

unintentionally (Stonehouse 1998, 130). The formation of the child's image of God is not, however, transferrable to the child from the parents or the significant adults through religious education (Stonehouse 1998, 134). The parents' image of God plays a crucial role in the child's understanding of God yet, in the case of parental absence, the parent role may be filled by the presence of other trusted adults in the child's immediate environment (Karslen, Coyle and Williams 2014, 307). The parent-representation is crucial because children observe how adults live out their faith in God and it impacts them (May et al. 2005, 160). Children can sense God's presence at a very young age (Logan and Miller 2017, 74) and their understanding of God is not limited to concrete physical imaginings of God as a human being (Coles 1990, 58). When children understand the image of God at a young age the image of God continues in the child's thinking, "Once the child's image of God has formed, and we had seen that it forms very early in life, it cannot be forced out of existence. It can be pushed down and repressed, thrown aside as an irrelevant toy from the earlier age, used as it is, or refined and transformed, but the image of God has a continuing life" (Stonehouse 2001, 133). The environment (Heland-Kurzak 2019, 439) of the child also shapes her or his understanding of God, and children eventually adapt as their own the understanding of God that surrounds them (Coles 1990, 67). A deep understanding of God may not be required for a child to make spiritual meanings. Rather, simple familiarity with ideas about God can allow the child to experience God (Adams 2019, 36).

### **Defining Children's Spirituality**

Children's spirituality today takes many forms, and it is worthwhile to examine the different perspectives and how different understandings could potentially contribute



to an understanding of spiritual resiliency. Here are several ways of viewing children's spirituality.

#### Children's Spirituality as a Journey

The initial phase of defining children's spirituality in the 1940s focused on unilateral transmission of faith via telling information 'TO' the children, meaning that children were passive receivers. In the mid 1960s, a shift occurred taking place towards spiritual formation 'FOR' the children, in which the process of connecting to God was communicated in a manner that would be appealing to children. In the third phase, encompassing the 1990s up to the present, the direction of spiritual formation became "WITH" the children, with the aim of "authentic engagement" (May 2020, 34), viewing "children as pilgrims" and spiritual formation as "walking alongside children" (May 2020, 34).

When spirituality is understood as a journey, it is crucial to remember that from a resiliency perspective, it is a journey undertaken with the child that requires listening to their perspectives on what challenges their life, what is difficult for them, and how they deal with challenges and difficulties. This in turn can widen one's perspective regarding how spirituality can be an instrument of resiliency.

#### Children's Spirituality as Distinct from Adult Spirituality

Although the term spirituality may be applied in the context of both adults and children, the understanding of adult spirituality cannot be a substitute for understanding the spirituality of children, nor vice-versa. Children's experience of spirituality is unique to the child and not a mini-version of adult spirituality (Eaude 2003, 152). Their perception of spirituality is much stronger, more curious, freer to think, bolder, and filled

with readiness to explore (Miller 2015, 163). Their mind is still pure and not yet adulterated by what people think or how the world operates. Advances in neuroscience also show that children from ages 0-12 perceive the world through spiritual experience (Miller 2019, 163). This uniqueness of the ages from birth till 12 is crucial because it is the only stage in human life to experience spirituality so intensely. It is important that the child's sensitivity to spirituality be made accessible in every way possible so that it can become a source of spiritual resiliency as they grow.

### The Challenge of Defining Children's Spirituality

The first challenge of defining spirituality is developing understanding that could be generally or universally accepted. Spirituality today can mean a number of ideas (Adams, Hyde and Wooley 2008) which may not necessarily include the idea of transcendence or, more specifically, God (Eaude 2003, 153). The broad nature of spirituality makes the concept more perplexing and hinders one from drawing up a precise definition (Csinos and Beckwith 2013), or even "a concrete functional perspective" (Allen 2008, 6). This inability to draw a precise definition about spirituality leads Eaude to conclude that it would be more advantageous let a definition emerge from a context rather than formulating a definition and applying it to the context (Eaude 2004, 54). In line with this, my study seeks to draw the understanding of spirituality from the perspective of Eaude's comment, which is to bring each one's understanding of spirituality to the table. Spirituality in my study will be understood as the child's relationship with God in a Christian context.

### Children's Spirituality as Natural Human Experience

Spirituality in children is an innate or inborn part of the humanness of each child at the time of birth (Copsey 2005, 24) and comes “naturally to children” (Miller 2015, 21). It is recognized as a predominant aspect of human development (Haugen 2018, 306). Although spirituality comes naturally to children, it does not guarantee a milestone in growth like physical growth. The fact that spirituality is natural, innate and embodied by every individual implies that it is not something that must be planted in the life of the child in order to make them resilient. Engaging spirituality is about intentionally creating a platform for children to express their spirituality (Mata 2016, 143), and helping them discover, awaken, and kindle their spirituality (Carter, Flanagan, and Caballero 2013, 151), and in this way allowing the potential of resiliency itself to unfold.

### Children's Spirituality as Problem-Solving Ability

Spirituality is also considered a form of intelligence that can aid in meaning making and problem solving. Hyde (2004) discusses the possibility of considering spirituality as a form of intelligence. He also argues for the importance of the context when considering the notion of intelligence. Drawing from philosophers, psychologists and theologians, his studies pose the idea that, on one hand, spirituality can be considered as a form of intelligence because of its problem solving ability, and on the other, it cannot because spiritual intelligence is not limited to problem solving. The research undertaken supports spirituality as a provenance for resilience during difficult situations, yet the definition for considering spirituality as a form of intelligence is not accepted in this study because the researcher, as a Christian, believes that any child who has faith and

relationship with God can rely on God, something not based on a child's intelligence, which generally is measured through academic achievements.

### Children's Spirituality as a Relationship with God

Spiritual awareness is present in every child even before religious education is introduced to the child (Allen 2008). But what makes the child's spirituality Christian is the "conviction" (Allen, 2008, 10) that "this awareness is directly related to God" (Allen, 2008, 10). This also affirms that all children are spiritual beings because all children are created in the image of God. The fact that not all spirituality is Christian does not imply that it is impossible for children to embrace Christian spirituality (May 2006, 48-49). The child is considered as a full human being and an active maker of spiritual meaning and each child has the capacity to search for meaning in their lives (Reynaert 2014, 179). This potentiality of the child also implies that children have the capacity to connect to God and to have a personal relationship with Him in their own ways. As the child is nurtured in grace, this nurture is evidenced in various ways such as how children experience God in their difficult times.

From the Christian perspective, the spiritual encounter that is experienced by the child during a difficult time is deeply personal. The comfort, the peace, the satisfaction and all other emotions experienced are personal experiences that promote the personal well-being of the child (Stonehouse and May 2010, 42-43). Children yearn for personal connection with God and they seek to be with God in their own personal ways (Stonehouse and May 2010, 48-49; Coulter 2015, 160).

## **Biblical Foundation**

The Old Testament describes children as a blessing, a sign of fruitfulness (Genesis 1:28), a heritage, and a reward (Psalms 127:3-5). The Bible records instances where children were present during important matters such as the renewal of the covenant (Deuteronomy 29:10-12), while Joshua was reading the law (Joshua 8:34-35), while a message from the Lord was delivered (2 Chronicles 20:13-15), when miracles were performed (Matthew 14:21), and during Paul's missionary journey (Acts 21:5-6).

### **Biblical Foundations for Children's Access to God**

The concept of access is explicitly emphasized when it comes to the relationship of Jesus and children. The notion of access is rooted in the Bible. The Bible clearly states that parents brought children to Jesus because they wanted Jesus to bless them, but that the disciples stopped them, meaning they were denied 'access' to Jesus (Mark 10:13). Jesus, however, clearly told the disciples not to stop the children from coming to him. The presence of children during significant moments and the high view of children in the eyes of God makes it all the more imperative for children to be given access to God and to know him well.

A child's lack of access to God is not necessarily due to the ignorance of adults. However, many adults may lack awareness that children have a divinely ordained capacity for direct access to God, even though children developmentally lack maturity (Reistroffer 1999, 32).

Mark 10:13-14 reads, "people were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the Bible rebuked them. This passage clearly elucidates that the children were not given the access to Jesus. According to John T. Carroll, "In the

Gospels, the disciples impede the *access* of young children to Jesus' touch and blessing" (Carroll 2001, 132). Do 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians and churches, perhaps unwittingly, play a similar role?" (Carroll 2001, 132). Blocking children's access to God could be because of failing to trust that children have the capacity for a genuine trusting relationship with God. For adults and parents, who possess much more experience, knowledge, and understanding than the child, the tendency to decide what the child is or is not capable of could be misguided, especially when it comes to children's relationship with God.

In the book of Deuteronomy, the method of access to God focused on the process rather than the product or inculcating the children. Miller writes, "the children do not simply learn the rules, they learn the story behind the rules out of which they come and on which they are grounded" (Miller 2008, 50). And this was done through the process of one of the interesting methods of teaching the art of asking questions. When Moses was instructing the people to teach their children about God, he was also aware of the fact that questioning would be a part of the children's learning process in order to follow the laws and decrees of God. Deuteronomy 6:20 states, "in the future, when your children ask you, what is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees, and laws the Lord our God has commanded you?" It is interesting to note that the art of questions here is not imposed or wired into the minds of the children, but it emerged out of an experience they have been exposed to through the lives of their parents. Even in the New Testament, Jesus as a child was found in the temple courts, sitting among teachers, listening to the elders, and asking them questions (Luke 2:46). When children ask questions, the parents are to tell them about God (Deuteronomy 6: 21-25) and the answer to be given to children, cited in Deuteronomy 6: 21-25, according to Miller is "not about a legal interpretation, not even

giving information about the laws” (Miller 2008, 51) but it “ interprets what is going on, the way they have to live roots it in the prior experience of God’s deliverance, and provides implicit motivation for obedience by identifying the good that obedience accomplished” (Miller 2008, 51). Having access to God is not about being dictated the rules and decrees mentioned by the Bible or even about getting the answers right in a Bible quiz. It is about the process, the process of following God and living a life that transforms.

Relationship was one of the aspects that allowed access to God. However, this access to God was not through the process of indoctrinating the children with the laws and decrees of God but it was to be impressed in their hearts (Deuteronomy 4:6-9). Learning about God was not about children having to memorize the laws of God mentioned in the Bible, but it was a beautiful process of parents practicing and keeping the decree of God (Deuteronomy 6:1) being a role model so that children will see them, and they will also fear the Lord by following the commands of God (Deuteronomy 6:2).

#### Children’s Spiritual Resiliency

A perfect Bible example of children’s access to God in the form of guidance and trust is the story of young Samuel and Eli the priest (1 Kings 3). Samuel lived in the days when God spoke to people directly and gave them messages which they passed on to others (Miller 1948, 32). Samuel’s first encounter with God was when he finally responded to the voice after mistaking it twice for the voice of the priest. Eli helped Samuel to experience God, and this began a marvelous series of conversations that continued throughout Samuel’s life (Miller 1948, 68). When Samuel heard God’s voice, he ran to Eli because he thought it was Eli who called him. Eli responded with

extraordinary patience and careful discernment that helped Samuel to gain access to God by himself. Eli did not rush to speak with God on Samuel's behalf, nor was he annoyed by the repeated disruptions to his sleep. Instead, Eli guided Samuel and created an environment where young Samuel could access God. Had Eli responded with impatience, annoyance, and/or rebuke, Samuel would have missed the opportunity to access God. Three implications for the cultivation of spiritual resiliency can be drawn from this account. First, age does not act as a barrier when it comes to God's purpose and appointment (1 Kings 1:1). Second, it is important to trust in children's capacity for direct access to God (1 Kings 3:8). Third, children need guidance and support in their walk with God (1 Kings 3:9). Allowing children access involves adults making intentional efforts and decisions to ensure children have appropriate platforms for access to spirituality.

In Scripture, access to God in times of despair was both direct and indirect. The Bible mentions physical spaces where God could be encountered. The temples were tangible spaces where the people could encounter the presence of God. The temple built by King Solomon was a physical space that reminded people about the presence of God. The temple was a place to seek the face of God, to find refuge, to repent from evil ways, and where prayers were offered to God (2 Chronicles 7:14-16). The tabernacle was another tangible space with God's presence that guided the people of Israel when they were travelling in the wilderness (Exodus 40: 34-38). Physical spaces served as reminders of God's visible presence and signified comfort, a place of refuge, and a place to meet with God. It is important to note that the presence of God was not limited to these physical spaces. God promised to meet with those who call upon Him (Psalm 50:14). God met people in their own space and difficult situations, such as protecting Daniel in



the lions' den (Daniel 6:20-21). The assurance of the presence of the Lord as a rescuer in times of trouble and difficulty is clearly stated by the Psalmists (Psalms 46:1-2). Being able to grasp the presence of God and understand that God can be accessible in any space, whether it is physical space or not, can contribute to spiritual resiliency because it helps children to understand that no matter where they are, they can still access and rely on the presence of God.

The slave girl in the story of Namaan (2 Kings 5:1-2) portrays the example of how children can have access to spirituality, their relationship with God, when they are in difficult times. Even though the passage of the Bible does not clearly elaborate what possible situations the child might have gone through, it clearly states that the girl was a captive, destined to be a slave (2 kings 5:2). Humanly speaking, one cannot imagine the trauma that the child would have gone through. The separation from her parents, seeing her homeland in chaos, and being taken by force to be a slave in a foreign world. Despite all this, the only longing mentioned for this girl was for the King to meet the prophet so that he could be healed (2kings 5:3). The girl's relationship with God here can be described as the source of her resiliency, and the window to personal healing.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study adapts Rebecca Nye's six criteria of spiritual nurture as lenses to explore accessibility to spirituality towards spiritual resilience among selected children. These six practices are believed to be core practices to support the development of children's spirituality.

Rebecca Nye's study of formulating spiritual practices emerged out of her groundbreaking research on children's spirituality. One aim of her research was to clarify

that all children are spiritual regardless of their external sense of mystery: “I hoped that my account of research would alter the perception of adults who perhaps previously had regarded children as non-spiritual unless they exhibited precocious piety” (Nye 1998, 150). Nye’s study of spirituality is not an appraisal of a preconstructed hypothesis about children’s spirituality, but rather, an open-ended exploration in search of a “potential discovery of new categories and themes, revised understanding of the proposed categories, or indeed a totally new framework of understanding” (Nye 1998, 138).

When Nye conducted interviews with children (Nye 1998), she found that everything expressed by the children with regard to their understanding and experience of spirituality exhibited a pattern of ‘consciousness’ and ‘relational’ connection in some form. This concept of consciousness was not just a regular sense of awareness but “discrete moments of unusual awareness” (Nye 1998, 238). In addition, the dimensions of being relational were not just limited to the child’s relationship with other people but also to themselves, as well as relationship to transcendence and relationship to the world. This concept of relational consciousness was the central idea that connected all of the data from the children. This remarkable discovery of relational consciousness, according to Nye, is the core of understanding children’s spirituality, and Nye believes that children’s spirituality should be supported.

Nye’s perspective also highlights the fact that children’s spirituality is better explained by means of experiences rather than in “words” (Nye 2009, 1). Nye believes that although a spiritual capacity is natural for children, it can be exhibited in different forms (Nye 2009, 5). However, according to Nye, the need to nurture children’s spirituality does not only revolve around figuring out the non-verbal aspect of children’s

spirituality but also a self-evaluation on the part of the nurturer: “we need a need to guide to seeing, feeling and evaluating our practices and settings for their spiritual quality” (Nye 2009, 41). Nye then offers six practices that are believed to be the essence of nurturing children’s spirituality and states that these practices may be implemented in any kind of work with children in any setting. These practices include: *Space, Process, Imagination, Relationship, Intimacy, and Trust (SPIRIT)*.

The six criteria, SPIRIT, were not designed as a theoretical framework for resiliency. However, in this study the researcher adopted the six criteria as a framework for study of ways to make spirituality accessible towards spiritual resiliency. Rebecca Nye’s theory identifying the six criteria has been tested in an intensive study that supports her claims of contributing to the spiritual well-being of children.

Minor (2012) conducted a quasi-experiment of the claim that the exposure to these six criteria promotes spiritual well-being via Godly play©; something that, according to Minor, was “largely untested” (Minor 2012, 119). Minor’s quasi-experiment demonstrated that Rebecca Nye’s six criteria, SPIRIT, comprise a well-tested theory providing insight that contributes to the spiritual well-being of children and is therefore beneficial for the study of methods of access to spirituality towards resiliency. Minor’s study also demonstrates that Godly play © is one approach to religious education that incorporates the six criteria of Rebecca Nye for spiritual nurture, and Godly Play© has been used as an intervention for children who go through difficult times.

Minor and Campbell (2016) conducted a case study using Godly Play© as a spiritual intervention for children in a hospital psychiatric unit. They found that Godly Play© promotes well-being and works as a powerful tool that allows children to find

meaning regarding existential issues, they face such as the meaning and purpose of life. The study made clear that although Godly Play© was not a treatment plan, it nevertheless gave the children the ability to express their challenges differently, and it gave them permission to freely wrestle with difficult questions and thoughts

Farrell et al. (2008) conducted an experimental study at Wolfson Children's Hospital in Jacksonville, Florida. This experiment used Godly Play© stories as a spiritual intervention for children who are struggling with chronic illness. The results indicated that Godly Play© stories contributed to the well-being of the children who were chronically ill, especially in the area anxiety and stress.

The aforementioned studies indicate that Nye's six spiritual foundation criteria are integral to Godly Play©. The findings, that children who experience Godly Play© demonstrate resilience during difficult times, affirm the worth of employing Nye's criteria for the study on how to preemptively prepare children to be resilient.

## **Space**

In order to create a deeper understanding of how the concept of *space* can be used as a method to access spirituality, the concept of *process* will be studied from three different perspectives: namely the physical space, emotional space and the auditory space. In the following paragraphs the three perspectives will be elaborated.

### **Physical Space**

Studies indicate that physical space is important for allowing children to access spirituality (Sangi 2017, 80). Church is a place where children come to learn about God and this place provides an intentional physical space to meet with God, "a kind of space

for children to do their spiritual work” (Nye 2009, 43). Spaces where children meet with God should be places that look inviting to the children because it reveals the priority that adults are making for the children to meet with God (Nye 1998; Nye 2009; Berryman 1991). The concept of space as a sacred space itself plays a huge role in the child’s understanding of space. But at the same time, talking about space is not about making the church attractive but relatable (Csinos and Beckwith 2013, 28). Imaginative approaches to religious education such as *Godly Play*© (Berryman 2017) and *Young Children and Worship* (Stewart and Berryman 1989) place major emphasis on the space in terms of intentionally greeting the child and letting them know that they are entering an area specifically designed to meet with God (Steward and Berryman 1989, 57). The physical space is carefully prepared with beautiful teaching materials crafted to present the stories to children (Berryman 1991). All these contribute to making the child feel that that they are important and that they are in a safe place and in a place when they can have access to spirituality even if they are having a difficult time at home or in school or with their friends. Researchers have proven that other spaces besides the church also play an important role to help a child to meet with God. Being sensitive and open to the possibility that children may meet with God allows them to expand the concept of meeting with God anywhere: “. . . but I knew it was God when I went out to recess. I found God in the field and I looked down on the grass and there was my pencil” (Reimer and Furrow 2001, 14). Physical places are crucial for the child to have access to spirituality for resiliency because it allows the child to understand that there can be special places to meet with God but also that God is accessible in any place they need Him.

## Emotional Space

This involves the freedom and opportunity to express one's self- questions, concerns, fears, hopes and other feelings without being judged, giving children the space necessary to think and come to understand for themselves (Copsey 2005, 34; Adams, Hyde and Wooley 2008, 43). While physical and emotional space are crucial, it is also important to create a hospitable space, without which spirituality cannot be nurtured. However, creating a hospitable space can be a challenge in an environment of power and autonomy (Eaude 2014). Constructing or diminishing emotional space often depends on the attitude of the adults (Brooks 1994), and diminishing those emotional spaces could deprive the child of the ability to draw resilience through emotional skills (Dan and Cairone 2014).

## Auditory Space

Listening to children helps adults to understand the spiritual life of the children more deeply (Stonehouse and May 2010), and in the process offers perspectives that best support children in their spiritual journey. Listening is a crucial component of communication and lack of listening implies a state of communication failure (Wright 2006, 64). Listening to children (APNTS Research Team 2018) conveys a message of hope and care, acceptance without judgement, listening to understand, and a safe space for the children to be children that are valued, that are taken seriously, and that matter (Wright 2006, 66). Joining children on the journey to listening to God is indeed an honor and should be taken seriously because the picture of God is partly formed by the person listening to the child (Borgo 2020, 44). Listening allows children to be able to express their personal views and enables them to put forth their doubts and questions (Stonehouse

and May 2010, 15). This does not mean that the child suddenly attains an authoritative position where the parents need to implement everything that the child has to say. It means that, “Children do need our protection but we also need their perspective” (Stonehouse and May 2010, 20). Cultural and global changes are inevitable (Stonehouse and May 2010, 21), thus listening to children, allowing them to share their point of view, remains crucial. Another way to listen is through silence. Silence in conversations may not be comfortable or silence may not be usual. However, silence should be taken seriously and it is also one of the ways to create auditory space (Nye 2009, 45). Often when children are silent, it does not mean that nothing is happening. Because children might have limited vocabulary (May et al. 2005), silence could be the best way to express what is happening (Nye 2009, 45).

In conclusion, *space* allows children to experience God with their own language, at their own time, and from their own perspectives (Espinoza 2014, 60). Creating space allows children to have access to God without “manipulation” (Borgo 2020, 43).

### **Process**

Being able to experience *process* as a means to access spirituality for resiliency contributes to the understanding that relying on spirituality for resiliency is a “process and not a product” (Nye 2009, 46). In order to create a deeper understanding of how the concept of *process* can be used as a way to access spirituality, the concept of *process* will be studied from seven different perspectives.

#### Process and the Concept of Time

The concept of time is crucial when it comes to viewing *process* as a method to access spirituality towards resiliency. The time factor is important not because time is

limited, but because time can limit connections with spirituality where the concern is just a visible outcome or an end product. When it comes to spiritual resiliency, children need fresh thoughts, differences in perspectives, and connection with God, In the words of Nye, “Learn to associate biblical material and its potential to make meanings in their lives with a pseudo-reflective process” (Nye 2009, 47). Because process is so essential, spirituality should be viewed as a “journey not a destination” (Anthony 2006, 24). This understanding of journey is important because rushing to finish explaining something to the child or rushing to give answers distracts from the process of allowing the child to connect with God in their own time (Stonehouse and May 2010, 47). The result is that the usual formal instruction that comes with achievable goals which determine the understanding of the lesson by the children is not always transformative (Nye 2009, 9), and it eventually leads to a bleak outcome: “Children disengage from the learning process if speculative knowing is used extensively in teaching them things of faith” (May 2006, 59). The point here is that when it comes to spiritual resiliency, there should be openness to allow the child to explore, and recognition that understanding and experiencing God is different for every individual. It is not limited to getting all the answers correct in a limited a period of time or within a scheduled Sunday school class or a scheduled Bible reading time at home.

### Process and the Transmission Approach

The tendency to focus on a process of using the transmission approaches that “merely repeat and talk about it” (Berryman 1991, 60) takes away the opportunity for the children to personally reflect on what a part of the story of God meant to them and how



they are meeting with God in that story (Stonehouse and May 2010, 39). The focus on a transmission process can certainly yield productive results but they are still incomplete:

Children can memorize Bible verses. Youth can learn how to defend the scriptures, and parents can know a lot of “stuff” about God and where to find certain passages in the Bible. These are all good things but they are not enough. Until those things penetrate down to the core and bring about life change, they’re simply not enough. When we succumb to the temptation of information over formation, we lose our transformation (Anthony and Marshman 2015, 70).

When the matter of inculcating the children with knowledge about God overtakes the importance of understanding that children have a hunger to know God in their own way. The result can be the child lacks an authentic connection with God, “overshadowing or depriving the child from understanding who God really is or what they needed to know” (Khen 2013, 130). When the Bible lesson is already done, or when various activities are completed, the process of retaining knowledge and facts does not equate to making the child spiritually resilient. “Children who equate the acquisition of knowledge with knowing God might struggle during the perils and dangers of life” (Csinos and Beckwith 2017, 47). Children learning about God through the process of one-way transmission may be hinder them and even be detriment when it comes to the development of spiritual resilience in children.

#### Process and Moral Training

When children are young, they learn about God in the form of moral education which is corresponded with and directly related to moral behavior (Anthony and Marshman 2015, 71), for example, doing what is good and what is right because that is what the Bible says. But if children are taught only about dos and don’ts, and if the teachings about God are only about moral rules, the teachings not only block children

from connecting with God, they also lead to an understanding that the facts in the Bible do not have special meaning. Reflecting on Kohlberg's moral theory, Stonehouse states that moral trainings are not about only the notion of children accepting the rules but it is also about creating a positive impact by supporting and nurturing it (Stonehouse 1998, 112). This is because the child's process of understanding God is in progress (like any other developmental progress), and later, when the child reaches adulthood, they will no longer accept and respond to the explanation "because the Bible tells us so" (Anthony and Marshman 2015, 71). This is because the moral reasoning of the child has grown beyond the moral instruction tactics used by their parents (Anthony and Marshman 2015, 71). For children who grow up in Christian homes, moral instructions can often become principles to live by in order to be a good Christian, something parents support because it makes them look good. These parents are well-acquainted with living by the rules and instructions extracted from the Bible, but they do not have access to transformation (Anthony and Marshman 2015). This practice of faith based on blind obedience is susceptible to abandonment in the face of painful challenges or crises in life. Christian faith reduced to these unquestioned moral rules conveys a dangerous message that biblical faith means "carefully living a Christian life based on keeping the rules on the master-list" (Sloat 1990, 5). When the transformative aspect of loving God or following Jesus is reduced to a moral rule, it can be a life-threatening, "stifling experience, producing a superficial, external sense of holiness, while the internal experience is one of depression, fear and anxiety" (Sloat 1990, 6). There is a danger of assuming that children will automatically inherit spiritual resiliency when they follow moral rules. Children's spiritual capacities, their abilities to have an intimate, personal connection with God, can

become overshadowed and neglected when learning about God is solely about following moral rules or adopting prescribed beliefs and practices (Csinos and Beckwith 2013, 47). Thus, it is important that the children find a way to connect directly with God. The peril of drifting away from relying on spirituality awaits when learning about God is a process of moral direction that is dictated according to what adults think is the best for them.

### Process and Avoiding the Instant or Comforting Answers

One challenging aspect of developing children's spirituality towards resilience is the urge to offer comfort in times of challenge and thereby overlooking the process of finding an answer. Human nature and instinct reveals that human beings were designed to love and to care—a reality of utmost importance for parents or guardians who attempt to comfort children with Scripture, a convenient and immediate approach. Children are vulnerable. Nevertheless, they need to develop the ability to think through situations and search for the answers by themselves (Eaude 2009). There is a danger in offering prepared answers to children when they are in challenging situations: "In failing to help children recognize that some questions do not have easy or definitive answers, we may discourage them from continuing to ask such questions" (Eaude 2009, 190). The process of spirituality is not about feeding instant comforting answers to give happiness to children (Eaude 2009), but to nurture within children the capacity to be resilient in the face of future challenges. Spirituality needs to be more than just a feel-good activity. It needs to focus on long term well-being. The older children get, the more challenges can be expected. In the words of Eaude, "All children are faced with what is hard to comprehend, and will continue to be so throughout life" (Eaude 2009, 190). Without any doubt statements such as "God will always take care of us or God helps us never to be

afraid” are true (Csinos and Beckwith 2013, 95), but these kinds of statements are just the tip of the iceberg, i.e., “simplified versions of much more complex, ambiguous and paradoxical theological ideas” (Csinos and Beckwith 2013, 95). The danger with using such statements is that it is like telling children that there is no alternative way to experience God (Csinos and Beckwith 2013, 98). The danger of providing theological absolutes or comforting answers is that when children no longer experience or cannot experience those statements, it provides justification for them to depart from faith. Csinos and Beckwith write: “This becomes as good a reason as any for them to leave their childhood faith behind, since the only things they were ever taught were unnuanced absolutes and they weren’t told that it is ok to question what they learned or to go deeper into their exploration of God in the light of real life” (Csinos and Beckwith 2013, 99).

In addition, if those answers do not satisfy the child’s mind and heart there is a possibility for the child to not question anything again (Stonehouse 2001, 43). When children go through difficult situations, an alternative to offering comforting answers is to allow the child to reflect on the meaning of the situations that they go through.

### Process and Meaning Making

The idea of exploring process as a method of accessibility to spirituality for the purpose of resiliency is not simply about reaching the goal of coming to a comfortable state from a challenging experience (Sheldrake 2021, 54), but also to take a journey to find meaning. Spirituality integrated in families also acts as a source of meaning-making during adversities (Theiss 2018, 11). Spirituality has the potential to give answers in the form of meaning-making for those children who are in difficult situations and allow for questions about what is happening to them and why it is happening to them (Vineuza and

Alejandra 2017). The meanings that children construct from their world of experience and within the life of faith are their own (Hymans 2004, 48) and in their own terms (Wilson 1992, 16). Being able to create meanings out of current situations does not mean arriving at a comfort level to be able to function again, neither is it about ignoring the difficulties but it is about making sense of it (Eaude 2009, 195). For children to be resilient, they should be given the opportunity to search and make meaning of their situation in their difficult times (Eaude 2009, 190). Meaning making is one crucial element to understanding how spirituality helps children to thrive. As children ponder on making meaning of the situations that involve them, they are drawn into various perspectives (Mountain 2011, 268) and questioning that could be one important aspect in understanding *process* as a method of accessibility to spirituality for resiliency.

### Process and the Role of Questioning

Questioning as part of the *process* of finding access to spirituality is an important aspect of spiritual resiliency because it allows a safe boundary for the child to explore their theology within safe zones, to “use their knowledge, and experiences to read, interpret, and even question the Bible” (Csinos and Beckwith 2003, 98). When those doubts and questions are shunned just because one does not have an answer or thinks that it is wrong to question the Bible, it paves the way for danger (Csinos and Beckwith 2003). This also implies that spirituality as a resilience factor for children is a process, a journey that is undertaken along with the child, allowing the child to express and wrestle with difficult questions, and not necessarily providing them with answers when individuals and adults are not sure. When children have difficult questions about God or

life, even though the adults cannot give the answers, it is crucial to remember that children need emotional support (Adams, Hyde and Wooley 2008, 40).

Although children naturally have the tendency to question and be curious, the environment around them plays a determining factor. “Unless children feel safe, they are most unlikely to take the risks and ask the questions that encourage their creativity and search for meaning” (Eaude 2019, 14). Children asking difficult questions should never be ridiculed or discouraged but should be viewed as a steppingstone to building resilience (Pratezina 2019, 81). The attitude of the adults can either encourage the children to safely explore those questions or shut them off. Csinos and Beckwith explain:

How we handle their questions matters because our responses tell them what we think about them and their emerging ideas or their theological ideas. . . . When we chuckle, shrug our shoulders or tell them that their question isn’t very good, we say something about who they are and whether we value them or not. . . . When we treat a child’s question with respect, we are treating the child with respect. And we are teaching him or her that it’s ok to ask questions (Csinos and Beckwith 2013, 95).

Young children are on a journey to explore everything around them through their different sense organs (Adams, Hyde and Wooley 2008, 60). Despite the difficulties and uneasiness that tags along when children have questions, an intentional step has to be initiated by parents: allowing children the freedom to question, disagree, and dialogue openly. This is not always an easy thing to do. Often it “requires us to be proactive, so children know it’s okay to talk about and do these things” (Logan and Miller 2017, 80). While holding on to the focus of not discouraging the children to ask questions, the attitude of openness and exploration of the idea is what is needed more than the answer (Miller 2015, 338).

Some of the ways to continue the engagement of spiritual questions are: a) engaging in a spiritual quest (Stonehouse 2021, 43). “Acknowledge that the child’s question is a hard one and join the child in seeking a satisfactory answer” (Stonehouse 2001, 43); b) Intentionally making time to work on the questions (Yust 2004, 131); and, c) Allowing for genuine conversations as “Taking questions seriously and attempting an answer is more important than the perfection of the answer” (Stonehouse 2001, 79). Because children are filled with questions, it is important that they are guided towards discovering how ideas can help them access spirituality towards resiliency.

### Process and Wondering

The art of wonder comes naturally to children (Yust 2006, 121; Wigger and Daley-Harris 2002, 11; Kantembe 2013, 356) and wonder is a powerful element that needs to be harnessed because it not only provides a space for the children to be connected to God in their own language but wonder initiates a powerful connection with the Holy Spirit (Stonehouse and May 2010). This is a potential source of comfort in the absence of comforting adults or when the physical presence of adults cannot provide the level of comfort a child needs when going through mental or emotional stress.

By wondering, children are able to connect with God’s story and discover meaning (Opdal 2001, 332) even though they may not be able to verbally describe it (Stonehouse and May 2010, 18). A child’s wonderings emerge from their own lives and their relationship to God (Hymans 2004, 48).

The child’s environment plays a major role in initiating wonder in children. The Godly Play© approach to the spiritual formation of children, developed by Jerome Berryman, places major emphasis on the practice of wonder which includes intentional

arrangement of time for children to wonder. Godly Play© also provides space for children to express their questions, their doubts and their grand imaginings without being corrected or directed to a more conventional way of thinking (Ingersoll 2014, 173).

*Process* for access to spirituality towards resiliency has been explored from different slants such as the concept of time, the information-transmission approach, moral training, avoiding the instant comforting answer, meaning making, and the role of questioning and wonder. These different understandings of process reveal the multilayered aspects of how children actually learn about God as well as how attention needs to be geared towards meeting the children halfway in their understanding of God (Yust et al. 2006, 4).

### **Imagination**

Being imaginative is not about how creative the presenter can be in teaching about God. Rather, it is about how children can be encouraged to use their imaginations to encounter God (Nye 2009, 51). The concept of imagination will be studied from three different perspectives. First, imagination as a source of strength: imagination is one of the ways that children can apply spirituality in times of difficulties. The experience of God for each child is unique and imagination allows for that unique experience to take shape (Csinos and Beckwith 2013, 73). When a child is able to imagine and conceptualize that God is with them, it can be a source of strength while facing challenges (Hooton 2014, 114; Reimer and Furrow 2001, 16). Cole's study with children includes narratives which served as direct references to the imagination of the children: "When I woke up and was scared - I pictured his face, with big eyes and a smile. He wasn't scared so I decided not



to be scared either” (Coles 1998, 48). There are also possibilities of children imagining the presence of God and literally interacting with this imagination in a physical sense: “. . . why are you laughing and I told him it was Jesus, and he was tickling my toes” (Reimer and Furrow 2001, 20). This narrative extract is a conversation between a father and a daughter as the child recollects and shares the experiences of moments when the presence of God was felt. Feeling the presence of God through imagination can also be expressed through different practices like prayer (Hampton 2004, 125).

Second is imagination and prayer. The concept of God plays a crucial role when prayer is used as a coping mechanism for the child to communicate with God (Mueller 2010, 199; Heland-Kurzak 2019, 443). However, the context of imagination here is not discussed as an end in itself, but it is rooted in the realm of understanding God and experiencing God and God’s comforting presence in the midst of challenges such as fear, anxiousness, loneliness (Sheldrake 1984; Boyd 2017; Grossoehme et al. 2011; Mountain 2005). The importance of developing a healthy image of God should not be overlooked since it is a work in progress. Although prayer has proved to be effective, yet there is also an incongruousness in the realm of prayer and resiliency among children who are not encountering difficulties and challenges to the point of being stressed on a higher level (Rew, Wong and SternGlanz, 2004).

Third is imagination and Bible stories. When children are encouraged to use their imagination, it is crucial to identify which resources stir the imagination of the child. Bible stories are a great way to help, “Children best comprehend the truth when it comes to them packaged in a story” (May 2006, 34; Pemberton 2014, 151). Children need to hear stories from the Bible about how people struggled and how God was a part of that

struggle. Hardships and struggles are part of life, and when children feel that those situations are disconnected from their spirituality, it may increase the possibility that they will give up on their faith as they grow up, and look to unhealthy alternatives for dealing with hardships and struggles. The stories in the Bible are not prescriptions to perfection or an end to pain and suffering but stories serve to ultimately provide understanding that, even in the face of imperfection and hardships, the presence of God is not fleeting (Hoopes 2020, 151). The Bible is a living testimony in the form of stories of people who learned to rely on and trust God to overcome difficult situations. Stories have the power to bring healing to children who are in difficult situations. The urge to feed the imagination with Bible stories is because of its potential to be a protective factor (Melia 2020, 123). Understanding the fact that “God’s Word comes to us as a story” (Hoops 2020, 150) can change one’s perspective on using Bible stories as a protective factor. Because stories are God’s word, they are transformative (Melia 2020, 123).

Imagination as a method of access to spirituality towards resiliency has been viewed from three different perspectives, namely, imagination as a source of strength, imagination and prayer, and imagination and Bible stories. These three perspectives explain the importance of imagination and the source of imagination that is crucial for access to spirituality towards resiliency.

### **Relationship**

Relationships play a very crucial role in the cultivation of spiritual resilience (Dillen 2012, 63; Mountain 2011, 265). Not all relationships may be beneficial to the child but the influence of significant adults plays a crucial role in the lives of the children (May et al. 2005, 161). Relationship as an access to spirituality towards resilience may be

viewed from three different perspectives: relationship as a role model, relationship as a powerhouse, and relationship as a safe haven.

### Relationships as Role Models to Children

Children learn unconsciously (Eaude 2019, 11) and vicariously (May et al. 2005, 161) and they need examples in order to be able to put something into practice (May et al. 2005, 33). Being a role model of trusting God in difficult times has a great deal of influence, and relationships help build up that influence (Eaude 2019, 15). Parents as role models are agents who can instill resiliency in the child, thus preparing the child to face difficult situations (Edwards and Wilkerson 2018, 51; Haight 2008, 2018). Children copy the techniques of their parents (Morgenthaler, Keiser and Larson 2014) and follow the ways their parents respond in challenging situations (Sanyal 2018). Children need models, not just to imitate, but to create their own form of meaningful expressions (Espinoza 2014). Children need to be able to see adults who know God and to witness how the faith of adults helps them deal with day-to-day problems, difficult people or challenging situations (Miller 2015). In addition, the concept of being a role model is not about being perfect but about being authentic (Tan-Chi and Tan-Chi 2020, 17).

### Relationship as a Powerhouse

Relationships which are close and intimate, whether in the form of the parent-child relationship or communal relationship (Foy, Kent and Patricia 2011, 92), are major forces in building resiliency (Beardslee 1989). These relationships can be a powerhouse source for resiliency when children experience challenging times (Haight 1998, 218). This, however, depends on the quality of the relationship between the parents and children.

Theiss elucidates, “Parental communication that is supportive, instructive, and responsive helps children develop the skills necessary to confront and cope with challenging circumstances, whereas parental communication that is controlling or dismissive can encourage children to be reactive, volatile, or impulsive in the face of adversity” (Theiss 2018, 11).

The ability of the child to rely on God during difficult times is dependent on the relationship between the child and the parents because the quality of relationship between parents and children has a direct effect on the child’s relationship with God (Stonehouse 1998, 61). If the child experiences love and care from parents, their attachment towards God will strengthen (Logan and Miller 2017, 66).

#### Relationship as a Safe Haven

Relationships also give a safe haven for children to express what they think and to discuss their views. Fisher (1999) conducted a study with 98 teachers to find out what fosters spiritual health, and the findings revealed that the children need a safety net to express their views and opinions, the safety of secure relationships. If they do not experience this in the safety of secure relationships, they will practice this elsewhere, possibly involving the company of misguided friends (Fisher 1999, 41).

Relationship as a method of access to spirituality towards resiliency has been viewed from three different perspectives, namely, relationship as a role model, as a powerhouse, and as a safety haven. These three perspectives elucidate the role of relationships in children’s access to spirituality towards resiliency.

## Intimacy

The essence of intimacy is to be able to feel safe regardless of the questions and any sort of doubts that the children have (Nye 2009, 53). An environment where children do not need to defend themselves or feel intimidated about their thoughts and opinions allows children to thrive (Tan-Chi and Tan-Chi 2020, 30). The ability of the child to be comfortable talking about God depends on the the environment of the child. “The ability to speak about God does not depend on age but on the level of commitment of the religious environment in which the child grows up” (Heland-Kurzak 2019, 432).

The following example from Nye allows us to see what goes on in the mind of the child and how that can affect the attitude of the child towards building intimacy. Nye observes:

The children may fear that they will be judged on how much they know, or feel that their affective responses are not the right ones (e.g. they really *like* the bit with Pharaoh’s armies), or they fear that the congregations will laugh at their ‘cute’ answer, like last time. Or they might feel scared by the uniform mood (‘fun fun fun!’ or being ‘very good and very quiet’) that can’t contain how they feel and who they are (Nye 2009, 53).

If these thoughts occur while the child is learning about God, they will likely experience anxiety, making it difficult for “any intimate spiritual engagement to take place” (Nye 2009, 53). It is important to trust the children, not push them to share their thoughts, especially when it comes to a child’s relationship with God.

Pressuring children creates barriers to accessing spirituality for the purpose of resiliency. Creating a safe and intimate space is long-term project (Nye 2009, 55; Tan-Chi and Tan-Chi 2020, 56). As children struggle and are challenged with their understanding of life as human beings, they need to be supported in every way possible. The needed support includes elimination of the belittling attitude adults often have

towards children just because they are young and have not experienced life as adults (Hart 2006,169).

### **Trust**

When talking about resilience, it is crucial to understand that children have the capacity to navigate answers because *trust* also means allowing to children to trust God for themselves without being rushed to consume the answers of others (Nye 2009, 54). If children are to utilize spirituality for the sake of resilience, they must also be given opportunity to explore it for themselves, requiring adults to refrain from the common inclination to offer quick solutions to problems (Sanyal 2018).

This frequent tendency to offer quick solutions to children in difficult situations (Tedd 1995, 27) is because adults often adopt the idea that children cannot think for themselves. In the words of Logan and Miller, “Children are blank slates, having no natural engagement with God and on their own, and therefore need to be taught in the right way” (Logan and Miller 2017, 14). When the relationship of children with God is undermined, or children are not given an opportunity to practice their faith in God, the capacity for resiliency fails to develop. “Resilience is stimulated if the people are given the opportunity to develop themselves and also to express themselves” (Dillen 2012, 63). Eade asserts the importance of protecting children and also allowing them a safe place to be able to protect themselves (Eade 2014, 239). Similarly, Stonehouse and May state, “Children cannot and should not be protected from all pain of life” (Stonehouse and May 2010, 33). This is because children are “active agents who creatively construct meaning and have a significant role in shaping their own spiritual lives” (Csinos Beckwith 2017, 58). By trusting that children have the ability to connect with God despite their very

young ages, a platform is created for children to make meaning of spirituality. Children need guidance and support but, at the same time, they also need a space to trust God for themselves.

The following anecdote from my childhood illustrates the concept of trusting children to trust God for themselves and why it can be dangerous if that does not happen. As a young child, I had to deal with several of my own fears, especially fear of the dark at night, and those fears were so personal. One night, I remember I was sleeping beside my mother, and I was so scared that I had to wake up my mother to pray for me, and afterward she went back to sleep. However, I could not sleep, and I had to wake up my mother again, and she prayed for me again. But that still did not work. I was so scared that my mother prayed for me yet again. After the third time, she told me that I needed to have faith. Even if she prayed for me many times, I also needed to believe in my heart that God was with me, and only then the peace of God would be with me. That was a turning point for me; after inviting God to be with me, I slept peacefully the rest of the night. Had my mother not trusted that I, as a child, could have a personal relationship with God, and had continued to just keep praying for me again and again, I might have continued to have a hard time trying to experience the comforting presence of the Holy Spirit on my own.

Several implications can be drawn from this anecdote as to why children should be trusted to experience God. Firstly, adults cannot give an understanding of God's presence and comfort by just by telling children what it is like (Stonehouse and May 2010, 34). Secondly, an understanding of the presence of God is a combined effort involving the loving guidance of an adult and the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Stonehouse and May

2010, 38). Thirdly, children need guidance, but they need it to experience God in their own way, “Children need to be invited and guided and sometimes to be left alone” (Eaude 2014, 243). Trust is an important element for spiritual resiliency in children because children are a work in progress and there is a constant association and assimilation in order to fit their learning into their experiences.

Trusting allows the understanding that a child has the capacity, the potentiality, and the ability to have a connection with God (Boyatzis 2008, 74). The “richness of the thoughts” (Adams, Hyde and Wooley 2008, 65) in children continues to grow and their unique personal views begin to take shape (Adams, Hyde and Wooley 2008, 65).

To strengthen the spiritual resiliency of the children there needs to be awareness that “Children are ready to explore existential issues when the questions surface in their own minds, not when adults choose to raise them” (Stonehouse 2001, 44). There is a need to trust children and give them a safe boundary to personally experience and explore (Eaude 2019, 5).

### **Challenges with Allowing Children Access to Spirituality**

Navigating methods of access to spirituality towards resilience can be hindered in several ways, such as unpleasant past experiences, manipulative attitudes of children, the great amounts of patience required, and a child’s limited language capacity. Unpleasant past experiences of a parent are a possible hindrance to allowing children to explore spirituality for resiliency because parents may not want their children to go through similar experiences (Miller 2015, 32; Logan and Miller 2017, 22; Csinos and Beckwith 2013, 95).



A manipulative attitude on the part of children could be another obstacle. Even though the responses from children are crucial in shaping practices that would be best for them, pressuring or forcing children to speak about their spiritual experience is dangerous. “If children feel that they are constantly expected to produce spiritual experiences and profound reflections upon life, the consequences could be negative, and children may fabricate answers which they think the adults want to hear, or else feel pressured and choose to disengage” (Adams, Hyde and Wooley 2008, 40). The trusting experience of young children is different in the sense that if they experience love and care from their parents, it is easy for them to experience God's love. This may not, however, exempt children from wanting to please their parents or the teachers, and this could create a major challenge for children to overcome manipulation (May et al. 2005, 270).

A great amount of patience is required because children are, unlike adults, not ready to give a systematic structure to an account of their experiences. “They tend to live more from moment to moment rather than in terms of reflection on sequentially and meaningfully ordered events” (Hay and Nye 2006, 128). A child’s expression of spirituality is generally inconsistent; one moment they may be talking deeply about their rich experiences but in a flicker of seconds switch to telling another story (Nye 2009, 6). Bringing a child back to the present moment can be challenging.

Another impediment to a child’s access of spirituality towards resiliency is their limited verbal ability and the challenge for them to interpret what they experience (May et al. 2005, 84). The verbal limitations of children have been recognized by other scholars, however, more from the perspective of awareness rather than pointing it out as a challenge (Adams, Hyde and Woolley 2008, 62).

## **Developmental Theories**

Human development theories have been extensively tested and relied on by educators to provide developmentally appropriate education. Developmental theories have a significant impact and implications for understanding the nature and process of human development, including how they learn, how they change, how they behave, and how humans flourish. With regard to spirituality for the sake of resiliency, the theories provide insight for better understanding 8-10 year-old children, understanding which is needed to ensure that the methods applied will be relevant to, and appropriate for, the children.

Children throughout the stages of childhood development relate to God and understand God in ways that differ from adults (Beckwith 2004, 41; Scarlett 2006, 28). Developmental theories do not distort or diminish the reality of children as spiritual beings (Scarlett 2006, 28), and the theories imply that childhood spirituality may follow predictable stages as do other aspects of human development. The spirituality of children viewed apart from developmental theories is often judged or belittled as too narrow (Hay and Nye 2006, 240). Development theories taken too seriously are either “overbought or oversold” (Boyatzis 2008, 54) and literally used as a ruler to measure how much children can understand God.

Some scholars conclude that human development theories do not have universal application and therefore cannot be used as an ultimate instrument to measure the development of children (Coles 1990, 23). Culture, and childhood itself, are convoluted, which implies the impossibility of using a single developmental theory to understand children.

Despite the limitations, developmental theories have a proven potential for understanding children. Developmental theories are not prescriptive scales nor instruments of precise measurement or understanding of children. Nevertheless, the theories point us to different possibilities (May et al. 2008, 74), which makes more room to creatively explore ways for children to access spirituality.

Developmental theories are especially important for understanding spirituality because spiritual resiliency cannot be guaranteed through external measurement of the child's success and development. Developmental theories provide insight into potential challenges a child might face in particular stages, with implications for cultivating resilience.

#### Erik Erikson- The Understanding of the Struggles

Ages 8-10 correspond with Erikson's psychosocial stage "industry vs inferiority," in which children, via given tasks and skills, develop a sense of competency that benefits society (Erikson 1959). Erikson's theory helps enumerate the challenges at this stage and also reveals that crisis at this age is not necessarily a result of trauma but may result from the environment (Stonehouse 2011, 47). Positive resolution of each stage-crisis contributes to healthy development of human personality.

#### Industry and Inferiority- The Struggle from a Social Perspective

As children transition from the home environment to interact within the larger social context, such as the school they are exposed to all sorts of challenges, "goals and limits and achievements to disappointments" (Erikson 1963, 259). The increased level of this social expansion in the world of the 8-10 year-old children leads them to be less

dependent on their parents. Children age 8-10 also develop more intense friendships (Eberle 1975, 139), recognize leaders, and want to be like them (Eberle 1975, 139). Children at this age undergo immense pressure as they seek to be accepted into different social circles such as in school, church, and the neighborhood. Peer friendships are crucial and when children do not find same age-group friends in their church, they may choose to stop attending the church (May et al. 2005, 169). Adults need to recognize the reality and significance of the struggle and find ways to help the child cope. Other issues such as peer pressure and inappropriate media-pressured body image expectations (Kuther 2017, 231) can undermine healthy resolution of industry vs inferiority conflict.

#### James Fowler- The Perception of God

James Fowler's faith development theory helps the researcher to understand the 8-10 year-olds' perceptions about God. Because the children value their experiences and their relationship with God, it is essential that spaces are created for children to express the matters of importance to them in various ways such as "in words, in action, in contemplation" (Fowler 1986; Fowler and Dell 2006). Allowing children to express their thoughts and values will enable the researcher to explore access to spirituality for spiritual resiliency among the 8-10-year-old children.

According to the faith development theory of Fowler, children age 8-10 have the potential capacity for the *mythic-literal stage of faith*. At this stage the child's trust or confidence in God is "appropriated with literal interpretation, as are moral rules and attitudes" (Fowler 1983, 191). The child believes that the notion of good behavior being rewarded and bad behavior punished is associated with God (Fowler and Dell 2004, 21). Fowler identifies three significant characteristics of this stage: the children can "sort out

real from-make belief; can enter into the perspective of others; [and are] capable of capturing life and meaning in narrative and stories” (Fowler 2001, 35). The notion of God being real and trustworthy, not simply mythical, begins to sink into the mind of the child (Beckwith 2004, 59). Children are able to understand that parents cannot always be present for them physically, yet this absence is filled by knowing that God is reachable even during difficult times (Granqvist and Dickie 2014, 202). As the child’s thought process about God expands, children begin to assimilate new understandings of God with prior knowledge and are able to distinguish the differences (Yust 2004, 130). The child’s understanding of God at this stage is significant, formative, and evolving. It is important that children be allowed to express their thoughts, ideas, questions, and doubts. This will lessen the hurdles to faith.

#### Albert Bandura- The Power of Observation

Bandura's theory clarifies the significance of learning by observing (Bandura 1971). Because children imitate their parents, the parents need to demonstrate reliance on God in difficult times. Children need to be directed to embrace spirituality in healthy ways. Observation is also powerful because it acts as a dynamic catalyst of new ideas, “beyond what they have seen or heard” (Bandura 2003, 169). Learning through observation has the tendency to create ripple effects on different levels. “Observational learning, a single model, can transmit new ways of thinking and behaving simultaneously to vast numbers of people in widely dispersed locales” (Bandura 2003, 169). Because children have the capacity to learn through observation, negative models “can bring hurt and confusion to those people who look upon them” (Silberman 2003, 181). Bandura’s

theory explicates the powerful effects of learning through observation that can be harnessed towards spiritual resiliency.

### **Resiliency Theories**

#### Norman Garmezy: Models of Resilience

In a study of stress and competence in children (Garmezy, Masten and Tellegen 1984), Garmezy and his team developed a three-model approach for understanding how children thrive despite stressful situations.

The compensatory model states that stress factors can be “counteracted or compensated” (Garmezy, Masten and Tellegen 1984, 102). According to the counteracted or compensated model, when a person goes through challenges, their stress or adversities can either be counteracted or compensated for. An example from the compensatory model could be of a child getting bullied as a risk factor and spirituality as the protective factor. So, when a child is going through the difficult time of getting bullied, the child can overcome that because of the understanding that God is with him, and that God is taking care of him despite his situation. In other words, an understanding of God would help the child compensate in the situation that he or she is going through. “My friend bullied me, so I am very sad, but thinking about God makes me happy.”

The challenge model uses stress or adversity as an opportunity for a better improvement. Children need challenges in order to develop resiliency, as in the example of a child relying on God in the face of being bullied. Because of the adversity, the child learns to trust God in difficult situations. The adversity needs to be monitored and controlled. For instance, when a bully threatens or commits physical assault, intervention

of the parents is necessary. When a child is bullied beyond what the child can handle, this could bring an effect emotionally or physically.

According to the protective factor model, the presence of a protective factor reduces the probability of negative outcomes, and does so on the condition that the protective factor is more effective than the stressor (Zimmerman and Arunkumar 1984, 6). This also implies that if there is no stress factor in the life of the child, the presence of the protective factor will be of less importance to the child. On the other hand, the stronger the stress, the deeper the connection between the child and the protective model. For instance, the closer the child is to God, the easier for the child to tackle the difficulties. The further the child is from God, the more challenging it will be to overcome the difficult situations. The models of resiliency as protective factors also indicate that, in times of adversity, a source of support is needed that children can draw upon. That source could be a hobby, sports, a relationship, or religion. Spirituality as a form of resiliency provides a potential source for the child who is brought up in a Christian family. Because of this, cultivating ways to access spirituality as a source of resiliency is crucial.

#### Michael Rutter: Challenge and Resilience

According to Rutter, resiliency is enhanced when negative coping strategies are identified and are counteracted (Rutter 1999, 130). This implies that when children go through difficult situations, (adversities and stress may not necessarily be from their family but it could also be from peer groups) (Rutter 1999, 128), interventions are necessary to help them adopt better coping skills. Positive experiences may not provide a protective effect, and sometimes risk factors can also enhance the protective effect

(Rutter 1999, 133). Similar to the Garmezy's Challenge model, positive experiences may not necessarily work as a protective effect and sometimes risk factors can also enhance the protective effect (Rutter 1999, 133). Risk to some degree is essential for normal development but at the same time, it has to be controlled and monitored and not go beyond what a child can handle (Rutter 2013, 237). Not all forms of stress or challenge are bad for children (Masten and Barnes 2018, 97), and Rutter's theory also explains how risk can be beneficial. Rutter uses the concept inoculate and says that "Resistance to infections does not come from avoiding all contact with pathogens such avoidance is likely to increase vulnerability rather than promote resistance" (Rutter 2013, 477). The exposure to minimal risk acts as a preparation to handle greater risks.

"Resiliency has to be considered on the basis of evidence on risk and protection" (Rutter 2013, 474). General assessment of risk and protection can give an idea of what needs to be studied but at the same time it cannot be used as universal tool for the purpose of resiliency (Rutter 2013, 476) without understanding the environment and this is where the study of resiliency necessitates the consideration for understanding the cultural perspective.

#### Michael Ungar: The Cultural Perspective of Resilience

Michael Ungar (2008) is a resiliency theorist whose work is vital when it comes to understanding context and the culture as essential elements. This is because the availability of resources depends on what is found in the context and the culture to develop resilience in that specific situation. However, this has to be implemented with a caution: We must understand the context in which resources to nurture resilience are found in order to avoid hegemony in how we characterize successful development and



good coping strategies” (Ungar 2008, 236). This also indicates that higher spiritual scores do not necessarily result in higher degrees of spiritual resiliency. For example, a high level of church attendance does not necessarily indicate that an individual is spiritually very strong because church attendance may simply reflect a routine cultural practice. Ungar states that although the spiritual practices score is high, it does not always determine a stronger influence from those practices because it might be just a cultural attribution. “A high rating may only signal cultural relevance rather than influence” (Ungar 2008, 229). Further, Ungar asserts that studies on interventions designed to promote resiliency require the researchers “to be more participatory and culturally embedded to capture the nuances of culture and context” (Ungar 2008, 234). Ungar’s theory demonstrates that spiritual practices do not equate with spiritual resiliency. Spiritual resiliency may be a result of spiritual practices but spiritual practice does not guarantee spiritual resiliency.

#### Emmy Wenner: The Nurturing Aspect of Resilience

Resiliency, according to Werner, is not a one-time achievement and it requires time to grow, aided by a support system in the environment (Werner and Brendtro 2012, 18; Foy, Drescher and Watson 2011). Resilience is a balance between stressful life events and protective factors and when this balance is tilted, the emergence of problems does not spare the child even though the child is resilient (Wenner 1984, 239). Werner states that resiliency can be achieved in the following ways: embracing the unique personality of the child; allowing the child to experience some challenges while ensuring that the challenges do not outweigh the protective factors; allowing the child to have responsibilities along with affirming expressions of appreciation; engaging the child in

the selection of a hobby or other interest that would help boost self-esteem; and, modeling that allows the child to witness and experience adversities as a part of life (Wenner 1984, 239).

### **Summary**

Chapter II reviewed a variety of literature and studies pertinent to a study on the methods of access to spirituality towards resiliency. The literature reviewed includes the background of the study, the relationship between resiliency and spirituality, and the working concept of resiliency and spirituality. This chapter also addressed various aspects of religion and spirituality, how they potentially contribute to spiritual resiliency, and the theoretical framework composed of six methods of access to spirituality towards resiliency, namely, space, process, imagination, relationship, intimacy, and trust. Developmental theories and resiliency theories appurtenant to the study, as well as the theoretical framework and biblical foundations were also discussed.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES**

#### **Research Methodology**

The methodology employed in this study is qualitative and is designed as a descriptive case study. Qualitative studies are keen on investigating how individuals make sense of their world from their own perspectives and not from the perspective of the researcher (Merriam and Tisdell 2006, 6). This methodology was appropriate for this study because qualitative research accommodates the need to create avenues and platforms for encouraging children to share their own story in their own voice (Creswell and Poth 2018, 84).

The use of qualitative methods in this study is desirable because past studies conducted among children have significantly relied on qualitative research over quantitative research (Tinson 2009, 43). Another reason why qualitative research is chosen because of the flexibility to be less formal. For example, it could be conducted at home, or through conversations without employing questionnaires. And this has a huge advantage because, “children engage with research to a greater extent when the method for researching with children is less formal” (Tinson 2009, 43). In addition, listening to children can yield a considerable amount of information with depth rather than trying to acquire data according to pre-determined factors constructed by the researchers (Tinson 2009, 43).

Employing qualitative research in this study was important because in a qualitative study, the researcher is considered as the “primary instrument for data collection” (Merriam 1998, 6). This gives several advantages, such as observation and the ability to cross-check data from the participants for accuracy (Merriam and Tisdell 2006, 16). Human beings have shortcomings and biases (Merriam and Tisdell 2006, 16), but the concept of reflexivity allows the understanding that being conscious allows control over the situation. Furthermore, although attaining perfect accuracy in understanding the views of the participants may not be possible, the advantages noted will allow the researcher to probe the best ways to describe the phenomena. The goal of employing qualitative research methods in this study was not to create knowledge that could be coherent regardless of context, culture, or time. Nevertheless, it does seek to give a detailed description of the subject, i.e., a “theoretical comparison and explanation” (Swinton and Mowatt 2006, 44) regarding particular people within a specific place or time.

### **Case Study Design**

Case study design was particularly selected for the study because this method allowed the researcher to probe details in depth, guided by the terms “how, who, and why” (Farquhar 2012, 6). Case studies focus on understanding the process rather than the results that might be yielded (Merriam 1998, 19). In addition, the aptness of case study design for this research is due to its effectiveness in explaining, describing, and exploring phenomena in the present (Farquhar 2012, 6), thereby allowing substantial exposition of the phenomena studied (Merriam 1998, 41). In this study, a multiple case system was employed, bounded within place, age group, and time (Creswell 2007, 73).

One of the drawbacks of doing a qualitative case study is the possibility of overstatement and its negative outcomes (Merriam 1998, 42). In order to minimize any potential exaggeration, this study was guided by research objectives built upon an established theoretical foundation, use of exhaustive research methods, and a transparent discussion of the findings.

### **Research Locale**

The respondents were selected from a Baptist Church in Kohima, Nagaland. This church is led by 14 ministerial staff, and the Sunday school for children falls under the Christian Education Department, which is comprised of a director, assistant director, 10 assistant superintendents, and 60 teachers who work with 800 plus children who registered in Sunday school for the year 2022. The church is a mother church that includes members from 10 sister churches. The Sunday adult worship services are all conducted in the mother church location. However, Sunday school for children is conducted at the individual sister church sites and not together as a whole Sunday school, although they all use the same Sunday school curriculum.

### **Pilot Study**

A pilot study was conducted before the actual research (Creswell and Poth 2018, 214) to refine and develop the research questions (Yin 2016, 38; Merriam 1998, 75). The pilot study was conducted on three levels. In level 1 pilot testing, the researcher interviewed a nine-year-old boy (in person); in level 2, a female school teacher (online). The level 3 pilot test was taken from the actual sample (in person).

Level 1 - The pilot test with the nine-year-old boy (in person): Due to location proximity between the child and researcher, the research was conducted in person with the parents' explicit permission and full awareness the nature of the research study pilot process. The researcher conducted this research with two goals in mind: first, to determine if the child could understand the interview questions; and second, to determine whether English or the local dialect was best suited for the interviews. The researcher conducted the interview at the child's home in his study room. The researcher made clear to the nine-year-old boy her position as a researcher, as well as the purpose and goals of the pilot study interview. In order to track his understanding of the questions, the researcher provided several tools in the form of questions or statements that he could use, including "*Please explain to me again*" (if the question was not clear or if he did not understand the question), "*I do not understand your question,*" "*I do not know that answer,*" and "*I do not want to answer the question*" (if he understood the question but had no answer). The researcher also invited the interviewee to choose which language to use for the research conversation: English, Lotha (his local dialect), or Nagamese (a common language between the different tribes). He chose English.

The researcher gained the following insight from the level 1 pilot study. The child's use of multiple languages, English at school and local dialect at home, may contribute to some hesitancy in responding to the questions. When the child was hesitant to talk, he would quickly respond "I forgot." This indicated to the researcher that children might be hesitant to explain in English when the local dialect is more commonly spoken, and expected to be spoken, at home on a daily basis. The researcher determined that even if a child can grasp the questions in English, it is best to consult both the parent and child

regarding which language the child would find most comfortable. If, after the researcher determines the most appropriate language, the children hesitate or are unable to respond to the interview question, then it is best to rephrase or skip the question altogether.

Level 2, the pilot interview with the school teacher (online): This pilot interview was conducted to determine if any changes are needed in the interview questions designed for the adults involved in the research study. In preparation for the pilot study online adult interview, the researcher chose a room in the house with proper lighting and little background noise; subscribed to Zoom “Unlimited;” procured a headset with a condenser microphone; and installed a 600 mbps broadband inverter connection in the event of a power outage. Even with substantial preparations, the researcher encountered numerous phone signal disruptions. Despite multiple connection and reconnections over a period of one hour, the researcher was able to complete all the interview questions with an assurance of clarity from the adult school teacher interviewee. Because of the technical challenges experienced, the researcher decided, with the approval of her dissertation adviser, to conduct the adult interviews in person.

Level 3, the pilot test with the actual sample of the population selected: To be fair on the part of the random sampling selection, the first family and the first Sunday school teacher who agreed to be a part of the study were chosen for the pilot study. In this pilot study the actual protocol and all the interview questions which were prepared for the research were administered.

One Sunday afternoon was scheduled after church for the family to do the actual pilot interview with the father, the mother and their 8-year-old daughter. After reaching the house, the wife informed the researcher that the husband had to go out for a work-

related emergency after church service since he works with the law and enforcement department. So, the researcher did the pilot testing with the daughter and the mother. Upon the recommendation of the mother and the choice of the child, English was used as a medium of communication. However, the researcher also assured the child that she could use her local dialect or English or even Nagamese, whichever she was most comfortable with. For the interviews with the parent and the Sunday school teacher, the researcher asked the questions in English, and they had no problem understanding her questions and replied in both the local dialect and in English. Just like assuring the child, an assurance was also given to the parent and the Sunday school to reply in English or use the local dialect or even Nagamese and both were familiar to the researcher.

### Pilot Study Results

The following changes were made in the interview guide following the pilot test.

1. Questions added

- a. The following questions were added to prepare the minds of the participants

since the research is also about resilience

Can you tell me what makes children sad?

What makes children scared?

What makes children worried?

What makes children fearful?

What makes children disappointed?

What makes children excited?

What makes children happy?



b. Additional question

What is one tip that could be given to children to have access to God during difficult times?

This question was added at the end of the interview, with the notion of giving every individual the freedom to express in their own words or ways how they think God can be made accessible to children when faced with challenges in life.

2. Changes in the interview protocol

Since the interviews were not conducted online, the researcher made changes in the protocol. The invitation letter could not be changed since it was already sent. However, the researcher personally made a call or contacted the participants through WhatsApp to explain her situation and requested an in-person interview in the interviewees' houses. The participants were very welcoming and willing to have the researcher in their homes. Most of them mentioned that it was much better than having an online meet.

3. Addition of an intentional reminder to explain the usage of the word challenges and problems before starting the interview.

- a. The researcher had to be particularly careful about using the word “problems” and “challenges” because it can easily be interpreted by the interviewee as a judgement. So, the researcher made a note to explain to the participants that the phrase ‘problems and challenges’ with reference to the study did not mean extraordinary challenges and problems, but rather those incidents and situations of everyday challenges which

children often experience, such as fear of the dark or insects, relationships with peers or siblings etc.

### **Selection of Respondents**

This study interviewed three groups of people: the children, their parents, and Sunday school teachers in order to allow for effective understanding of the children's views and opinions in the form of crosschecks before drawing conclusions (Seidman 2006, 54).

This proposal was granted approval by the APNTS Institutional Review Board (Appendix A). After the proposal defense, the researcher made revisions as per the instructions of the panel. Then, before gathering data, permission was obtained from the senior pastor (Appendix B) and the Christian Education (CE) Director (Appendix D) for the pilot studies, as well as for the actual research. Since the researcher was obtaining a formal official permission from the church, she added a translated script (Appendix C and E) in in her dialect too. The invitation letter was also sent by the Christian Education Director to the parents, children and Sunday school teachers (Appendix F and K). After securing all necessary permissions, the pilot study was conducted, followed by the field research.

### **Sampling Technique: Non-Probability Sampling**

In this qualitative study, case study design was employed, and a non-probability technique was implemented for the sampling since generalization is not a goal of this research (Merriam 1998, 61). Likewise, the application of non-probability technique in this study was most apt because of the research goal, i.e., understanding the uniqueness

and depth of each child's story regarding their access to spirituality towards resilience within a particular context.

Under non-probability sampling, the strategy employed involved a purposeful sampling. According to Merriam, "purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam 1998, 61). These characteristics were suited to the study because the researcher was specifically looking at the notion of resiliency from a proactive context. The insights were gained from this study from a specific population and particular age group.

There were two levels involved in the purposeful sampling strategy, namely, the sample selection at the case level and sample selection within the case, with both levels guided by the criteria (Merriam 1998, 66). In the following paragraph, the levels of the sampling's strategy are discussed.

#### Level 1-Sample Selection at the Case Level

Defining the standards for selection of the sample is the first step for purposeful sampling (Merriam 1998, 61). The site for this study was a selected Baptist church in Kohima, Nagaland India. The participants of this study were selected from three different populations: children who are 8-10 years old (primary school students), their parents, and Sunday school teachers.

#### Level 2-Sample Selection within the Case

The second level of sample selection is to refine the selection of the sample within the case (Merriam 1998, 65). At this level of selection, the researcher approached the

Christian education director of the selected church and requested that she connect with the children, their parents, and Sunday school teachers who met the following criteria.

#### Criteria for Selection of Children

The researcher sent the selection criteria for the children and their parents to the CE director, and she was the one who approached the participants and connected them to the researcher.

The following criteria were applied for the selection of the children

1. The child must be 8-10 years old, attending primary class in Sunday school.
2. Parents must be members of the church and they must have attended Sunday school when they were young.
3. The children must be doing well-all basic needs met, no food insecurity, no extraordinary financial struggles, no apparent crisis in the home, no other extraordinary crisis.
4. The children should not have undergone grief or loss of an immediate family member such as parents or siblings.
5. The children must be residing with the parents.
6. The child should have attended Sunday school since the beginner class.
7. The parents and other members of the immediate family such as parents and the siblings should not be seeking any long-term medical attention such as cancer treatment.
8. No members of the immediate family should be a person with a disability.
9. The parents should not be alcoholics.
10. The selected children should not be siblings.

### Criteria for the Sunday School Teacher's Selection

The researcher asked the Christian education director to recommend one male Sunday school teacher and one female Sunday school teacher who meet the following criteria:

1. Must be a member of the selected church since childhood and have attended Sunday school;
2. Must have at least 3-5 years of experience teaching Sunday school.

### Sample Size of the Population

The researcher is the best person to determine the number of participants (Patton 2002, 244). Usually, people do four to five cases, as increasing numbers of cases can negatively affect the depth of insight aimed for with the study (Creswell 2007). Deciding the number of participants to be selected depends on the number of people that will be adequate to respond to the purpose statement (Merriam 1998, 64). With the recommendation of the dissertation panel during the proposal defense, four boys and four girls (for a total of eight cases) were selected for this study. The researcher was given an option to add more cases if needed, however, this was not necessary. In addition to the children and their parents, two Sunday school teachers—one male and one female—were also interviewed. Accordingly, the total number of participants was 26.

### Rationale for the Selection of Age Group

The children interviewed were chosen from the primary class. The students in this class are all found within one of the categories of the four developmental theories mentioned in Figure 2. The child participants, who are all ages 8-10, fall between the

minimum age, i.e., seven and the maximum age, i.e., 12 years old. Furthermore, they all fit within one Sunday school classification, namely, the primary class.

**Table 1. Developmental Theories Age Classification**

<b>Sunday School Class Classification</b>	<b>Class</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Cognitive Theory Classification (Piaget)</b>	<b>Psycho-Social Development (Erikson)</b>	<b>Faith Development Theory (Fowler)</b>	<b>Moral Development Theory (Kohlberg)</b>
Beginner 1	Nursery, Kindergarten 1 and 2	3-6 years				
Beginner 2	Class 1 and Class 2	6-8 Years				
<b>Primary</b>	<b>Class 3 and Class 4</b>	<b>8-10 years</b>	<b>Concrete Operational 7-11 years</b>	<b>Industry and Inferiority 5-12 years</b>	<b>Mythic-Literal 7-12 Years</b>	<b>Conventional Age 7-11 years</b>
Junior	Class 5 and Class 6	10-12 Years				
Intermediate 1	Class 7	12-13 Years				
Intermediate 2	Class 8	13-14 Years				
Senior	Class 9 and 10	15-16 Years				

Secondly, participants ages 8-10 were selected because the case needs to be intrinsically bounded (Creswell 2007, 73). Finally, this age range was selected because at this age the thought process of the child is changing from concrete reality to the abstract understanding of beliefs. Karen Marie Yust uses the term ‘inquisitive mode’ (Yust 2004, 13) to define this stage because children in this stage are “interested in investigating the claims of their own and other traditions and naming their own beliefs” (Yust 2004, 14).

## **Ethical Considerations**

All participants must be protected in three areas for the research to be ethically considerate (Creswell and Poth 2018, 215). In fact, the three areas of protection were applied not only to all the children, but also to the parents and Sunday school teachers selected for the study.

To be ethically considerate, therefore, respect for persons in terms of privacy and content (Creswell and Poth 2018, 215) was implemented. To execute this first ethical consideration, the researcher explained the purpose of the study before the commencement of the interview or the discussion. Further, all the participants were assigned codes (Creswell and Poth 2018, 215) such as C1, C2 for the children; C1M, C1F, C2M, C2F and T1, T2, for the parents and the Sunday school teachers respectively so that the identity of the participants would be protected. Official permissions from the senior pastor and the CE director to conduct the study were also obtained. The researcher personally contacted the senior pastor over the phone to obtain a verbal permission followed by the official permission document sent through WhatsApp, and confirmation was received through WhatsApp messages since that was the most convenient means. The researcher also personally contacted the CE director over a zoom meeting. All the participants received explanations of the purpose of the study, the duration of the interview, their right to withdraw from the interview or discontinue, and the plans for using the information acquired (Creswell and Poth 2018, 232). For the interviews with children, since this study does not pose any physical or emotional risk, an informed consent was sought from either of the parents (Freeman and Mathison 26, 2008).

In addition to the consent signed by the parents (Appendix H) before interviewing their children, a verbal assent (guided by a written document) to willingly participate in the research was obtained from the children on the interview day (Appendix G). This assent from the children in addition to the consent from the parents was required because this study aims to allow children to contribute their ideas, seeing them as potential contributors of knowledge (Tinson 2009, 17). Furthermore, the children's assent was necessary because of the vulnerability of all children. All children, irrespective of their gender, race, caste, economic condition, are considered vulnerable because they are physically small, cognitively limited in their developmental capacity and knowledge attainment, and socially naïve, which renders them susceptible to manipulation (Freeman and Mathison 2008, 24). Finally, since the population of the study involved 8–10-year-old children who can make decisions regarding their participation in the research, their personal assent was essential (Tinson 2009, 18). The children's agreement to participate did not obligate them to participate in or complete the research process. They were free to leave the study at any time should they choose to discontinue (Tinson 2009, 20).

The second area of ethical consideration addresses the welfare of the participants who are interviewed as well as the researcher's welfare, a concern for individual welfare which aims to minimize harm and augment reciprocity (Creswell and Poth 2018, 215). As mentioned before, all children are considered vulnerable to exploitation because of their limited developmental level of maturity (Freeman and Mathison 2008, 24). However, this study did not carry any risk to the participants because the children selected do not fall under the category of Children at Risk (CAR). The Lausanne movement of Children at Risk also clarifies that if the people surrounding the child are



able to “meet the needs their vulnerability creates” (Lausanne Consultation on Children at Risk 2015), then those children are not considered children at risk.

Justice relating to the equal treatment and inclusivity of all the participants is the third criterion for ethical considerations. The researcher will maintain equal respect for the participants whether they are young or old.

### **Data-Gathering Instruments**

#### **In-Depth Interview (IDI)**

IDI served as one of the three data-gathering instruments in this study because the core purpose of the interviews is to uncover and appreciate the meaning that children construe through their lived experiences. Interviews do not simply serve as a lens for acquiring solutions, proving suppositions, or conducting appraisals (Seidman 2006, 9). Accordingly, since this study is about making spirituality accessible to children, it was important to give a voice to the children. Moreover, to validate the responses of the children and shed light on the perspectives of the children, interviews were also conducted with the parents of the children and the Sunday school teachers. Interviews value every person’s story (Seidman 2006, 9) so the researcher may view the behavior of a particular individual from their own perspective (Seidman 2006, 10). Individual interviews reveal that the voice of the person is valued. This was demonstrated by giving the interviewees undivided attention (Freeman and Mathison 2008, 101).

The interviewer and all the respondents engaged in a semi-structured formal interview. All participants were asked questions that allowed the researcher the flexibility to probe in any direction that their responses required for the purposes of the study. The interviewer followed the interview guide but allowed for open-ended questions that might

point away from the interview guide. Although employing open-ended questions could deviate from the focus of the discussion, it allowed the opportunity for a discovery of potential new ideas or thoughts. The interview guide (Appendix I) contains the list of questions. It also served as the checklist that helped balance venturing into new ideas with tracking the information needed to answer the research questions.

### Drawings

The use of drawings was second method of data collection. At the beginning of the study, the children were asked to draw a picture of God. This drawing was not intended to be, and was not, evaluated for any psychological or scientific understanding. Drawings served as a preliminary activity in building a rapport with the children to prepare them to talk about spirituality (Freeman and Mathison 2008, 114). Some children were hesitant to draw, and although they were encouraged to draw any symbol that represented their understanding of God, they still chose not to draw.

### Researcher's Journal

The third instrument for gathering data was documentation through journaling by the researcher herself. The use of journaling by researchers during their research has proven to be a highly effective tool to enhance and amplify the integrity of the research (Nanji 2007; Banks-Wallace 2008; Annink 2017). Journaling helps to clearly document the steps of the process that has been implemented and how it reached a certain conclusion (Tracy 2010, 841). In this study, the journal followed guidelines (Appendix J) adapted from Anne Annink's guide to qualitative research journaling (Anninik 2017).

## Observation

Observation was another crucial element, “a key tool” (Cresswell and Poth 2018, 232) in data collection. In order to enhance rich description in the form of “clarification, juxtaposition, discovery, confirmation, emphasis, illustration, elaboration, complementary, effect, corroboration, verification” (Denham and Onwuegbuzie 2013, 687), observation was employed in this study, specifically in the observation of non-verbal cues. Observation of non-verbal behavior is an important part of qualitative research. Observation also included using the senses and being aware of “physical settings, participants, interactions, conversations” (Creswell and Poth 2018, 232). One of the advantages of face-to-face interviews in this study was the researcher’s ability to capture the non-verbal facial and body expressions: “listening more carefully to the participants' voices, observing their facial expressions more intently, and deliberately using one's own facial expression to convey emotion and build a rapport” (Self 2021, 9). For this purpose, all interviews conducted were video and audio recorded with the permission of the participants. Video recordings have been recognized as an important source of observation (Morgan et al. 2017, 1061).

The non-verbal data was collected in three different levels. In the first level, the interviews were recorded in audio and video format with the permission of the participants. In the second level, a verbatim transcript was written using the audio recording. In the third level, the researcher watched the video recording and noted the body language, tones, etc.

## **Data Collection and Recording**

The CE director was the key person who connected the participants with the researcher. Over a brief Zoom meeting the researcher explained to the CE director the need for children, their parents, and Sunday school teachers who would fit her criteria to be part of the study. The interviews took place between a few days to two months after contacting the participants. This is because the children were in school, and they had assessment tests and exams almost every month which kept both the parents and the children involved. In some cases, both parents were also working professionals so neither the interview with the parents nor the children was possible. As a result, all interviews had to be postponed during the Christmas holidays. Another reason was that the researcher's set of criteria was detailed, and the CE director had to check the entire background of the child carefully because, although the researcher in her criteria mentions that "children should not have undergone grief-loss of an immediate family member such as parents and siblings," some families reside close to their grandparents, and they are very attached to the grandparents. In case of any sickness or death related to them, the child could have been experiencing grief which would disqualify them for the researcher's criteria. The researcher remains grateful to the CE director for her wisdom and assistance.

In addition, individual parent did not agree on doing this interview instantly because both the father and the mother had to both agree to the interview, not just one parent. When the parents were approached, they were grateful for the opportunity. At the same time, they were all reluctant at first because such interviews are new to our society, and an interview sounds more like evaluation than a conversational interaction. The

duration of the interview, 45 minutes to one hour for each session with the children and the parents, was cause for concern and serious consideration in agreeing to the research interviews.

For the data collection, the researcher personally visited the home of each participant. The children were interviewed first, followed by the parents. The average duration of the interviews were 45 minutes, 50 minutes, 60 minutes among the children, the parents and the Sunday school teachers respectively. Upon arrival, the researcher was ushered into the participants' house. The interview usually began with the researcher thanking the participants for their willingness to be a part of the study followed by an explanation of the purpose for the research interviews, and asking if they had any questions. The researcher then requested the parents to sign the consent in her iPad form for the child interview. After the parents exited the room, the interview started with the researcher explaining about the assent form to the child, responding to any questions, and then requesting and documenting the child's consent by having them sign and date the designated form. Upon completion of the interview, the researcher thanked the child and requested that the child, upon leaving, invite their parents to enter for their interview. The researcher then proceeded to explain and request their consent and sign the designated form. The same protocol was followed for the Sunday school teachers, with the exception of one Sunday School teacher interview being conducted in the church building rather than in their home.

For the children, the parents, and the Sunday school teachers, the study examined their understanding in the realm of spirituality and posed no risk within the family setting and the environment of the children. Nevertheless, for the children, the focus of the

interview was a discussion about God and, according to research studies, children usually shy away from talking about God at these ages (Hay and Nye 2006). For this reason, the nature of the study included the need for privacy and explanation in order to address these issues (Freeman and Mathison 2009, 54). However, the researcher noticed that the explanation was not necessary because, after signing the consent form, the parents asked the researcher if she preferred to interview the children alone or with parents present.

### **Data Processing and Analysis**

The researcher used her voice recorder as well as her cellphone to do the audio and video recordings. After the researcher exited the house, she would intentionally take a walk for a while to ponder and evaluate her experiences, especially with regard to what did and did not go well, for the sake of the following interviews. She would either do a voice recording or journaled it when she returned home. The researcher used her personal laptop and external hard drive for the interview backups including video and audio recordings which were carefully secured for the sake of confidentiality and preventing access by anyone other than the researcher. After securing the recordings each interview was transcribed verbatim in a Microsoft Word document.

The first round of data analysis was for the non-verbal observation with the aim to provide rich data. The researcher carefully watched all the research videos and noted the non-verbal observations such as body movements, tone of voice, posture, behavior. With the help of the verbatim transcript, the researcher tried to identify if the non-verbal behaviors were related to clarification, confirmation, emphasis, verification.

The second round of analysis was for the data write-up. After the non-verbal analysis, the researcher studied the verbatim transcript carefully, paying extra attention as

to how the non-verbal behavior could potentially affect the data. After this process, the researcher exported all the data to MAXQDA and analyzed the data according to the research question. The analyzation started by coding the data. According to Creswell and Poth, this is the essence of qualitative research, whereby it critically brings together all the data that is collected through the research instruments (Creswell and Poth 2018,259). The coding of the data was followed by categorizing it into themes for systematic organization (Creswell 2007, 167).

### **Validity and Credibility**

Research studies are often conducted in the areas of education not only to draw deeper insights in their field but also to enhance its practices and disseminate the findings to others in the form of theory and reliable practices (Merriam 1998, 198). To be able to reach this stage, the researcher needs to be rigorous. Validity and credibility can greatly enhance the rigor of a study (Merriam 1998). In this study, the following strategies were employed to amplify its validity and credibility: a) Triangulation b) Member checks c) Peer examination, and d) Reflexivity.

#### **Triangulation**

Undertaking research contributes to prevailing knowledge, but the question of its worthiness to be considered as a contribution remains a challenge. This is because there are many factors such as “interpretation based on the cultural, social, gender, class and personal politics that we bring to research” (Cresswell and Poth 2018, 302) that influence the process of research. This default aspect of bringing research to the table infused with personal interpretations can water down the credibility and validity of the research.

However, employing triangulation can enhance the value and reliability, and attenuate personal biases (Fusch, Fusch and Ness 2018). Triangulation requires the data to be collected using different methods such as “multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods” (Merriam 1998, 204). The concept of triangulation has strategic advantages: it “allows the researcher to reach a maximum of theoretical profit from using the same methods” (Flick 2007, 42). Although the point of using triangulation is to evaluate the consistency of the type of data yielded “through convergence of information from different sources” (Carter et al. 2014, 545), inconsistencies in the data findings using triangulation does not necessarily mean there are errors in the findings and does not weaken the credibility of the study (Patton 2002, 556). On the contrary, “understanding inconsistencies in findings across different kinds of data can be illuminative and important” (Patton 2002, 556). This study employed two kinds of triangulation, namely data triangulation and method triangulation.

#### Data Source Triangulation

Data source triangulation (Carter et al. 2014, 545) basically involves the notion of gathering data from different populations who are experiencing the “same phenomenon at different times, in various locations and with different persons” (Denizen; as cited in Flick 2007, 42). Data triangulation also aims at “discovering commonalities within dissimilar settings” (Fusch, Fusch and Ness 2018, 22). To comply with the criteria for data triangulation, the data about what methods allow children ages 8-10 access to spirituality towards resilience among the selected children in Nagaland, were gleaned from a) the children, b) their parents, and c) the Sunday school teachers through one-on-one interviews conducted with each participant individually (Fusch, Fusch and Ness



2018, 22). The major respondents of this research were the children. But for the purpose of data triangulation and obtaining enriched data, parents and Sunday School teacher participants were also included (Seidman 2006, 54).

While implementing data triangulation, one caution that has been pointed out is the concept of the originality of the responses from the participants. Multiple participants may draw data from the same source so there is a need for caution to see if “reports of the study” (Yin 2016, 88) from the verbal data triangulation are linked to each other because the data yielded might be from participants who have searched the same resource on the internet. However, in this study, the verbal data obtained was ensured of originality because this study involves personal reflection on experiences and responses from three perspectives: the child perspective, the parent perspective and the Sunday school teacher perspective.

#### Methodological Triangulation

Methodological triangulation is simply using different methods to study the same phenomenon (Carter et al. 2014). In this study the researcher applied three methods, namely, in-depth interview (IDI), journaling, and observation.

#### Member Checks

Member checks provide a way to check on the accuracy of the transcribed responses by taking the data back to the participants for review and clarification (Merriam 1998, 204). In this study, the researcher obtained permission from the participants and the authorities to be reinterviewed in case of a need for clarification, with

the goal to accurately and precisely record and analyze the data yielded from the participants.

### Peer Examination

Peer examination is the practice of “asking colleagues to comment on the findings as they emerge” (Merriam 1998, 204). In this study, in addition to the researcher’s advisor, the researcher also shared her findings with some of her fellow academic peers for the sake of constructive feedback.

### Reflexivity

Reflexivity is understood to be a “crucial” (Swinton and Mowatt 2006, 33) and “integral” (Swinton and Mowatt 2006, 57) aspect of research marked by “honesty and authenticity with one’s self, one’s research, and one’s audience” (Tracy 2010, 842). The researcher is the primary instrument (Merriam 1998) in qualitative research and because the researcher has control over “what is recorded, what and how it is recorded, what is deemed to be significant or insignificant and what will or not end up as a part of the final product” (Swinton and Mowatt 2006, 62), it does feel like the research is mostly from the perspective of researcher (Swinton and Mowatt 2006, 33). However, the greater the explicit self-awareness the researcher has, the greater the impact towards genuine interpretation. “The better a researcher is able to recognize his or her personal view of the world and to discern the presence of personal lenses, the better one is able to hear and interpret the behavior and reflections of others” (Fusch, Fusch and Ness 2018, 21). Being able to identify reflexivity in research does not in itself achieve integrity and

transparency, but it is a path towards enhancing the caliber of the research (Annik, Anne 2017, 3).

Reflexivity is critically important in the research process, and it cannot be ignored, so in order to tap this useful resource, the researcher documented observations and reflections in a research journal. This practice reinforced the validity of the study. To be validated requires clear identification of the means to the end, “the researcher’s ability to show convincingly how they got there, and how they built confidence that this was the best account possible” (Richards 2015; as cited in Merriam and Tisdell 2016, 252). Using the journal presented the evidence of how the research came to a certain conclusion.

### **Reliability**

According to Merriam and Tisdell, “Reliability refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated” (Merriam and Tisdell 2016, 250). This research is about spirituality, information that would emerge from personal reflection. It is impossible to expect research to be replicated precisely because “Human behavior is not static” (Merriam and Tisdell 2016, 250). No two individuals are the same and the aim of qualitative research in itself is to try its best to examine the uniqueness of how individuals perceive things from their own perspective (Merriam and Tisdell 2016, 250). On one hand, the more interpretations, the more valuable, but, on the other hand, the influx of variant interpretations could lead to a question of how to measure the standard and establish a “benchmark by which to take repeated measures and establish reliability in the traditional sense” (Merriam and Tisdell 2016, 250). Many people experiencing the same phenomena does not make the study reliable in social sciences (Merriam and Tisdell 2016, 251). This puts forward the question of what can make a study reliable. In

the present study reliability was substantiated from two areas, namely, a) Generalizability and b) Rich and thick description.

### Generalizability

The concept of generalizability usually involves the application of findings more generally in different situations. However, to be able to generalize findings is neither the aim nor the task of the qualitative researcher (Swinton and Mowatt 2006, 46).

Nonetheless, the benchmark to attain generalizability will be substantiated in two ways. Firstly, for the readers to be able to discern and contextualize the research findings in their own contexts, the researcher will give ample details of the study (Merriam and Tisdell 2019, 256). Secondly, the researcher gives authority to the reader to be the sole decision maker in considering whether the study suits their context (Merriam and Tisdell 2016, 256).

The goal of this study was not to find insights for the purpose of generalization, but will nevertheless be guided by the notion of an in-depth understanding for the sake of creating awareness, generating knowledge, and contributing to the greater literature of understanding a particular phenomenon in a broader context.

### Rich Description

The second method to establish reliability is to provide a rich quality and quantity of description. The aim here was to allow the reader to be immersed in the study so that they may use their own discernment (Swinton and Mowatt 2006, 843). Rich description gives readers the space to be able to immerse themselves in the research and draw their own understanding. The aim of rich description in this study is to attain data both in

terms of quantity and quality, meaning “in-depth but still thoroughly partial understanding of the issue” (Tracy 2010, 844).

Crystallization is one way of obtaining a rich and thick description. According to Tracy, “Crystallization encourages researchers to gather multiple types of data and employ various methods, multiple researchers and numerous theoretical frameworks.” Crystallization in this study will be reflected in the form of gleaning data from the children, parents, and Sunday school teachers, and by employing multiple research methods such as in-depth interviews, journaling, and observation. The layers of data that will be produced through crystallization will contribute towards providing a quality description of the study.

### **Summary**

Chapter III discusses the research method employed in the study. The research approach is case-study and is qualitative in design. This study employed two kinds of triangulation for data collection, namely, data source triangulation which includes responses from the children, the parents, and Sunday school teachers; and methodological triangulation in the form of in-depth interviews, observation, and the researcher’s journaling. The other elements of the research design such as sample selection technique, sample selection criteria, data collection procedure, and instruments for data collection such as interviews, observation, drawings, journaling, and ethical considerations are also enumerated in depth. This study also further discusses how the data gleaned was analyzed for the study. Finally, the concept of the validity and reliability of the study has been discussed in detail.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA**

This chapter discusses the research findings based on the interviews, non-verbal observations, and journaling, with the aim of identifying patterns, themes, and categories for exploring methods of access to spirituality towards resilience.

The analysis was performed in several stages. The interviews were recorded in both video and audio format. A verbatim transcript was written using the recordings and, after reading and studying the scripts, the data were exported to MAXQDA to identify the themes.

The purpose of this research was to explore methods that would allow access to spirituality towards resilience among the selected 8-10 year old children in the context of a selected Baptist Church in Nagaland.

The significance of the study lies in the valuable insights, principles and practices gleaned that could help or possibly hinder children's access to spirituality. This study has the potential to motivate readers to ponder the attitudes and actions they put forth when working with children, and to validate whether their attitudes and actions serve as a hindrance or a stepping stone towards children's access to personal spirituality. In addition, this study has the prospective benefit of increasing openness among parents or any adult working with children so that they may be encouraged to be confident in their efforts to enhance children's access to spirituality towards resilience.

The findings of this study were guided by the criteria *Space, Process, Imagination, Relationship, Intimacy, and Trust*, and how these criteria allow access to spirituality towards resilience among selected 8-10 year old children from the context of a selected Baptist Church in Nagaland. The research questions on each of the six criteria provided a focus for each of the research questions yet with the aim of open-ended rather than pre-determined expectations or assumptions. As a qualitative study, the research findings about access to spirituality towards resilience were determined inductively from the interview interactions. This research portrays the voices of children on how spirituality can be made accessible for the sake of resiliency. Conducting the interviews with the children, their parents and selected Sunday school teachers provided multiple avenues for the researcher to gain a nuanced perspective and to cross-check responses. As the researcher started conducting the interviews, it was clear that the responses from the various participant individuals or groups would either corroborate, complement or contradict with one another. For the sake of transparency and in depth understanding, the researcher included non-verbal data, journal reflections, and the rationale for insights described.

It is the researcher's hope that readers will vicariously experience what she encountered and come to a deeper owned understanding of how spirituality can be made accessible for the purpose of building resiliency in children.

Initially, the process of writing the verbatim transcripts was quite excruciating because of the intensive in-depth interviews. Eventually, however, as the researcher processed the interview encounters, she found a deep sense of fulfillment from the interview experience and findings. The authenticity of the children, the parents, and the

Sunday school teachers resonated in their voices. None of the respondents were in a hurry to finish the interviews. Participants responded to the questions with openness, honesty and transparency. The researcher concluded each interview with a deep sense of gratitude for their gracious hospitality, their serious, respect-filled investment, openness, and vulnerability. And because of this, the researcher was determined to do justice to their investment by meticulously studying, interpreting, and presenting the findings.

The audio and video recordings were especially advantageous for immersion in the study for the sake of analysis and interpretation (Every participant gave consent for video and audio recording except C5, who only consented to the audio recording). Firstly, these recordings allowed for extensive review with precise documentation of the participants' voices. Secondly, the video allowed for the observation of non-verbal behaviors. The non-verbal instrument in this study was employed to add richness to the data collected. In addition, in some cases, the recordings served to maximize the authentication of corresponding non-verbal behaviors.

The researcher's journal helped the researcher to note the physical setting, contact dates, and thoughts which emerged before, during, and after the interviews. The journal contributed to her study in the following three ways:

1. The journal provided a space for the researcher to note her reactions and prevent influencing the responses of participants.
2. The journal provided a space for the researcher to process her discomforts when participants would responded with silence.



3. The journal provided space for the researcher to design neutral responses to participants' questions in order to prevent influencing participants' responses to the researcher's questions.

Children need access to spirituality for the sake of resilience when faced with ordinary as well as extraordinary challenges in daily life. This research project aimed to identify and come to a deeper understanding of the possible and various methods that allow children to access spirituality. The research findings described in this chapter reveal and confirm the manifold and multi-dimensional nature of methods for access to spirituality. The narrative and in-context quality of the research process yielded praxis-grounded, as opposed to theory-limited, insight. The findings are organized in response to the six research questions implemented.

**Table 2. Demographic Profile**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Designation</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>
<b>C1</b>	Sunday school student	8 years	Boy
<b>C2</b>	Sunday school student	8 years	Boy
<b>C3</b>	Sunday school student	10 years and 4 months	Boy
<b>C4</b>	Sunday school student	10 years	Boy
<b>C5</b>	Sunday school student	10 years	Girl
<b>C6</b>	Sunday school student	10 years	Girl
<b>C7</b>	Sunday school student	10 years	Girl
<b>C8</b>	Sunday school student	10 years	Girl
<b>T1</b>	Sunday School teacher	-	Female
<b>T2</b>	Sunday School teacher	-	Male

## Research Question 1

IN WHAT WAYS DOES *SPACE* ALLOW ACCESS TO SPIRITUALITY TOWARDS RESILIENCE AMONG THE SELECTED CHILDREN IN NAGALAND?

**Sunday school and church participation play a vital role in providing *space* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.**

*“I would go to the church and spend time with God. Not like playing around or like, but like worshipping, closing our eyes and, like, telling him to help your family- C3*

Children find church and Sunday school a designated *space* where God is available/accessible to them, and where they can freely focus on and encounter God.

C4 is a 10-year-old boy who loves singing and listening to music. He states, “In the church I can connect with God as I pray to him in the church about my problems and stuff like that. Nothing can stop me from telling him whatever, even in Sunday School.” Children know that church is a place where they find God and so a careful attention needs to be paid to the space where they come to worship God. A previous study conducted about child-friendly churches also confirmed that children consider church as a place where they can find God (Sangi 2017, 80), even when they are going through different circumstances. It is clear from this example that children find church to be a space where God is available/accessible to them, and where they can freely focus on God and encounter him, “telling him whatever.”

Children recognize, value, and take seriously the *space* provided to encounter God in church

C3 turned 11 years old two months ago when the interview was conducted and he loves listening to sermons through podcasts. When he was asked if there is any place where he can go to be with God, he mentioned church: “I would go to the church and spend time with God. Not like playing around or like [that], but like worshipping, closing

our eyes, and, like, telling him to help your family.” The response confirms that the church is a place where they do their “spiritual work” (Nye 2009, 43). Children recognize, value, and take seriously the space provided for them to encounter God in church/SS; “not like playing around.”

The care/condition of the physical *space* send a message to children that can help or hinder a child’s access to spirituality.

C1 is an 8-year-old boy who is a keen and cautious child and who, with the help of his father, studied the COVID-19 virus that caused the pandemic. When C1 was asked if there is anything he would change about Sunday school, he said, “I would probably like the change the Sunday school to the old Sunday school because the toilets are very dirty. . . . So many spider webs, stuff, right, [in] the water so I don’t even want to flush.” Sunday school rooms are places where the children do their spiritual work. Places where children meet with God should be welcoming to children because this demonstrates the importance that adults place on children meeting with God (Nye 2009, Berryman 1991).

Church /Sunday School provide *space* for encountering God through relationships / interactions with others.

C8’s father stated, “To search for God, to pray or other things, we can do it in any place, but especially to search the Word of God in Sunday school, church and crusades are some of the places that are important for them. Even if we raise them at home, they also need to see how their peers live, and their understandings also need to broaden—even in the case of searching for God—in that way their thinking will broaden.” Similarly, C4’s mother also asserts the importance of how children learn about God through interactions with others: “They also see how their friends behave, their

friends' conduct, how to search for God, how they pray, praying together, singing together.”

Sunday school and church are crucial in allowing access to spirituality towards resilience because it is outside the home where children get to see the way other children live their faith and to learn from that. Churches and Sunday schools are a space set apart from other activities and provide opportunity for undistracted focus on spiritual matters.

**The home environment is an important *space* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.**

*“The seed is planted in the home; no matter what they teach in SS, or no matter what they teach in church nothing will grow because, if we do not plant the seed, what can grow?”* - Father of C1

#### The home as a foundation for spiritual nurture

C1's father stated that the home is crucial space for children where the seed about God can be sown, and Sunday school will “enhance what is in their hearts.” However, he stresses that “the foundation is set at home.” C1's father also states that when the spiritual foundation at the home is nurtured, the tendency for children to go to Sunday school is out of the children's own willingness, not “forced,” and this has an advantage for children because “They can start opening up their minds, start learning thing (*“Hmmm,” says the wife as a sign of confirmation, and nods her head in agreement*).” C1's father asserts that Sunday school is indispensable. “Sunday school and church are very much necessary for their spiritual growth.” Nevertheless, home is where the foundation is laid. “To start that initiation process (*with emphasis on each word, spoken at a slow pace*), it should start at home (*soft voice but with firmness*).”

In addition to C1's father, several other fathers also indicated the importance of the home as the foundation for children's spiritual nurture: "For children to know God, everything starts from home" - C8's father; "The way we raise them at home is crucial because, when everything is taken into consideration, the basics of learning about God starts at home"- C4's father. It is encouraging to learn that the parents understand that 'home' is a crucial place of spiritual nurture. However, that perspective of 'home' is interesting because all these parents and their spouses were also raised in Sunday school, and they still attest that home is foundational. The point is not meant to undermine the role of Sunday school, but to elucidate and strengthen the concept of 'home' as pivotal in laying the foundations of children's spiritual nature. Only when the children have the foundation of spirituality, will they have the option to access it or to strengthen it.

C3 also recalls that during the pandemic they were not able to go to church, but they would pray at home. He was able connect with God and felt close to God, and he testified to a sense of joy at being able to connect with God at home. "Like, Sundays, if we can't go to church, like, especially in covid, during the pandemic, right? We used to pray at home, so I felt [my] heart rate feeling very strong. I could feel the Holy Spirit surrounding [my] heart-not the human heart, but the spiritual heart. That is why I felt joy."

#### The home as a base for spiritual teaching

When the question was asked about the best space where children can connect with God, T2, who has been a Sunday school teacher for over 10 years and who is a father himself, stated, "The best is nothing more than the family." T2 also stated that once the children leave the house, they are exposed to other environments which can add to

their confusion. “In some of the schools now [we] are not taking it seriously but, even in Nagaland, many parents are allowing their children to go to central schools.” According to T2, the problem with central schools is, “There they are trying to [diminish] God. They are allowed to do yoga. They are allowed to do some universal spiritual things.” This can eventually spawn perplexities, “So, [children] will be confused. So, if another confusion is added to their confusion, there will be no solution.” This implies that when spiritual understanding does not have an anchor at home, the school environment can be bewildering to children because they do not have control of spiritual practices that are imposed in schools, even practices that contradict their Christian values. Furthermore, parents need to be aware of the kind of school they send their children to because it may drastically affect the spirituality of the children, especially if the foundations of spirituality are not strong at home. This would then be a potential hindrance for access to spirituality towards resilience.

Based on the above findings, the home environment is seen to be a crucial *space* that allows access to spirituality because home is the foundation for spiritual nurture and the core base for spiritual teaching.

**Physical places where children are comfortable and familiar are an important *space* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.**

*“Researcher: When you are scared or worried, is there any special place you can meet with God?”*

*C2: My private room”*

The case of C2: When he was asked if there is any special place where he can meet with God when he is worried, he replied, “My private room.” The researcher clarified if he is referring to his bedroom and he replied “yes.” He also stated that he

usually talks to God when he is worried. “Aaaah, when I am, like, worried, or scared, or waking up from a very scary dream sometimes.” This is particularly when he wakes up while everybody is asleep. “Midnight at 3:00 a.m. is the scariest part.” He even described his physical state when he is worried, saying, “You know when I am worried, I sweat a lot (*using his fingers, shows me how sweat drips on his face*), my hands and my teeth will be, like, rattl[ing] a little bit (*the fingers in front of the mouth and allowing the finger movements to describe the word rattle*).” For C2, his bedroom is also a ‘private’ place which can be a very personal space, a space where he connects to God, a space where he thinks about God, where he talks to God, a place he has access to God, a place where his faith is tested when he wakes up scared in the middle of the night, a place where he feels safe, a place where he can “talk to God in his mind,” a familiar place, a place where he can have access to spirituality in his own way, at his own pace.

The case of C3: When C3 was asked the question, “is there any place in the house where you can connect with God when you are worried and scared?” he responded, “Yeah, in my bedroom.” When the researcher further asked, “What sort of things do you talk about to God?” he respectfully declined to answer and said, “Well, I do not want to talk about this” (*he clenched his fingers as he said this*). The researcher could sense a sort of tension and discomfort in his voice as he said this. It was the researcher’s deepest desire to know what he talks to God about because he mentioned that he talks to God when he is worried or scared, and that was what exactly what the researcher was studying. But this is also where the researcher had to draw the line and not further interrogate because the child declined to answer that. All that was left for the researcher was the verbatim transcript of the interview to at least get an idea of making a connection

as to why he declined to respond. And this later part of the conversation possibly adds understanding as to why he declined.

Researcher: What do children fear?

C3: If they talk about the things, they . . . for example, like, if someone was asking them about their family's privacy, right? I mean, like the things that you are not supposed to talk about it, they get worried, fearful.

Researcher: Why fearful?

C3: Because if they talk about the bad stuff of the family, the dark side, then the people also might share [it] with other people.

Researcher: So children fear that they might speak it out or something like that? How about you? What do you fear?

C3: Like . . . the same thing.

Maybe there is "bad stuff of the family, the dark side" that makes C3 scared and worried and unable to share with anybody else, so he shares it only with God. Maybe C3 feels that there are some things that can only be shared with God, so he decided to decline to answer when the researcher asked the questions. Regardless of the accuracy of these assumptions, one conclusion that can be drawn for sure is that his bedroom is a safe space where he can have access to spirituality when he is worried or scared.

In addition to C2 and C3, C7, an 8-year-old girl, also responded that her bedroom is a special place where she would go to when she wants to talk with God. This also indicates that familiar and comfortable spaces such as a bedroom matter to children when it comes to having access to God. In addition, C1's father's response also substantiates the understanding that familiar and comfortable places allow children to access to spirituality. He states, "I think, you know, like, the best place would be when they are busy doing their own thing in their own comfortable place, like, for instance, with my kids in their playroom or in this room. . . . It might be in their own room, it might be in



my library, but when they are alone, when they are doing their own thinking process, I think that is the place where they can understand or find God.”

It is evident from the responses of the children and the parent that familiar and comfortable spaces such as a bedroom can be an important physical space that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.

**Emotional and auditory *space* as an important space that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.**

*“I think we should not be too judgmental. If they come to us, if the moment they share their problems, and we say no, it must be your problem.” - C2’s Mother*

Listening before assuming and judging

The case of C4’s mother: C4’s mother says that the best part of being a mother is to see her children who are growing up and displaying the qualities of being kind, speaking carefully, and treating people well. C4’s mother recalled an incident that made her reflect on the importance of listening to children and creating an emotional space. C4’s mother recollected:

Based on what I think, because I have experienced that with my daughter, once she returned from school very sad. But, [as] I was observing that and she would not talk unnecessarily, I was giving her [a] shower [and] I asked her what happened. She said nothing happened, she did not even look up, just [turning] her face towards the wall. So, I asked her in a gentle way, talking to her, telling her, “Tell me what happened,” and I said, “I will not scold you,” because, most of the time, we are, like, maybe “because you did this” or maybe “because you did that,” and I end up scolding them, so sometimes it is also like it is their fault, sometimes they are scared that we might scold them like it is their fault.

Listening to children conveys a message of hope, care, and acceptance without judgement (Wright 2006, 66), and this is confirmed in the response of one of the mothers who stated that children should be listened to first without judging and scolding them

when they are going through difficult times. The scolding approach when children are in a difficult situation is one parenting style among Naga parents, i.e., tough love, sort of a way to make sure that the child will always be doing right and will not be the bad child in any situation that arises. This is based on the researcher's experience and observation. Notice also that C4's mother used the word "we." The usage of the word "we" could be a reference to the husband or to the other parents too (who scold the children when they are in trouble instead of comforting the child). Certainly it is not her alone. It is evident that the mother is trying to make a change, trying a different approach, to be gentle in her attitude towards her child.

Then I told her to look at me and she started crying. I am giving her a bath, but you know it, right? Then I asked her what happened, [mentioning] issues with classmates, this happens daily (*meaning this is not a first-time incident*). [Then] she started [crying]. That is the time I replied, I think that is how, when they share it with us, that time when we can reply to them in [a] good way . . . the way we reply. First listen to them and then encourage them from the word of God, tell [them] that even though people are difficult, do not provoke them. After that, I saw changes in our relationship. The way we respond matters.

The tears demonstrated to the mother that the change of her parenting style worked! Rather than automatically drawing a conclusion and imposing beliefs or lecturing the child, it was crucial for C4's mother to listen to what her child had to say. By listening carefully to the needs of her children, C4's mother made emotional and auditory space accessible. Adults believe that they know best for their children, yet, it might be one of those needs of the child which makes it crucial to listen to what they have to say from their perspective (Stonehouse and May 2010, 15). C4's mother was able to allow the child to have access to spirituality towards resilience by making a change in her usual parenting style. She did this by allowing the child to be safe first, listening to her and then sharing about God.

The case of C2's mother: She is a dedicated, loving, and caring mother who even gave up her job to take care of the children. She believes that children need to be given a space to validate their emotions without judging them when they are going through difficult times. C2's mother stated, "I think we should not be too judgmental. If they come to us, if the moment they share their problems, and we say no, it must be your problem." The words of C2's mother make clear that listening to children also means allowing children to express their personal views (Stonehouse and May 2010, 15). The attitude of tough love parenting described by the mother of C4 was also evident in the words spoken by the mother of C2, "Maybe you did something wrong." However, she points out that this could be a hindrance: "If I start by saying something like that, then how can they feel free to approach me?" The approach that she uses is to listen first, regardless of the reason why the child is going through difficult times. "I just listen quietly. I try to take it seriously; I must listen intently. It may even be my child's fault, but I just listen first and then try to figure [things] out." This affirms the importance of listening rather than scolding. The words "quietly," "seriously," and "intently" also affirm that the attitude of listening to children matters. Listening to children cannot be taken lightly. C2's mother makes clear that when children are going through a difficult time, it is particularly crucial to first respond by making a space for the children to safely express themselves instead of parents making their own conclusions and judging the children.

The case of C3's mother: This is a case of choosing to make an intentional change. The mother of C3 is happy that her son is now growing up, maturing, and asking so many questions that sometimes she must go back to her books and study them to

answer him. For C3's mother, listening is about understanding—"When we listen, we also learn what they are going through. We understand their part, their story. When we listen, we also know if they really understand. Even then the children will think, "Yeah, somebody is listening to me . . . yeah, that is very important." C3's mother also indicated that the role of being a parent in a particular culture may be a factor that could be a hindrance towards listening to children. She stated, "We also become, like, knowing all, we know everything—'Just keep quiet and listen.' . . . We do that a lot in our culture. I think we should listen to them, then we will know." This statement confirms two ideas, firstly, that an environment of power and autonomy can be a hindrance to making hospitable spaces with children (Eaude 2014); and secondly, that constructing or diminishing emotional spaces depends on the attitude of the adults (Brooks 1994). And diminishing emotional space results in depriving children of the chance to draw resilience through emotional skills (Dan and Cairone 2014). The responses of C3's mother bring attention to the potential role and significant impact that the parent's attitude and the concept of culture can have in the process of listening to children.

As the researcher reflected on the emotional and auditory space as recognized by the mothers of C2, C3 and C4, she was reminded about a statement made by C2's father and C5's mother when the parents of C2 and C5 were asked what makes children worried. This was what she had to say:

C2's father: (*Immediately responds*) "Are they [ever] worried?" (*Slightly laughs as he speaks.*)

C5's mother: "Ever since [they were babies, whether] we have enough or not, we have brought them up in a way that they feel they have all they need, so they do not bother about anything."

It is important to note that the families that the researcher interviewed are children who are doing well. So, this mother's comment made the researcher wonder if parents in general would feel like their children do not need emotional or auditory space, or even have spiritual needs if the parents have provided for all their material needs?

The findings reveal that (a) listening "intently" even though it may be the "child's fault" and "trying to figure things out;" and, (b) choosing to listen to children despite living in a culture where parents "know [it] all" and tend to say, "[Just] keep quiet and listen," are helpful steps that aid in creating emotional and auditory space that allows access to spirituality.

**Understanding that God can be connected with from anywhere regardless of *space* is an important aspect that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.**

*"... because ... every place is a special place ... to pray ... to God."- C7*

C7 is an 8-year-old girl and she loves spending time with her younger siblings. When she was asked, "Do you think children have special places where they can connect with God when they feel sad or scared?" she gave much thought to the question and responded:

C7: "Well ... I don't think so because ... [every] place is a special place ... to pray ... to God." (*Wow!*)

According to studies, other venues besides the church play a significant role in assisting children to meet with God, so being aware and open to the idea that children may meet with God helps them to broaden their concept of God anyplace (Reimer and Furrow 2001, 14, Stonehouse and May 2010, 42). So, on one hand the researcher felt that this insight from C7, "[Every place] is a special place to pray," was a strong statement to

support the notion that children's access to spirituality through prayer is not limited to any physical place. C7's body language in the form of smiles and other body movements initially left the researcher skeptical about the sincerity of her response. However, when C7's mother was asked the same question, she replied, "It can be anywhere, since they are going to school, I tell them to always say a prayer before they go to school or before they go for [an] exam. So, a brief one second having interaction or talking to God, that can help them a lot. . . . There doesn't have to be [a special] place where you can talk to God, it is not like that." The mother's response clearly indicates that C7's response was not simply to please the researcher. Whether the child was parroting her mother, or thinking deeply for herself about God, it is clear from the interviews that the understanding that God is accessible regardless of the physical space is an important aspect of space that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.

It is conspicuous from the responses of the children, parents, and Sunday teachers that *space* as a method of access to spirituality is evidenced in the forms of physical spaces to connect with God, emotional and auditory spaces as the bridge to allow the access to spirituality, and delimiting the understanding that God can be accessible only in specific places.

## **Research Question 2**

IN WHAT WAYS DOES ***PROCESS*** ALLOW ACCESS TO SPIRITUALITY TOWARDS RESILIENCE AMONG THE SELECTED CHILDREN IN NAGALAND?

**Verbal assurance is an important aspect of *process* that allows children access to spirituality towards resilience.**

*"For them, even when they are going through difficult times, we can assure them that God is there"-C6 father*

C2 states that his parents are the best people to talk to about God and he also feels comfortable talking about God with them. C2's father's response strengthens C2's statement that his parents are the best people to talk about God. C2's father states that sometimes children need a verbal assurance as a reminder that God is everywhere. "One day our son asked, '[Is] God here?' (*surprised expression*) I replied, 'Yeah, he is. We don't see him, but he is here; he is everywhere. Then he said, 'Oh, really!' So, that kind of assurance, I believe children need it." C2 also said that his parents help him by telling him about God when he is scared at night when one of them "stays with you, telling you not to be scared . . . saying that God is with you." C2's mother also mentioned that when children go through difficult times, they learn to seek God through the encouragements of the parents. She says, "Talking about God, encouraging them, so I am not a theologian, he (the father) is not a theologian, but [with] the little faith that we have, we also try to tell them that God is with them in all that they do. We need to trust God. We need to fear God." C2 is at an age where he is not yet able to accept the abstract concept of God. Yet, as C2 sees his parents put their trust in God, it gives him the assurance that God can be trusted (Brown 1981, 30).

C1 also mentioned that he learns to trust God during difficult times because his parents tell him about God, "Like, trust in God and don't lose faith and don't be scared, don't be scared in [different] places."

C6's father stated that his 8-year-old C6 might not yet understand or fully grasp when her father verbally assures her of God's comforting presence. However, he asserts that it is still the duty of the parents to raise their children in a way that assures them of God's presence. "For them, even when they are going through difficult times, we can

assure them that God is there.” C6’s father states that the way children are raised is crucial because, regardless of children’s ability to feel the presence of God, it is sure that “[children] are following the parents’ beliefs and how they are nurtured.” C6’s father also remarks that maybe [C6] might not get a clear picture of God or may not feel the presence of God, and he cannot judge, but he is sure that [C6] still thinks that God is there because that is what they tell her.

C8’s father said that when children experience fear, they can be given comfort as they are verbally reassured about the comforting presence of God—“It is okay, child, God is here, God will help us. Do not be scared and do not be afraid. If we trust in God, everything will be all right. Even if they are scared, we tell them [that] God is everywhere, God sees everything.” When C8’s parents were asked, “Can children really experience God just by verbally assuring them when they are going through a difficult time?” C8’s mother said she believes that verbal assurance does work because of the godly environment that children are raised in. In the words of C8’s mother,

[When] we raise them [in the] home, we raise them with the understanding that God is with us, that God is loving and forgiving. God and Jesus died on Calvary. That is why the precious blood of Jesus Christ washes away the sins of those who believe they will be saved. Even us, from our own homes, we raise them with that understanding. Even in Sunday school they teach about who God is. So even if children do not literally see God but by the way we tell them about him, even if all children do not understand, for some children [we] raise them that way [in order to] help them understand the comforting presence of God I believe.

The responses from C2 and C1 elucidate that when they are going through difficult times, verbal assurance about the comforting presence of God helps them. In congruence, even the parents—C6’s father, C8’s father, and C8’s mother—confirm that verbal assurance about the comforting presence of God is what they can give to children



when they are going through a difficult time so that they can have access to spirituality towards resilience. However, for C6's father and C8's mother, the verbal assurance about the comforting presence of God needs to go hand in hand with raising and nurturing children in a godly way.

It is apparent from the responses of the children that verbal assurance from their parents allows them to have access to God to be resilient. This insight from the children is also supported by the responses of their parents. However, the literature indicates that there could be a potential hindrance to allowing access to spirituality towards resilience when verbal assurances are given with the intention of providing instant comfort rather than journeying with the children to make meaning, because all children go through difficult situations, a reality that will continue as they live their lives (Eaude 2009, 190). Csinos and Beckwith agree and assert that statements such as "God will always take care of us or God will help us never to be afraid" (Csinos and Beckwith 2013, 95) are true. Nevertheless, they also mention that those statements are "simplified versions of much more complex, ambiguous and paradoxical ideas" (Csinos and Beckwith 2013, 95). The danger of using such statements, according to them, is that it is like telling the children that there is no other way to experience God (Csinos and Beckwith 2013, 95).

Although the field research results are apparently incongruent with what the literature states, the researcher asserts that both the research finding as well as the literature are true. The researcher confirms that she herself found comfort when she was reassured even as a child, and now, too, with the statement "God will always take care of us." Yet she also remembers that (as stated in the introduction in Chapter 1), as a child, this concept of God did not fit in her fears. So how does the researcher draw a conclusion

to resolve this dichotomy? The researcher believes that although there is truth in the field research results, the literature also adds insights in the following ways. Firstly, verbal assurances are necessary in allowing children to have access to God when they are going through difficult times, but it is also equally crucial to give opportunities to children to reflect on their spirituality by dialoging with the children instead of just talking at them. Secondly, parents may not be aware of the risks of just verbally comforting children with the word of God without giving them the opportunity to reflect on it. Thus, raising awareness could be one of the implications.

**Encouraging children to pray in all situations is a significant aspect of process that allows children to access spirituality towards resilience.**

*“Any problem, pray to God”-T2*

T2 has been teaching Sunday school for the past three years and one of the experiences that she shared was that, in Sunday school, children come from all different kinds of families, but she encourages all the children to pray to God in all kinds of circumstances. “When we teach the child, from the lesson also, we always tell them, like, if you have any problem, pray to God. He is there to listen to your prayer and answer your prayer. Even if there are things that you cannot tell your parents or best friend, tell God. God is not going to scold you but listen to your prayer, and God will help you.” T2 also states that the importance of helping children to understand that prayer is a weapon that does not have a space or time limit. “Prayer does not have to be in a specific place, but while walking [or] while sitting we can always pray to God any time.” She also said there was a child who came and told her, “I was not feeling well, but it was God, because of God, I am cured, and I am able to come to the church.”

**Parents giving children opportunities to pray by themselves in their presence is an important aspect of *process* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.**

*“We tell her to pray by herself, but we are with them” -C7’s mother*

When the parents’ of C7 were asked how they can help children so that they can trust God by themselves during difficult times, C7’s mother replied, “We usually tell them to pray by themselves, but we are with them.” C7’s father narrated an incident about C7, “Usually our daughter, she finds it hard to sleep sometimes, and she takes the faith of prayer, she prays and sleeps.” C7’s mother adds, “Sometimes she would even pray five [or] six times also before she falls asleep; she would keep on praying.”

C6’s parents are also of the view that, instead of parents always praying for the children, it is crucial that children are given opportunities to pray. In the words of C6’s father, “Instead of us always talking and sharing, we must give them time also. Sometimes we say that sometimes you should pray. We should also give space to them to pray because we are raising them, but when we do not give them space, it becomes like a routine only, they are not able to experience anything. If we give them space, it is something that they themselves are experiencing.”

**Allowing children to reflect on what they know about God gives children opportunity to understand God in their own way, and this can be an important aspect of *process* needed for access to spirituality towards resilience.**

The case of C1: When C1 was asked if there was any Bible story that he would like to share, he closed his eyes and started thinking. He said, “What was that again, Noah and the ark?” (*He sounded like he was guessing*). Although C1 did not narrate the whole story, he said that the story of Noah was “pretty interesting.” When asked what the story of Noah reminds him [about] God, he answered, “God is there to help. He gave

wisdom to know how to build the ark even without any education.” Like any other school-going child, school life is important to C1. Academic pressure is real and he is able to recollect precisely, “Like... . . . when I got, like . . . how do you say? . . . 16 out of 18 on my socials exam.” “Like, when I get fifth on my, how do you say, second evaluation, I got fifth on my second evaluation, grammar, I wrote bigger as ‘biger’ so I was so angry and disappointed (*smiles again*).” Even before the interview, when C1 was asked if he had any questions, he said, “This is not like [an] exam, right”? Even in the middle of the interview, C1 suddenly asked a question, “How do [you remember] all these questions you are asking me?” Now all these statements make sense of why C1 chose the story of Noah. C1 was not able to narrate the story exactly how the Bible says. In fact, he just wrapped it up by saying “pretty interesting.” However, when asked what the story reminds him about God, the words “God, help, wisdom, education” were clear in his reply, and these words are all related to academics. C1 knew the story of Noah and knowing that story was providing him with access to spirituality, to trust in God to help him when he is worried about academics.

The case of C3: He chose the story of David and Goliath: “I really like David and Goliath, because since David was a righteous person and he protected his lambs from a lion, because he also killed the lion. I found it very shocking that he killed such a ferocious being. And he knew that God was with him, that is why he did not fear to fight Goliath” When asked what that story reminds him about God, he responded, “So it is that the moral, it is that, like, God is always with you and he will never leave you.” Perhaps C3 was trying to connect the story with his current state of understanding God and putting his trust in God. C3 said he was worried about death, “because some people have

theories like, after death, that there could be an empty void, and it will just be complete darkness. Or else some people also say that there might be an afterlife. People come up with different theories about death, right? So the thing that I believe the most is about after [this] life.” Then, at the end of the interview, when the researcher asked him if he had any questions, he asked, “Do you . . . believe that God really made the world, or the Big Bang theory?” Perhaps the story of David and Goliath reminded C3 that even though he is struggling to understand who God is, God will never leave him.

The case of C4: He said Genesis was the only story he could think of at that time. He said, “The times when God created heaven and earth, called the dark night and the light day, and he made fishes and animals and when he made Adam from his own image. Adam was feeling lonely, [so] God took a part of his rib and made Eve. And Eve was . . . deceived by the snake because the snake told her if she ate this apple, “You will become more like God,” and she trusted the snake, so she knew everything bad and good. She knew she was naked, so she had to cover herself up. And God threw them [out] from the Garden of Eden.” When asked what that story reminds him about God, C4 replied:

The story tells me that the devil is always there and he always [tries] to deceive us. Even during bad times, he tries to deceive us, he tries to push us away from God, he tries to make us lose our faith in God. But the story tells us that we should not lose faith in God and we should always believe in him.

From this response, it appears that C4 had access to spirituality towards resilience through the story. C4 had mentioned at the earlier part of the interview that his family was struggling a lot because his uncle had cancer but was now healed. C4 also mentioned that he wonders about God in the following ways: “I just want to know whether God is always with us, whether he is staying with us every single . . . every time we go somewhere, whether he will actually answer our prayers and stuff like that.”

The case of C2: C2 did not have a favorite Bible story to tell so he was asked to share anything from the Bible.

Researcher: Can you tell me your favorite Bible story?

C2: No I don't have [one].

Researcher: If you do not have a favorite, then can you tell me anything you remember from the Bible?

C2: Short or long?

Researcher: That is your choice.

C2: It is not exactly (*emphasis on the word e-xa-ct-ly by saying in slow pace*) a story, but just in my mind, you know. Like he was on the cross with those two soldiers and then came back to life.

Researcher: What does that remind you about God?

C2: That will happen to us. Like, when we die, that he will, something . . . our spirit will go up and then it will, something, come back to normal.

Researcher: Like up where?

C2: [To] heaven

In this conversation C2 did not even mention Jesus on the cross, but the connection that he described indicates resilience through spirituality, at least based on his idea of where one goes after death. In the beginning of the conversation, C2 mentioned a scary dream where his aunty died. This, as it turns out, actually did happen. During informal conversation with the parents following their interview, the father mentioned that his sister had recently passed away. The mother of C2 also mentioned that sometimes he asks questions like, "Is heaven a good place?" C2, when interviewed, also mentioned 'heaven' when he thinks of God. It is evident from these comments that C2 is trying to make connections with his view of God as well as the experiences around himself.

These interactions in the interview elucidate how children are attempting to make sense of their reality through the idea of God, sense that they constructed while drawing comfort from God in the process. The way the children narrated the Biblical stories also indicated *process*, as children are learning to relate Biblical content and its potential for

significance in their lives with a “pseudo-reflective process” (Nye 2009, 47). In addition, a study among school children also confirmed that children do not all have a single or even similar view of God. It states that, to let children express their spirituality, there should be openness to let them express themselves and freedom for them to be able to make meaning from the things around that remain “personally significant to them” (Hyde 2008, 241).

As the researcher listened to the stories narrated by the children, she had no better words to describe her experience other than quoting the words of Stonehouse and May, as they listened to children:

As we have listened to children, we have come to believe that we do not give children their understanding of God. We cannot literally transmit to them what we know. As they are ready, children construct or form their understandings for themselves, with the gracious presence, encouragement, and guidance of God’s Spirit (Stonehouse and May 2010, 38).

**Learning about God at a young age is a crucial aspect of *process* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.**

C1’s father believes that it is never too early to start teaching and telling children about God. “Sometimes, not [just] sometimes, a lot of times, we think, ah, that they are too young to understand this, and we don’t talk about God and we don’t try to explain certain things. But I feel it is not like that. Because they too understand.” This statement affirms that children can experience God’s presence from an early age (Logan and Miller 2017, 74). C1’s father is very specific that children should be taught about God at a very young age because children will not stay with parents for too long. As the children finish high school, they will have to go for further education. C1’s father says that if the spirituality of the child is nurtured, it [will guide] the children regardless of [what]

situations they go through. C1's father states: "As long as that anchor, [which] is the seed that you have planted about God at home, so if the anchor is strong, even if the sea is rough, the ship may go here and there, change directions and all, but still it will come back when the storm settles." He also says that when the children grow up and go their own way, it is "impossible control them all the time, they might do the worst thing also, but if that anchor is there, I believe they will come back in line."

C8's father also declares that when children are raised in the knowledge of God at home from the time they are young, when they grow up, they will remember how they were raised because the understanding of God will never be lost, and they will always be able to come back to God.

T1, the Sunday school teacher also supports the notion that when children have been taught about God at a young age, they are able to have access to God even when they go wayward in their faith, and they will be able to return.

It is evident from the responses of C1's father, C8's father, and T1 the Sunday school teacher that learning about God at a young age is crucial because, even when the children grow up and go through difficult situations or even go away from their relationship with God, they will always have an anchor so that they can come back to God. The concept of God as 'anchor' mentioned by C1's father indicates that when children have formed the image of God in their life at a young age, the image of God can never be lost. It might be "pushed down and repressed, thrown aside as an irrelevant toy from the earlier age, used as it is, or refined and transformed, but the image of God has a continuing life" (Stonehouse 2001, 133). And this confirms why learning about God at a



young age is a crucial aspect of process that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.

**Intentional learning is an important aspect of *process* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.**

Being woken up by his mother at 6:30 a.m. to go to Sunday school, C2 stresses a lot because he believes he is not getting enough sleep in the morning. Yet he clearly knows that going to Sunday school is important because that is where they do activities and are taught songs and Bible verses about God. C2 believes that, even though the students get a grade and even an F grade in the Sunday school evaluation, God still loves them because “they are good in their own ways” (*A tone of confidence resonated in his voice*). When C2 was asked how a child knows that God is with him when he is afraid, he answered, “[In] the Bible it says so.” He also stated that the best way for children to learn about God is through the Bible, by memorizing some of it. When the researcher asked him if he remembers any Bible verses, he confidently answered “Yes” and recited John 3:16 aloud by heart. C2’s mom and dad also grew up going to Sunday school and believe that Sunday school may be one place for children to find it easy to connect to God because it keeps them engaged. In the words of C2’s father, “For children, just sitting down and worshipping God by listening only can make them bored. But when they are doing activities rather than just sitting and listening, this keeps them engage. So, perhaps.”

Sunday school is a place where children are intentionally made to learn about God. When C4’s parents were asked the question, “Could you also tell me how children know that God is with them when they are going through difficult times?” The mother replied, “Because they go to Sunday school, they also learn, we feel because sometimes

we hear them talk about what they might [do in] situations, like a role play. That is how sometimes I understand.” Sunday school is a place to intentionally learn about God, and singing the songs, learning the memory verses, and learning about God keeps children engaged with the Bible. Keeping them engaged with the Bible works as a guide when children go through difficult times. A study, conducted among children 8-12 years old, reported that children engaged with the Bible have access to proactive resilience. It “prepar[es] them to face the temptations and challenges they encounter in the world, both now and as they move into teen and young adult years” (Ovwigbo and Cole 2010, 111).

All the children who participated in the present study go to Sunday school, and they know that Sunday school is where they “get to learn about God, [they] get to learn about his miracles, what he did to save people (C4),” and “learn about God and Bible stuff (C1).” In Sunday school, the children: “learn about listening to God and obeying him” (C2); “learn about God” (C5, C6); “learn about God, his words, and we even have a book to learn all about it (C7);” “talk about God” (C8); and “know about God” (C3).

In addition to Sunday School, an intentional effort is made by parents at home. C5’s mother lets the children read the Bible and memorize Bible verses, C6’s parents buy Bible story books so that the children can read them, and C6’s parents bought a children’s Bible. This kind of effort allows children to intentionally learn about God, a significant aspect of the process that paves the way for access to spirituality towards resilience.

**Seizing challenging moments and turning them into teaching moments  
is an important aspect of *process* that allows access to  
spirituality towards resilience.**

According to C1’s mother, C1 is concerned that he will not always be able to live with his parents. He worries that his parents will get sick and tells them that he will take

care of them when they get old. When these thoughts emerge, C1 raises questions about God. C1's mother said that, initially, sometimes she would scold him for asking too many questions. But eventually she realized that she could use this as an opportunity to allow C1 have access to spirituality. She explained to C1 that eventually everybody will die, so that is why everybody needs God. "You will die, I will die. We don't know who will go first but that is why we must believe in God. That is why now I bring [up] John 3:16 there, since they have memorized it. Whoever believeth in him, see, that is why we must believe [in] Jesus, because there is a place where we are going to meet. That is where you can ask God any question that you want." C1's mother also stated that following the evening prayers, and just before the children sleep, is a crucial moment and the children become emotional. This is also a time when C1 asks questions about God. C1's mother recollected a question asked by C1: "Jesus is the Son, so Jesus will listen to his Father?" C1's mother said that these questions may be raised because she always tells C1 to listen to his father. "Those things, since I keep telling him you must listen to your father, you have to listen to your father. You know, even if you do not agree, you have to listen." In this case C1 is clearly making a connection of how his obedience correlates with Jesus having to obey his father. According to C1's father, such times can be an opportunity to plant seeds about God.

C1's mother saw the challenge of uncertainty about the future that C1 was facing. C1's father was able to recognize this as the right moment to plant a seed about God. The parents of C1 seized challenging moments and turned them into opportunities as a vital aspect of the process to allow C1 to access the spirituality needed to find comfort and trust in God.

**Challenges are an important aspect of *process* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.**

Doing what needs to be done during challenges—Spiritual practices as steppingstones.

C4 recalled that he became afraid when his family was struggling a lot because his uncle had cancer. C4 said that he would see his mother having a hard time but since he did not know what to do for her, that challenging moment gave him access to spirituality, “My mother was struggling a lot. She was struggling a lot because she could not think straight, she did not know what to do. She felt really worried [at] that moment. I did not know what to do, what to tell her, whether to help her or not. But I knew it was the right thing to always pray for my uncle and tell her that he [would] be cured soon. What I used to do when I was afraid during that time, I used to pray to God, and tell him to heal my uncle, help my mother, help my mother to become strong, and I used to tell my mom to have more faith and believe that God [would] cure my uncle.” These responses from one of the boys indicates that the *process* of access to spirituality involves connecting to God through spiritual practices and experiencing comfort in the midst of fear (Boyd 2017).

Facing challenges is not about removing the problems but going through the problems.

C1 recounted how he was afraid for his exams, especially for one particular subject, and when the researcher asked him what he did he said, “I just prayed to God. I told him to get rid of the fear.” When asked if the fear went away, he answered, “Not too much, but I felt confident.” His mother also indicated that C1 seeks to ask God to help him with challenges. C1’s mother explained that the moments during school functions when C1 had to give a speech may also be times that he asks for help because, “Just

before going out, I see him murmuring.” And she says that C1 would sometimes do that “when he is trying to confess.” The mother assumes that maybe C1 is praying because C1 also mentioned to his mother the “anxious moment before going to the stage.”

Facing challenges is also about preparation.

C3 was asked the question, “Do you feel like God is with you when you are going through a difficult time? This is what he had to say: “Not really, because if I am going through difficult times, right, like going through stress, that is why my mind does not really think of God.” The researcher wanted to clarify this, so she asked again, “I want to clarify, when you are going through stress or when you are going through difficult time, you don’t feel like God is with you?” Then C3 replied, “When my mind is really free, like, not very stressed, I just pray to God and I tell him to help me not to stress out too much and get me through those difficult times.” The researcher wanted to make sure, so she asked again, “So in difficult times and stressful times, you cannot approach God? Is that what you mean? And C3 replied, “Yes.” This conversation with C3 demonstrates the importance of being proactive and intentional in allowing access to spirituality, because challenges are inevitable, and they come to all people, regardless of being young or old.

It is evident from the responses of C4, C3 and C1 that challenges are a crucial aspect of process that allows children to have access to spirituality because it allows them to access spirituality in the form of being guided in what to do, having the right perspective, and proactively seeking help from God to go through challenges.

One interesting research finding relating to challenges was how a majority of the child participants referred to their exams when they were asked about what makes children worried, afraid, or scared;

C1: Worried - "Like getting 16 out of 18 in my exam"

C2: Worried - "When in their exam, they do not do properly and they remember at home"

C3: Afraid - "Exams, especially of a particular subject;" Worried - "when their exam papers are going to be revealed"

C5: Worried - "Failing [an] exam"

C7: Scared - "They get scared about their exam paper."

These findings illustrate that these children are going through the "industry vs inferiority" stage as described by Erikson, where there is a lot of emphasis on academics and competitiveness, and children are exposed to "goals and limits to achievements and disappointments" (Erikson 1963, 259). Since academics is a big part of their lives, these findings cause concern that the children in the context of Nagaland could be at risk because of the "high mental tension among the school students emerging due to constant academic stress, poor academic performance, underachievers, fear of failure, family and school pressure for high-level academic performance" (Rume 2017). In spite of this, based on the interview experience with the parents, the relationships between the children and their parents appear supportive and communicative which are indicators for children to acquire skills required to deal with challenges (Theiss 2019, 11).

**Creating an atmosphere conducive to question asking is a crucial aspect of *process* that allows children to have access to spirituality towards resilience.**

Space for questions is necessary because of the growing complexity of the world.

Creating an atmosphere for the children to ask questions is crucial because the present generation is different compared to the past. According to T1 the Sunday school teacher, "In our time we were very innocent because there was no pollution. But these

days [there are] too many pressures, too many pollutions, so instead the present generation might be questioning more often than our generation. That is what I think.”

#### Creating a safe space for children to ask questions

C1’s father believes an atmosphere for children to ask questions about God must be created. He says that although the questions can sound silly, parents need to listen and create a safe atmosphere. C1’s father believes that if a good atmosphere is not created, then children will stop asking questions and that could be dangerous. “He might seek a wrong place, [the] wrong person, or a wrong medium to find the answers.” Fisher (Fisher 1999) conducted a study with 98 teachers to find out what fosters spiritual health, and the findings determined that the children need a safety net to express their views and opinions in the safety of secure relationships. An atmosphere that encourages children to ask questions requires parents and teachers to listen. Failure to create such an atmosphere for questions silences children and potentially endangers those who make look to unhealthy sources for answers to their questions.

#### An atmosphere conducive to questions involves an explicit welcome of questions extended to the children by parents and teachers.

T2, a Sunday School teacher, feels that an open atmosphere for children needs to be created where children are welcomed to ask questions in Sunday school. She states, “I think we cannot tell them not to ask questions . . . or it can be some limited questions also. I think it has to be just open. They want to ask, but they cannot ask. That thing should not be there that I feel is.” She also stated that creating an open atmosphere for children to ask their questions is crucial because some children are sensitive. “Some children lack confidence. They think that what I am asking or what I am saying may be wrong so, like, not to face this embarrassment, could be that.”

When C5's parents were asked their opinion about asking children to ask any kind of questions they have about God. C5's father was positive in the form of encouraging the children to do so "For me, it is okay when children ask any questions It is our duty to encourage them to do so." C5's mother agreed. However, she added two important points. First, she said that for children to ask questions, the parents need to teach about God first. Secondly, even if children are not asking questions, the parents are responsible to create an open environment through their upbringing.

**Encouraging questions is an important aspect of *process* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.**

Encouraging questions affirms natural inquisitiveness.

The Sunday school teacher T1 states that children at this stage are full of questions and so they must be given the opportunity to speak out. He states that children at this age are in a "formative stage, and during this time they are so inquisitive, they are asking so many questions, why this is like that, why it happen[s] to my family like that." He also mentioned that this questioning stage disappears when children grow older. "We do not see that in senior classes. When they reach [a] senior class, they are more shy to talk about things, more protective, and more self-conscious." This is also what Hay and Nye reported in their study; children are afraid to be ridiculed, so they do not discuss spirituality (Hay and Nye 2006, 103). Children need to be encouraged to ask questions because they are naturally inquisitive, and the encouragement to ask questions during childhood may help them avoid or overcome fears of ridicule for asking questions during adolescence. Also, children need to be encouraged to ask questions because they have reasons that matter to them for asking questions.



C1's mother believes that children should be encouraged to ask their questions because there is always a reason behind why they are asking questions. She states, "I feel like they should ask the question because there is something cooking in their mind, and that is why the question is coming up." C1's father also agrees and reciprocates, "I do encourage them to ask, no matter how silly it is, because the question in the first place came from their own selves, and nobody put it in their mind. Or maybe they might have seen something, and that question has popped up in their head."

Asking questions provides opportunity for parents and teachers to guide the children.

C1's father also remarks that children should be encouraged to ask questions because it gives an opportunity for the adults to guide them and nurture them in the right way. In C1's father's words, "Instead of having the doubt in their mind and letting the question grow into something bad, it is better to nip it in the bud. So, if it is something bad, I tell them this is not good. And it becomes my duty to tell them this is good, or this is bad. And end it from there or at least give them a satisfactory answer or make them understand that this is bad."

Encouraging questions helps overcome doubts.

C4's father states that when children ask questions, there is always a reason, and this reason could be because they are doubting. He says, "In fact, because they have doubts, they bring out those questions, so, if we do not clear that [up], the doubt will always be there, and they will really wonder if God truly exists." When C4's parents were asked the question, "If we shun the questions that children have about God, what possible side effects can emerge?" C4's father said that this could be a stumbling block in

their relationship with God. “I think they will start doubting the existence of God. . . . They will really wonder about what it is [really] about.”

Encouraging children to ask questions also requires not imposing boundaries or judgements related to the question.

C1’s father states that encouraging children to ask their questions also means imposing no boundaries with the questions, saying, “I don’t control (*with emphasis in his tone*) their questions (*mother nods head in agreement too*). In the sense of, ‘You can ask me this, you cannot ask this or that questions’ (“*Yes, exactly,*” *rejoins the mother*). I do not have anything like that. They can ask whatever they want” (“*Freedom to ask,*” *the mother repeats those words as she nods her head in agreement*). This assurance of no boundaries for questions is crucial because if the children feel like they will be judged for their questions, they will never raise any questions (Eaude 2019, 14).

Encouraging questions calls for assuring children that all questions are important.

C1’s father affirms the idea that there is no such thing as “silly question.” Similarly, C2’s father comments, “We feel that whether it is a small or very unnecessary question, importance should be given to them.” C1’s father also says that allowing children to express the questions that they have is more crucial than judging if their questions make sense or not. He explains, “It can be a silly question, but trying to entertain that question, I think, that is important.” Encouraging children to ask their questions about God is essential because it allows for the children to be guided. It even allows freedom to question their understanding of God in a safe zone (Csinos and Beckwith 2003, 98) and thereby strengthens their relationship with God, which is crucial in the process of access to spirituality.

### Encouraging questions requires adults to be open and vulnerable

As much as parents understand and believe that they should encourage children to ask their questions, some parents have also expressed the challenging aspect of it. In the words of C3's mother, "Practically speaking, it is very difficult." She also specifies that it becomes difficult when it gets biblical, "Especially when my son, like, starts to ask what about revelation." C3's mother affirms that children should be encouraged to ask questions but feels challenged sometimes. "Parents should be really ready, encourage them to ask more questions. We are doing the opposite because most of the times, especially during meal times, we are tired, and we would say 'Can you please keep that question for some other time or can you please eat quietly?' Sometimes it becomes like that also."

C2 has a lot of questions about God; "How did God make the universe and the earth? If he is everywhere, do you mean here, in this place, in this room? How did God get there in heaven in the first place? If God is with us . . . how is he with everybody at the same time? Are they duplicates of him? (*Tone was questioning and sounded like he was annoyed*). When the researcher asked C2's parents their opinion about encouraging children to ask any questions about God, C2's father answered, "Yes. Why not?" C2's father encourages C2 to ask questions and C2 is aware of that. However, C2's father also admits that even as parents it is not an easy talk when children ask questions. "Sometimes as parents, also when they ask questions, we are speechless (*unfolds his palms raising up both his hands in the surrendering gesture*), sometimes we have no words." C2's father recalls a conversation with his son:

C2: Who made this?  
C2's father: God made this.

C2: God made the car?  
C2's father: No, God gave us the brain to make the car  
C2: Who made all the earth and the planets?  
C2's father: God made them.  
C2: Who made God?  
C2's father: I do not have the answer.

As much as C2's father believes that children should be encouraged to ask questions, he is also humble enough to admit to his children when he does not have answers. He lets C2 see that human beings have limitations, too. C2's father is also aware that when parents are 'know-it-alls,' it paves way for danger. C2's father declares, "That will give them a false hope (*with emphasis on the two words- false hope*) in us because they will think, 'My father has, my mother has all the answers and know everything,' and, whatever we say, we may just be sometimes trying to please him or her, or they will just take it for granted. That false hope will be given so sometimes it is good to acknowledge we do not know."

Encouraging children to ask questions also allows the possibility of not having the answers, the possibility of feeling uncomfortable, the possibility of being personally challenged, and the possibility of expending the parents' energy, leaving them exhausted. Encouraging children to ask their questions does not mean that adults need to have all the answers. They cannot because human beings have a limit. Neither does it mean avoiding questions because they make them uncomfortable (Logan and Miller 2017, 83) It is all about engaging with their questions (Stonehouse 2021, 79) and walking with children in their spiritual journey.

Setting aside an intentional time for children to ask their questions

Intentionally setting aside time for questions and giving priority to the questions of children over other matters communicates to children the importance of their questions, and perhaps the significant role of questions in the development of faith and spirituality. The researcher asked C1, “Do you have any questions about God?” He responded, “I have a thousand questions!” (*he sounded so enthusiastic and made hand movements for emphasis*). Then the researcher asked if he could tell her five of those questions. He agreed, saying:

Is God made naturally or God is made by something? If God is made by something, who made that something? Is there an end in space? What was the color of space before God was even there? Why did God make the virus? How did God make our body? I do not get anything about my body. How does the mind generate?

Upon interviewing C1’s parents, his mother added more questions: “How was God created? Constant question (*tone with emphasis . . . Uses her right hand and makes a sudden movement from the left to the right*), it has been like 2-3 years he (C1) has been asking us this question. Because he asks [it] a lot, that is why I wonder if it has bothered him a lot.” His mother also reiterates that her son never stops the question, and sometimes it becomes challenging.

However, since the parents of C1 take the questions of C1 seriously, they make a specific time for C1 to ask all the questions he has about God. C1’s mother states that they intentionally inform C1 that there will be a specific time for them to discuss. Setting aside time to work on questions is a crucial aspect of spiritual engagement (Yust 2004, 131) in the process that allows access to spirituality. C1’s mother recounted an incident that had happened two days before. “After we got in the car, C1 asked, ‘mother can I

have [a] conversation with you?’ And because it becomes very difficult to think deeply while driving, I told him ‘Talk to me, but not a deep conversation.’ And so we just discussed something about street food.” This is how C1’s mother makes specific time just to answer to their son’s questions. C1’s mother states, “Letting them know (*with emphasis on every word*) that, okay, this is the time, with the right seat, in a comfortable position. ‘Sit down’ (*with emphasis on every word and using both hands to describe*), and you are there to discuss with them. Not as doing something else and talking to them at the same time. I have observed this in my son. Sitting with him for the purpose, just for the purpose of it, then everything will come out.” She also mentioned that by giving time to the children with undivided attention communicates the message to the children that she is taking that time seriously. In the words of C2’s mother, “Now they are here to listen to me. Not because they are listening for the sake of listening, but making an effort to listen.” C1’s father also states that, no matter how busy he is, he believes that giving time for children’s questions is necessary. He asserts, “[So], no matter how busy we are . . . we will talk about it.” Setting aside a time for discussion is also allowing the children to know that “It is okay to talk about and do these things” (Logan and Miller 2017, 80), and this is a crucial aspect in the process that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.

#### Turning questions into a spiritual quest

C1’s father states that there are times when C1 asks him questions for which he does not know the answers. And during those times, he admits that he does not know, but he does not stop there. In C1’s words, “Listen, I don’t know about this so that that is not the end. I do not leave it at that. I do not know about this but let us do one thing. Let us find the answer about this together (*mother nods her head in agreement*). Because just

saying no and leaving it at that, that question will not stop (*using his right hand*). So I tell him, ‘We will find this out together,’ so that okay, sort of makes it an adventure for them.” Journeying with children to seek answers (Stonehouse 2001, 43) is a crucial aspect of process that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.

The responses of the parents, children, and the Sunday school teachers indicate that encouraging questions is an important aspect of access to spirituality because it affirms natural inquisitiveness, provides opportunity for adults to guide children, and helps children overcome their doubts. In addition, the findings reveal that encouraging children to raise questions means imposing no boundary or judgement related to the question, requiring adults to be open and vulnerable, intentionally making time for children to ask their questions, and journeying with children to search for possible answers to their questions.

**Paying attention to children’s experiences is an important aspect of  
*process that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.***

When C6 was asked the question, “What makes children feel disappointed?” she said, “When their friends don’t play with them.” She also mentioned that playing with friends makes children excited and “Going to school, finding new friends makes me happy.” This also indicates that friends are an important part of her life. Peers are important to children at this stage of life (May et al. 2005, 169). When the researcher was studying the verbatim transcript of the interview with C6, she was particularly intrigued that the idea of God revolved around the concept of forgiveness. When C6 was asked what she thinks of when she thinks about God, she answered “forgiveness. Thinking about that God will forgive me.” When she was asked what sort of things she talks to God about, she said, “About forgiving me and forgiving my parents and forgiving my

siblings.” She also mentioned that she feels close to God when she is thinking about God forgiving her, and she can learn about God by forgiving other people. It seems that C6 is struggling to understand what forgiveness means, and perhaps C6 is trying to understand how forgiveness is applicable to her real life with her friends. She may be struggling to understand feeling hurt and forgiving her friends because, upon interviewing the parents, C6’s father also mentioned that sometimes C6 comes from school “complaining about friends.” However, C6’s father said that that is the time when they integrate the teaching into real life situations of loving people. C6’s father states, “What we tell the children is, always love people Even in the future, whether you become a boss or, in any way, always love people.” What the father said to C6 about loving people may not substantially help C6 understand the concept of forgiveness. C6’s father mentioned that they try to integrate real life situations into their teachings, so paying attention to the experiences of children could potentially give parents an opportunity to integrate spiritual teaching and in this way allow access to spirituality. Paying attention to the experiences of children could be a springboard in the process that allows access to spirituality.

**Prayer can be a hindrance in the *process* towards access to spirituality towards resilience.**

Magical prayers can be a hindrance in the *process* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.

Magical prayers: For C3’s mother, when she was growing up, prayer was a list of things she wanted that she prayed for and she got, “It was like a Santa Claus . . . I want something, and I pray, if I need something, it was like that.” However, as a mother, now she realizes that God is way beyond that. C3’s mother says that although prayer is crucial, prayer should not be considered as a list of wants that children can get whatever they want. In C3’s mother’s words, “God is a provider, God is a healer. Praying to God is



not only about getting things from him, not a shortcut, but we need to live a life of faithfulness and obedience. Prayer is not that instant.” When prayer is all about a list of things to be procured from God, it can be dangerous because prayer is not all about that. ‘Faith in the prayers’ themselves rather than in ‘God’ can be a hindrance in the process towards access to spirituality.

T2 the Sunday school teacher states; “I think for most Christian families, we believe that we must pray to God. And if you do not pray it is not good. If you are going somewhere, have you prayed already? Before you go out you must pray so that God will protect you.” She adds that prayer for some has already become like “rules.” T2 tries to explain, saying, “When we pray, we are asking God; we are not doing any favor, we are asking [something] from him, but then, like, sometimes it becomes like a rule also. And then, like, I think that mindset is already cultivated. If you do not pray, you will not get; if you do not pray, God will not protect you. Some people have taken it that way also.” This is true and it was reflected in the conversation with C8’s mother. She said, “For us, we tell them even if it is here and there, even during an exam, when we forget, if we pray to God, he will help us. Until today we teach them this. So, what I tell them is, it depends on their heart.” This clearly implies to the child that if they do not pray, God will not help. T2 states that children should be reminded that “[Whether we] pray or do not pray, God is always there to protect [you], because we are all God’s children. But then, out of obedience, we pray to God, we talk to God.”

Throughout the interviews, parents mentioned that they encourage their children to pray, pray before eating, pray before going to school, pray for protection, pray when they have exams, pray before they step out of the house, pray before going to sleep, pray

when they wake up. The researcher does not have the ability to measure the authenticity of the prayers, however. As mentioned by T2 the Sunday school teacher, when prayer is about ‘faith in the prayer itself rather than in God,’ it could be detrimental because prayer could just become a rule the children need to follow. And this can also result in empty prayers. C6’s father states that prayer just for the sake of praying is not complete. He adds that knowing the word of God brings enlightenment, “Because I believe, like, prayer is very important, but when you know the word of God, the word of God can also bring understanding. I believe prayer in addition to the word of God is crucial.”

Prayers are a vitally important aspect of process that allows access to spirituality towards resilience because prayer “holds the potential of opening the door to experiencing God” (Stonehouse and May 2010, 45). However, magical prayers and having faith in the prayer itself rather than in God could be an obstacle that may decrease access to spirituality towards resilience.

**Routine prayer with an explanation could be a *process* that increases access to spirituality towards resilience.**

When C1’s parents were asked the question, “Based on your experiences, how do children learn to seek God to help them when they are going through different kinds of challenges?” the mother replied that “Children may be too young to experience that.” At this point she is not undermining the idea that children have the potential to experience God, rather, she was rational. She uses an example of prayer to explain this. She states, “They are doing it more out of obedience since, as such, there is no visibility, and we are yet to discover that. Like, for example, we are going to eat dinner. By default, they have to pray. So, it is already like a muscle-memory, so they just pray. And if they do not pray, I scold them, so, they have to pray. It is like a muscle-memory, it is like a routine thing”

(uses her hand and goes in circles). However, she discovered that C1 prays to God when she [the mother] is sick and she would also see him murmuring before going onto the stage to perform. His father adds, “But this was something that was never taught to C1. We never taught him to do that, all we did was always seek for God’s help. Whenever we can’t come and help you physically, he will be there to help you—like that. So those kinds of things have already been planted in his mind.” At the end of the interview, when C1 was asked for one tip that he can give to seek God during difficult times, he replied, “Like, think about God, pray.” This also confirms that the routine prayers are taking root in C1’s life.

From the responses of C1, his mother, and father, it is evident that consistent routine prayers with a proper explanation of what is done and why it is done increases access to spirituality towards resilience.

**Assuming that children are too young to experience God can be a help or hindrance in the *process* towards access to spirituality towards resilience.**

When C5 was asked what she thinks deeply about God, she replied, “How he forgave—he died on the cross and forgave us from our sins.” At end of the interview, when the researcher asked if she had any questions, these were the questions she asked

C5: Does God really forgive people when they lie?

Researcher: Yes, God will.

C5: But if they lie again, will God forgive?

Researcher: Yes, He will if we ask with a clean heart

C5: But if the heart is not clean, will He still forgive?

Researcher: Yes, he will still forgive if we ask for forgiveness with an honest heart.

In the conversation, C5 responded as if she was clearly having a difficult time trying to understand how God could forgive her. This was evident in that the transition from one question to the other in response to the replies given by the researcher was very

quick. During the interview, when the parents were asked the question, “Can you tell what makes children worry?” the mother replied, “At all times, whether we have plenty or not, we bring them up in a way that they feel is sufficient, so they do not bother about anything.” Again, when they were asked the question, “Could you tell me how children learn to see God when they are going through challenges,” the mother responded, “It feels like they have not reached that stage yet. The father also added, “I think, at this young age, they might not have faced challenges, but maybe they will face them through the years.” On the other hand, she also mentioned that sometimes, when C5 says some inappropriate words, she whispers, “Jesus, please forgive me.” (*She enacted the whispering, and the way the mother enacted the scene did not indicate that the issue is bothering C5.*) The researcher also asked the question, “In what way can children be helped so that they can experience God by themselves?” The mother responded, “That will usually happen when they grow older. Right now, they are just 10 and 12, so I have not thought about that now. So, when they reach [that level], we will help them accordingly.”

When the parents were asked the question, “how do you nurture your child’s spirituality?” she replied, “Let them read [the] Bible, and then let them memorize it. We are not so much like other families; we are working on it.” At the end of the interview, when the researcher was escorted as she left the house, C5’s mother also mentioned again, “We are not so much like other families; we are working on it.” The interview with C5 and her parents demonstrates a difference of perspective. The interview with C5 clearly indicates, firstly, that the issue of forgiveness is bothering her. This may be because she is at a stage that Fowler identifies as the mythic-literal stage of faith, where

the child believes that God is the source of the idea that good behavior is rewarded and evil behavior is punished (Fowler and Dell 2004, 21). Secondly, her mother's statement that they "are not like other families," which was spoken twice, indicates that they do not focus much on spiritual nurture. Thirdly, the parents may not have taken the spiritual nurture of the children very seriously because they assume that their children are too young to experience God in their own ways—"It feels like they have not reached that stage yet." Believing that children are too young to experience God can be a hindrance towards children's access to spirituality if "children being too young to experience God" is the reason for not taking their spiritual nurture seriously. Fourthly, parents may not have taken the spiritual life of the child seriously because they have materialistically provided them with everything the children need—"We bring them up in a way that they feel is sufficient, so they do not bother about anything."

**Language could be a help or hindrance in the *process* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.**

The case of C2: C2's parents have a mixed marriage, meaning his mom and dad speak different dialects. So, usually C2 is very comfortable communicating in English to both parents at home because he is not fluent in either of the languages that his mother or father speaks. C2's parents are concerned about this because, in church and in Sunday school, the main medium of instruction is usually the dialect of the father. On one hand, C2's parents stated that going to Sunday school helps children to communicate and practice the language. On the other hand, however, the parents are also concerned that their children are missing a lot because the children are not able to maximize their spiritual growth due to language limitations. C2's father recollects, "The other day I was telling my child, 'See, we were in the church, and the small boy in front of us was quiet

the whole time.’ And then, you know what my child replied? ‘Because he understands the language, so he is quiet. We do not understand, so we get restless.’” C2’s parents also stated that they could have easily chosen an English-speaking congregation church, but they feel that it is important for them to stick to the present church because they put “emphasis on allowing the children to learn the language.” This situation also indicates language as a possible hindrance in the process of developing access to spirituality.

The interview responses of the children, parents, and Sunday school teachers clearly corroborate *process* as a multimodal method of access to spirituality. The forms of process identified through the interviews included: praying, encouraging, teaching, questioning, learning, seizing teachable moments, and encountering challenges.

### **Research Question 3**

**IN WHAT WAYS DOES IMAGINATION ALLOW ACCESS TO SPIRITUALITY TOWARDS RESILIENCE AMONG THE SELECTED CHILDREN IN NAGALAND?**

**Conceptualization of God is an important aspect of *imagination* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.**

*“When I go through difficult times, I always think about him, and he will always be there with me”-C6.*

C2 believes that there should be a certain kind of attitude when God is approached. He stated, “You have to be, like—what is that word again—serious; you are supposed to be serious and talk to him properly.” Perhaps C2 said this because he imagines God as scary, or because his parents taught him to approach God in a serious and proper manner. Regardless, on a positive note. C2’s comments indicate a perception of God as worthy of reverent and disciplined engagement. C2 mentioned that he talks to God in his “mind”

when he gets worried . He also added, “When I am alone, I think of him.” When asked, “Do you feel like God is a human being?” C2 responded, “yes.”

C1 is an 8-year-old boy who stated that he feels “relaxed” when God is with him. When he was asked the question, “Have you ever felt close to God?” he responded, “Like, mmm . . . in the dark, when it gets really scary . . . like, something just popped out and just ran away, I felt, I feel like God stays next to me.” C1 also stated that God is “everywhere” and described God as “multiple of them.” Maybe C1 was referring to the trinitarian God or maybe he is simply implying that God converts himself to multiple beings. Regardless of the conclusions that might be made, it is apparent that C1 was able to conceptualize how powerful God is.

C6, an 8-year-old-girl, stated that she remembers God when going through difficult times. “When I go through difficult times, I always think about him, and he will always be there with me.” C6 also stated that she feels scared when she is alone. When the researcher asked what she does when she is scared and alone, C6 replied, “I think that God is near me”

C5 is a 10-year-old girl. When the researcher asked the question to C5, “Can you tell me how God helps children when they are sad, or they are scared? She replied that God makes them feel like “he is with them.” The researcher asked as follow-up, “How do children know God is with them,” and she replied, “Because God is in their hearts.”

C2, C1, C6, and C5 were able to conceptualize their understanding and experiences of God in a way that was unique to each of them. The role and significance of the imagination for access to spirituality is evident in the comments about the nature and presence of God made by each of these children in their interviews.

The experiences of the children confirms that the way children experience God is unique and imagination allows that to happen (Csinos and Beckwith 2013, 73, Reimer and furrow 2001, 20); and being able to conceptualize is a source of strength in the midst of challenges (Hooton 2014, 14, Coles 1998, 48).

**Creative art is an important aspect of *imagination* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.**

C6's father believes creative art is one of the many ways that children can access God. He explained that it all starts with a basic prayer and, later, as C6 started growing up, they tried to incorporate that prayer into the different creative arts that the child is interested in. He stated, "First, what we started [with] was just [that] small basic prayer. So, that is like a daily monotonous routine that we are teaching. We wanted to cultivate the habit but now, since C5 is growing up a little bit, she has started writing, like, poems by herself. Now what we are telling is that prayer is all about talking to God. There is no one way of praying, it is just you conversing with God." Being imaginative here is about encouraging children to utilize their imaginations to discover God, not about how creatively the presenter can educate about God (Nye 2009, 51).

**Stories are an important aspect of *imagination* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.**

When C4 was asked how parents can help children when they are scared, he said "by comforting the child telling stories. . . . Stories about God, stories about how faith heals, olden time stories. The child will feel secure with the parents when they tell them that." C4 also stated that when children read "Bible stories about God," they can trust Him.



C7's father explained that Bible stories can provide a vicarious experience for the children to have access to God to help them during difficult times. He stated, "They have these small picture magazines, David and Goliath, all these Bible stories. They have a series. I think they have gone through all those things, and they know that, like, God helped them. They know that God helped all those characters, and they could do [things] with [the] help of God. So, they have built something—that God can do it." The stories in the Bible are not prescriptions for perfection or remedies to put an end to sorrow and suffering, but they do explain that even in the midst of difficulty and imperfection, God's presence is not ephemeral (Hoopes 2020, 151).

C4's father recollected that when he was young, Bible stories were an important resource for connecting with God, and that is what he wants his children to experience. He remarked, "Through my experience, during those days, we used to have comic [books about], like, Elijah and Samson, When I was young, I read those. It spoke to me a lot. It has been a while now, but I always used to bring those comics for them so that in the form of illustration, they can connect to their heart." God's revelation comes in the shape of a story, and it has the power to influence people's perspectives because stories are God's message, and they are transforming (Hoopes 2020, 150 and Mellia 2020, 123)

The responses from the parents and the children confirm that truth presented to children in the form of a story helps them to understand it the best (May 2006, 34 and Pemberton 2014, 151).

**Media is one avenue for *imagination* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.**

*. . . Lightning Thor, I think that are the imagining he has of God -C1's father.*

Media can be an effective way for children to understand about God and to connect with him. C1's mother thinks that a movie helped C1 to understand the God's attribute of seeing everything. She said, "I constantly tell them, like, whatever you do, if you steal, you lie, you cheat in the exam,--even if nobody sees you, God is there. He is looking at you. I think that eye image might be there in him. Because, in *The Lord of the Rings*, Sauron, he sees everything, So I think that kind of image is there." C1's father added that C1 might also have got his understanding of God through movies. "Lightning Thor, I think that is the imagining he has of God."

C1's father believes that media could be a good platform for children because it gives them a space to interact with their thoughts in their own ways. "There are different mediums now available, so since they are very much into YouTube and all those things. Giving them the right channels to watch through media that we do not explain, they are trying to question [by] themselves or trying to evaluate things themselves, so that is also a good platform." However, because media is a powerful tool that allows children to use their imagination in different ways, C1's father cautioned that whatever the children watch "needs to be monitored" and children should be helped to understand what is real and what is not real, as he believes that "Children are never too young to understand what is real and what is not."

The responses of the children indicate that when they are enabled to conceptualize through imagination that God is with them, they can have access to spirituality that allows resilience in times of fear or sadness. In addition, the parents and the children have identified rich sources for engaging the imagination with potential to maximize access to spirituality.

It is apparent from the responses of the children and parents that *Imagination* as a method of access to spirituality can be effectuated through the process of conceptualizing the notion of God and employing creative art, stories, and media as potential tools for maximizing their access.

#### **Research Question 4**

IN WHAT WAYS DOES *RELATIONSHIP* ALLOW ACCESSIBILITY TO SPIRITUALITY FOR SPIRITUAL RESILIENCY AMONG THE SELECTED CHILDREN IN NAGALAND?

**Vicarious Experiences of God Through Parents are an Important Aspect of *Relationship* that Allows Access to Spirituality Towards Resilience.**

The vicarious experience of God through their parents is essential because children's perception of God is directly or indirectly related to the way they perceive their parents. C5's parents were asked the question, "Can children experience the presence of God by just telling them what it is like?" The response of C5's mother describes three kinds of vicarious experience. First is the physical presence, as she states, "Even your physical presence should make them feel that." Second is creating avenues for children to develop trust. She says, "Give [the] children [an] opportunity for them to trust you. The children should be able to receive the comfort of God through you, and they should be able to trust you like they trust God." Third is experiencing tangibly: "Even if I tell [them] 'God is this' and 'God is that,' if I neglect her then I am not sure if the child will understand. But when I talk about the love of God, do what is good, and at the same time allow them to experience the comfort through me, then of course they will feel 'Oh, really, God is good. That is why Mom and Dad also love me.'" This confirms that if

children experience love and care from their parents their attachment with God also will strengthen (Logan and Miller 2017, 66).

In the case of C8's mother, vicarious experience is in the form of a literal experience of God. To help children to understand that parents are the 'seen God,' the mother explains about God, "God is spirit, so wherever we go, God always goes with us and he is always with us." God is on earth as the parents: "[The] seen God on earth is [the] parents, and God is in heaven." Then she connects the idea of God and the presence of the parents: "If you obey mother and father, you obey God also. If we obey mother and father, they also bless us. This is how I teach the three of them. So, obey mother and father. God is watching us from up above but on earth here, God sent us, the parents, to you the children on behalf of him. To take care of you. So, if you obey the parents, God will also bless you." C8's father also states that when children have difficulties, they will go to their parents because the parents are the seen God on earth. "Seeing parents is like seeing God. So, for any concerns they will always tell their parents first."

For T2, the Sunday school teacher, the vicarious experience of God is also in the form of a support system from trusted adults. T2 encourages children to pray as well as share their concerns with somebody close to them: "'Pray to God. You tell your problem to someone whom you really trust.' It may be their mother or father. Once the mother or the father knows that child's problem, they pray to God. And if the child needs something, and they approach the father or the mother, the needs are being fulfilled. Then the child automatically feels that it is God who helped the child to get the thing or [be] healed when they are having [a] difficult time."

## **Sharing Personal Experience as an Essential Aspect of *Relationship* that Allows Access to Spirituality Towards Resilience.**

The Sunday school teacher T1 stated that an intellectual answer can be given to children but giving an answer through one's personal life is more effective. "You can give them an intellectual answer, but you may not be able to give an answer through your life. But if I give an answer through my life, I think that would be heavily embedded in them. They will not forget but it will remain and bear fruit."

C4's father shared about how they get involved in the stories they teach children so that they can have access to God during difficult times:

I have been sharing [with] them my experience in life and their mother's experiences in life. My wife is an orphan. By the time she was 13, her mother passed away, and at 16, her father passed away. When the youngest was 7, she lost the father. At a very young age, because God loved them, they can experience and live thus far is one thing. In my life, even me, I struggled in my life, no shoes, and I prayed to God, and he answered. About how God answered my prayers. The experiences that we have, we share with them. This is how God helped us, this is how you see God is with us. Even through our lives.

Through the testimonies of his parents, C4 has encouragement and opportunity to put his trust in God. C4's mother mentioned that sometimes children witness the pain that they, their parents, are going through. "Of course, sometimes when we are too hurt, we do not even feel like praying. But sometimes, we pray and when we pray, they have seen us [with] tears rolling down. I feel those experiences speak to them. We pray; sometimes, we cry and pray, so I think it speaks to them." Being a role model of trusting God amid adversity spins a great deal of influence and relationships aid in the development of that influence (Eaude 2019, 15). In the interview with C4's family, it was interesting to note that what the parents were teaching C4 was clearly reflected in his response when he was asked the question, "How do children learn from parents to trust God during difficult

times?” In the words of C4, “Children learn from their parents to trust God during difficult times. . . . From a young age, even if they suffer, they know that God is with them because the parents tell them never to lose faith, always have trust in God, and always have trust in God because, even if we can’t see him, he will always do a miracle in our life.” This indicated that for children to be able to put something into practice, they need examples (May et al. 2005, 33).

Similar to the experience of C4, the parents of C6 have shared their stories of the different situations that they have gone through and how God helped them in those particular situations. C6’s father said, “Sometimes, even before I stand up in the pulpit to preach, I tell them I prepared, but this is not even my word. This is God’s word.” He also shared that God “gives me the boldness to share also and gives me new thoughts also.” C6’s parents understand that there are certain challenges that the family can go through which children might not be able to comprehend, so they do not discuss those with their children. However, C6’s mother explained that there are also situations that cannot be avoided, so they carefully explain to the child what is happening, that God is in control, and then remind the children about how he has taken them through. “Maybe, as a family, everybody has ups and downs. So, sometimes even if we say that we do not want to show [it] to [the] children if we go through bad times, we share with them also about what we are going through. In addition to sharing, we also tell them that still God is with us. After time passes by, we recollect and say ‘That time, that happened, but today God has blessed us with this. God has saved us. We were in sickness but as we prayed, God has answered us that today.’ In that way.” This also indicates that children need to be able to observe

adults who have a relationship with God and see how their faith in God helped them overcome problems, difficult individuals, or hard circumstances (Miller 2015).

The findings illustrate that sharing personal experiences with children is an essential aspect of relationship that allows access to spirituality towards resilience because children get to hear, observe, and experience what it is like to rely on God and trust in God to prevail despite difficulties and challenging situations.

**Peers Can Provide an Important Aspect of *Relationship* that Allows Access to Spirituality towards Resilience.**

After the researcher finished the interview with C2, she formally thanked him verbally. C2 was not in a hurry to leave the room. He was already very comfortable. As the researcher was preparing to interview the parents, she asked him a question: “So, who are your best friends?” This question was not in the protocol; it was just a question that the researcher would normally ask children while interacting with them.

*(Scene: Researcher putting back the crayons and C2 looking at the eraser and fiddling with it).*

Researcher: So, who are your best friends?

C2: Aah. *(stops fiddling with the eraser looks at the researcher)* A, B, C, ah, I have, like, 12 friends.

Researcher: Woah, so many! Are they all in Sunday school or in school?

C2: All in school, like, just in school. In Sunday school, let me think *(immediately puts down the eraser that he was fiddling with, pauses for a few seconds and starts counting using his fingers)*. Four! . . . My best friends are A, B, and C in Sunday school, and A, B, C, and D in school.

Researcher: So, friends are so important to you.

C2: Friends can help you out and, like. . . They are not like parents . . . *(shifts his glance from looking at his hands fiddling with the eraser to looking at the researcher)* and you can talk to them, like, keep your secrets. I go to their houses . . . sometimes just stay in the friend’s house whenever it is not so interesting. . . . But when I come home again, it is kind of interesting *(adjusts himself to sit*

*properly and putting his right feet up and was quite in a comfortable mode).*

Several implications can be drawn from this conversation. First, friendships are of great value to children at this stage, as they “generally become more interested in forming and nurturing relationships with peers” (Kuther 2017, 679), and having friendships is also an important aspect of life. “Children need friends with whom to develop social skills and experiment with launching out beyond the family” (May et al. 2005, 169). Second, there is a transition of relationship from the parents to the increasing role of friends, indicating a sense of resilience through friendship in the life of C2. The researcher lacks the information necessary for determining the quality of C2’s friendships, and C2 is not a child at risk. Nevertheless, friendship as a factor of resilience is also evident in the life of C2 as seen from the regard that he has towards his friends.

**Moral Values teachers in school could be an important aspect of *relationship* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.**

When C1 was asked who the most comfortable people are to talk with about God, he replied, “My parents and maybe [my] scripture teacher.” C1 was clearly not talking about a Sunday school teacher in this context. He goes to a Christian school and in Christian schools they usually have a subject related to the Bible. When he mentioned the scripture teacher, it was important to recognize moral teachers in schools as an important aspect of relationship that allows access to spirituality towards resilience. One of the Sunday school teachers, T2, validated the response given by C1, saying, “If there are teachers who teach moral values, those will be of great help to the students.” Children's lives are significantly impacted by the influence of important adults (May et al. 2005, 161).



**The presence of parents is a crucial aspect of *relationship* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.**

When children were asked about who children approach when they are going through a difficult time, the children indicated that that they will go to their parents. The responses of the children included, “I go to my parents first and, after that, God. When I am with my parents, I know that I am safe” (C4); “My parents” (C5); “I go near my father and think to God that I am not be scared” (C6); “It would be my mother” (C7). One of the implications that can be drawn from the protective factor model of resilience (Zimmerman and Arunkumar 1984, 6) is that when children go through difficulties there needs to be a source for support, and the presence of the parents can potentially be that source. Because the nature of the relationship between parents and children directly affects the child’s relationship with God, the child's capacity to rely on God under trying circumstances depends on the relationship between the child and the parents (Stonehouse 2001, 58). This also indicates that the physical aspect of the presence is critical in a relationship that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.

**Parents as role models are a crucial aspect of *relationship* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.**

C2’s father explained that when children see consistent spiritual activities being modeled by their parents, those spiritual activities such as prayer (or other religious practices such as going to church) provide an access to spirituality during difficult times:

Aah, I think (*thinking deeply, a little frown appearing between the eyes*) it is not about telling them, ooh, pray, ok? It is the everyday routine, no? (*Sounded like a confirmation was desired*) It is the everyday (*emphasis on the word every day and unfolds his hands to explain that*) that we do. We fail in that (*At this point, the*

*researcher was thankful that he was honest*). That everyday prayer, that everyday compassion, that empathy that we instill in them--I think that is important because at the end of the day, suddenly you face a tragedy or a situation whereby you are compelled to seek God, and you cannot force the children, "Pray to God" (*sounded like a command that parents would usually tell children mixed with anger and helplessness*). I do not think that is possible. And that is not wise, but that everyday trust that we instill in them--that is something that can stir them to seek God individually instead of us telling them pray to God. I am not saying we are doing that every day. We fail in that (*This is the second time he confessed this*). We also try, but I think that goes a long way, not just a day of instruction. We also try. But we try to go to church together, we try to pray together. We do not always tell them, "Do this, do that." But we make sure that when they see us doing things together, I think automatically, instead of us telling them, they will catch up, I feel, actually.

Several implications can be drawn from what C2's father said. First, being a consistent spiritual role model is not easy even for parents, and it can be impractical some days, but the truth is, even if children are intentionally taught about God, it is crucial for them to have a role model and to see who practices spirituality consistently (May 2006, 33). Second, practices such as going to church, and praying to God consistently could be one crucial factor for children to develop access to spirituality towards resilience. A study (Harvard T. H. Chan School of Public Health 2018) conducted with more than 5000 children 8-14 years old, who were then interviewed during their youth (23-30 years), reported that children who had a religious upbringing, e.g., attending religious service at least once a week, or who had practiced religious activities like daily prayer reported mental as well as physical well-being. They were happier and less involved in destructive behaviors such as drug abuse when compared to those who did not have a religious upbringing.

**Grandparents are a significant aspect of *relationships* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.**

When C1 was asked if there is any special place where he can go to be with God, he said, “Churches. [And] when I go to my grandparents’ house, like, almost every time we pray.” He indicated that he was referring to his maternal grandparents. C1’s response clearly demonstrates that he is able to see that God is accessible through prayer in the presence of his grandparents. C6’s father mentioned that grandparents play an important role in the life of the grandchildren, stating “Parents are also important but, when it comes to grandparents, when parents love children, that is also different. But when grandparents give the love and attention to their grandchildren, that is very different. In addition to the love that they receive from grandparents, raising them in the ways of God may be a strong impact that I think [they] may have.” C1 has witnessed her grandparents living out their faith in God, and C6’s father commented about the importance of grandparents in the lives of their grandchildren, indicating that grandparents can comprise significant aspects of relationships that allow access to spirituality towards resilience, “Grandparents who practice their faith before their grandchildren, particularly as they live out the arduous process of aging, can provide a model their grandchildren can draw on, even emulate, when [they] face adversity” (Allen 2021, 77).

It is evident from the responses of the children that their peers, parents, grandparents, and moral values teachers are important figures in relationships that allow access to spirituality. The responses from the parents also indicates that their relationships with their children give the children the avenue to experience God vicariously and the opportunity to share their stories of how God took them through difficult times. These, in turn, can be crucial platforms in the criteria of relationships that allow access to spirituality towards resilience.

The interview responses reveal that the significance of *relationship* as a method for access to spirituality cannot be overstated. The various kinds of *relationships* unveiled as methods for access to spirituality included parents as role models; vicarious experiences of God through relationship with parents, grandparents, teachers and friends; and, vicarious learning about God through the testimony of the parents.

### **Research Question 5**

**IN WHAT WAYS DOES INTIMACY ALLOW ACCESS TO SPIRITUALITY TOWARDS RESILIENCY AMONG THE SELECTED CHILDREN IN NAGALAND?**

**Not taking children for granted just because they are young is an important aspect of *intimacy* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.**

Amid the comprehensive interview with C2's parents, C2 entered the room unannounced, looking for something. C2's mother responded kindly, "Please give us few more minutes," and the father told C2, "We will come to you later, ok?" They respectfully requested their child to exit the room, and their tone of voice was relaxed as they did so. They did not exhibit any belittling attitude towards C2, who was interrupting the serious interview taking place. They made him feel important. They paid attention to him when he entered. In the interview, C2's father recalled an incident, which he narrated: "One day he asked me what is beyond the sky. I said, 'It is endless. The universe is endless. Are we floating? We do not know. Are we falling by gravity somewhere? We do not know. The whole planet system may just be hovering around, we do not know. There is no ceiling like this; I do not know.' 'Eeeew, creepy, that is so creepy!' he (C2) said." C2's father did not brush off the question as silly or as nonsense because a child was asking it, and he tried his best to give him an honest answer. C2's

reply, “Eeeew, creepy” as a response to the statement made by the father shows that C2 is comfortable with himself and able to respond in his own way.

### The interview

Researcher: Who is the best person to talk to about God?

C2: My parents

Researcher: Do you feel comfortable to talk about God with anybody?

C2: Yes a little bit.

Researcher: With whom do you feel comfortable to talk about God?

C2: My parents, you (points at researcher), and then—who else—my siblings.

Note: The researcher was surprised when C2 mentioned her. However, the interaction also reminded the researcher that for children to feel comfortable enough to talk about God and have access to spirituality, an invitation needs to be extended and an intentional environment needs to be created (Logan and Miller 2017, 81).

Through the real incident during the interview of the parents, the reminiscence of the father’s experience, and the interview testimony, two conclusions can be drawn. First, the response to the interview questions portrays an environment where C2 feels safe, not belittled, and not judged because of his young age. This promotes the essence of intimacy which is to feel safe regardless of the thoughts and doubts children have (Nye 2009, 53). Second, there was a positive flow of communication between the child and the parents even with reference to spiritual talks, which is an important factor that contributes to resilience: “The way that parents communicate with their children can cultivate personal characteristics that are more or less flexible, adaptive and resilient” (Theiss 2018, 11).

**Trust allows *intimacy* needed for children to access to spirituality.**

When C4's parents were asked, "What helps children to feel safe enough to talk about the questions they have about God," C4's father replied, "For me, it is the level of trust that the children have with their parents, that they will not be judged, whatever the question may be." Trust is an essential element for intimacy that provides access to spirituality, and this needs to be intentionally cultivated by the parents so that the children feel safe to ask their questions.

Encouraging children to communicate strengthens intimacy that allows access to spirituality.

C4's mother believes that children are usually expressive in nature. She remarked, "According to my experience, every day children want to express themselves, they want to say something." C4's mother also believes that communication needs to be initiated by the parents. "Until and unless the space and the opportunity is created, how will they express themselves? The more we communicate, [the more] they tell us about what doubts and fears they have." In addition, C4's mother stated that, since she stays home a lot, she can sense the gap in the relationship between herself and the children when the communication of the children is less. Furthermore, C4's mother explained that children can sense when the parents are not comfortable to communicate. "They would just respond like, it is ok, just leave it." Encouraging children to express themselves and making time to build a relationship with children encourages intimacy between the child and the parents that allows access to spirituality.

**The attitude of busy parents can be a help or a hindrance in nurturing *intimacy* that allows children access to spirituality towards resilience.**

According to C1's father, when children ask questions, it is crucial that parents be intentionally mindful of their attitude even when they are busy. C1's father himself is a health professional and, even when he is home, he is on call, meaning he does not get to

spend much time with his children. Nevertheless, despite his busyness, he believes that parents can choose to have an attitude that creates a healthy habit even during their hectic schedule. In his words, “When we are busy or when we are occupied with certain things, so many problems, so many priorities, so many things, difficulties at work . . . so, when we always postpone their question, when we tell them “Not now, not now” (*annoyed face with hand movements*) with repeated “not nows” or when we tell them, “Don’t ask me such things.” Brushing off their questions (*uses his right hand to demonstrate brushing off*), I do not think that is a healthy habit. Because it does not take much time to look them in the eye and tell them, “My child, right now I am busy with this certain thing. Let me finish this thing and we can get back to your question.”

In the case of C6’s father, he stated that some attitudes of adults can instill fear in the child. The parents “may be using harsh language, the whole attitude actually, or maybe when you return home very tired and you do not feel like saying anything and show them your irritation.”

Busy schedules can result in unfriendly attitudes by parents and hinder intimacy with their children. On the other hand, responding in a giving manner, making an intentional effort to be mindful of one’s attitude, and taking time to explain to the child, can pave way for intimacy to be established in the relationship between the parents and the children, allowing access to spirituality.

**Overreacting responses to children can impede *intimacy* that allows access to spirituality.**

C1’s mother, a devoted, dedicated, and nurturing mother, is experiencing a great relationship with her children and her husband. She finds God to be her Savior, her comforter, and her refuge. She pointed out that “overreacting” is one attitude that can

create a hindrance to creating an intimate relationship with her children. She admitted that she has reacted harshly to her children several times, and has determined that reacting in this way does not help children, and only creates an unhealthy environment where the child is scared off. “When parents react negatively, the children are afraid, so the next time, instead of confessing, they hide it.” When children are afraid of how their parents may react to their actions or questions, it can create a rift between the child and the parents which in turn can be a hindrance to nurturing an intimate relationship that would allow access to spirituality.

**Belittling attitudes of adults can hinder *intimacy* that allows access to spirituality.**

According to T2, the Sunday school teacher, teaching in Sunday school should not be taken for granted just because the children are young. T2 taught Sunday school grades 1 and 2. She said, “We need to study also. We should not just take it for granted, saying, ‘They are children, so they will not know.’ We really need to prepare to teach about God.” Children are belittled when adults fail to take their spiritual education seriously. This undermines the significance and diminishes the experience by children of Sunday school education, which should be devoted to a child’s access of spirituality. Belittlement hinders access to spirituality which otherwise could have been gained.

Several participants mentioned that the belittling attitude can happen among adults. T2’s father pointed out, “There are different kinds of people. I have seen some adults, when children engage in talk, they will listen intently, and they will reply. But there are some who would not even acknowledge what they are trying to say. Only older people should talk with that kind of attitude. The small boy or the small girl is trying to talk to them but ‘Okay, okay.’ Just trying to brush them off.” Some said the belittling attitude is



because of tradition: “Because in our traditional families we tend to say, ‘I know, as a father I know, you do not have to question me. What I say is correct’” (T1, Sunday school teacher). Some said it is because of habit: “But for us, because that is a habit, ‘I am the father,’ ‘I am the mother, listen to what I say.’ That habit [continues] (C5’s mother).” Some said the belittling attitude is because of culture. “Being parents, I think we become selfish and we also become like know-it-alls; we do that a lot in our culture” (C3’s mother). Whatever the reasons may be, what is important is that “the belittling attitude is identified” and several steps are taken to counter it, such as “listening to them” (C5 and C3’s mothers), “having an understanding attitude” (T1), “creating a godly, and non-judgmental atmosphere and having an understanding attitude” (T1). Belittling children is a hindrance to creating intimate relationships because children feel ignored and undervalued. T1 also adds “Once you ignore them, the second time they will not come back.”

**The lifestyle of the parents could be a hindrance towards allowing *intimacy* to flourish.**

When C8’s parents were asked to identify some of the behaviors and attitudes that can hinder children from asking questions they have about God, C8’s mother expressed her belief that the way the parents live their lives is a big determining factor: “For some parents, they use alcohol and drugs and they do the opposite of what the Bible says, so to them, it is difficult to share about God. If we the parents live well, the children will also be glad to talk with us anything about God, if we live in the light of God.” C8’s father added, “Like what the Bible says, that we should not steal. So, if the parents do not live by that, the children might not be able to ask us questions about God.” When children witness their parents failing to live what they profess, they may be hindered

from talking about God with their parents, thus preventing the intimacy that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.

It is evident from the responses of the parents that intimacy has the potential to allow access to spirituality towards resilience because intimacy also means taking children seriously, initiating communication with children, making time for children for in the midst of busy schedules, and living a godly life so that children will be able to comfortably communicate about spirituality with their parents.

It is discernable from the responses of the parents and the Sunday teachers that *Intimacy* as a method of access to spirituality takes the form of communication, checking attitudes and lifestyle, and not taking children for granted just because they are young.

#### **Research Question 6:**

**IN WHAT WAYS DOES TRUST ALLOW ACCESS TO SPIRITUALITY TOWARDS RESILIENCY AMONG THE SELECTED CHILDREN IN NAGALAND?**

**Children recognize the need for guidance from adults as they learn to *trust* in God.**

When C3 was asked the question, “I wonder if children can trust God by themselves . . . what do you think?” he said, “They can’t because they also need guidance from pastors and, like, schoolteachers.” C3’s mother also explains things to them from the Bible, and, in addition, they do Bible studies with other families as well. This indicates that adult involvement in the form of guidance is a crucial aspect in the process of trust that allows access to spirituality.

**Children need opportunities that allow them to exercise their *trust* in God.**

When C7 was asked, “Can children trust God by themselves?” she replied, “Parents would have to give them the courage to, but still they can.” This indicates that

children have their own ways to connect with God, but guidance in the form of a nurturing environment is equally crucial. C7's mother mentioned that when C7 is scared to sleep at night, she lets her pray to God by herself—in her presence, but “to pray by herself.” Resiliency theory indicates that not all forms of challenges or stress are bad for children (Masten and Barnes 2018, 97) and, to some degree, it is essential to develop resistance, but it must be monitored and controlled, and not beyond what the child can handle (Rutter 2013, 237). In addition, C7 was also given a children's Bible so that she can read by herself. This also implies that guidance is not parents doing everything for the children but helping the children to help themselves. Children need to be guided but they must be also given the opportunity to exercise what they learn (Eaude 2014, 243).

**Proactively teaching children about God and helping them understand about God is an important aspect of *trust* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.**

C6's father states that children at a certain age will have the potential to reason about God for themselves but, at this [younger] stage, they need guidance in the form of pro-actively being taught about God. “There are certain stages that they may also reason for themselves, but for us at this juncture, we have to be telling them ourselves, not just to explain but also to help them understand.”

**Raising children in a godly way is an essential process of *trust* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.**

For children to *trust* in God, initially the word of God must be planted in their hearts.

For children to experience the trust that allows access to spirituality, it is important that parents not only introduce God to the child but also assure them of why he can be trusted. C1's father states, “Make them understand that God is there, God is watching over you, and he wants the best for you.” C1's father states that if the seed of

God's assurance is implanted in the hearts of the child, then the process of trusting God can develop. "If that feeling is clearly planted in their hearts, once the seed is planted, then the process automatically takes over, they can start."

For children to *trust* in God, teaching is crucial

According to C3's mother, for C3 to develop trust that allows access to spirituality, teaching children the spiritual and moral, as well as setting an example, all go hand in hand. "It goes back to teaching them, guiding them, teaching them how to pray, values, and things from the Bible—not only from the Bible, but the things which are right and wrong, by setting an example." C3's mother's desire is for the children to be able to trust in God even in their absence. "Even if we are not there, we know that they are secure, he is doing fine. I think we should be able to raise that kind of children."

For children to *trust* in God by themselves, the nurture in the home environment and the Sunday school is crucial

C3's father adds that parents play a crucial role in this process, "I think, not I think, but it will depend a lot on the parents when they are growing up." C3's father's statement on the crucial role of the parents is not an opinion, "I think, not I think, but it will depend," but an important point, a determining factor.

C5's mother's view of children experiencing trust that allows access to spirituality is that it is dependent on teachings that the children receive from their parents at home and in Sunday school;

Parents also teach them at home about God's love and tell them that if you disobey, even if your parents are not with you, God sees us all from above. Parents tell them at home, Sunday school also tells them that, and even the school tells them that. So, according to what I think, they will also remember in their heart.

**Trusting that children can connect to God by themselves can be a help or hindrance to *trust* that allows access to spirituality.**

C2 is an 8-year-old boy, and the researcher believes that age does not limit children's ability to connect to God. The researcher trusts that C2 can connect to God at his own level and can make decisions, and he has the choice to contribute his ideas to the study of the researcher. And because of these beliefs, the researcher decided to interview C2 in the first place. This part of the interview portrays how C2 is trusting God in his own way:

Researcher: When you pray, what comes to your mind?

C2: About God and the future

Researcher: Do you think children can think deeply about God?

C2: Yes (*with confidence*).

Researcher: Why do you think so?

C2: Because all the children know about God (*he sounded confident*).

Researcher: Does God know all the children?

C2: Yes, of course (*confidently*).

Researcher: Why do you think so?

C2: Because he is God. And he knows everything. He knows our future.

Researcher: Are you afraid of the future?

C2: Uhm, yes (*the pace was slower than before*).

Researcher: Can I ask why?

C2: (*Looks at the researcher*) Because I don't know what is going to happen.

Researcher: But you know who is in charge of the future, right?

C: Yes.

Researcher: Who is that?

C2: God.

Keeping in mind that the researcher cannot precisely judge the quality of relationship between God and C2 (because relationship with God is personal, just between the person and God), she cannot fully attest to the fact that all of C2's responses are precisely and completely genuine. However, according to the conversation, it can logically be concluded that C2 is able to trust God by himself and, although he fears the

future, he is aware that God will be in the future too.

The researcher was relieved to hear that C2 knows that God holds the future. Perhaps C2 just answered this to please the researcher, perhaps C2 truly believes, or perhaps C2 has yet to truly understand? Whatever the case, it made the researcher wonder both from a positive and negative perspective about that feeling of relief she experienced. On the positive side, there was verbal assurance, confirmation, and a sense of peace that the researcher experienced because C2 knew that God oversees the future and can he trust in him. From a negative angle, the “positive” feeling could become a false comfort for the researcher or any parents or teachers, causing them to forget the fact that for children to be able to continue to rely on their spirituality, they “must receive support from adults and their environments” (Foy, Kent and Patricia 2011, 92). When C2 was asked the question, “Do you think adults believe that children can also trust God by themselves?” C2 replied, “Yes. If they teach them.” Children are still learning and need intentional guidance and, intentional effort to cultivate trust in God. A deliberate effort needs to be made by adults so that children will trust in God as they grow up, even during the most challenging seasons of their lives.

As C2 exited the room after his interview, his mother entered the room and was asking about how it went. C2’s mother mentioned, “C2 is the kind of child that is so spontaneous—whatever it is, good or bad, just comes out. That is why I am a little worried” (*she sounded a little concerned*). The researcher wondered, why did the mother say that? Was it because C2 was just an 8-year-old boy? Would the mother have the same concern if C2 was a teenager? Was the mother worried because children cannot be

trusted? Does the mother's question mean that the interview with C2 cannot be trusted? C2's mother knows her children very well and decided to leave her job to take care of them when he was young. C2 is 8 years old, and his mother said, "Without them [referring to her children], my life would be incomplete." C2's mother also understands that because C2 is young, he has a limited ability to comprehend God. She said, "They are in this stage where we cannot be too deep about spiritual things. Of course they are learning, but then we cannot . . . know. Even if we tell them, they cannot comprehend everything." This limited ability to comprehend does not stop C2's mother from teaching and telling him about God: "[By] small steps we try to tell them that we need to trust God (*father crosses his hands, thinking mode, nods his head*). C2's father added that even though children are young, they still have the potential to connect with God from their level: "I believe children's minds are not polluted. They are pure (deeply thinking) in their thinking, so I think their conversation will be more meaningful with God." From the response of C2's mother, it is evident that understanding the developmental capability of children is crucial for the spiritual nurture of children. Yet, from the response of C2's father, it is evident that children's potential to connect with God transcends their developmental abilities.

The responses of the parents show that *Trust* is an important aspect of access to spirituality. It is also evident that trust as a method of access to spirituality can be maximized by guiding children to trust in God, giving children the opportunities to trust in God, proactively teaching them about God, raising them in a godly environment, and teaching children about God without underestimating a child's capacity for genuine and meaningful personal relationship with God.

## Summary

This chapter focused on presentation, analysis and interpretation of data. The findings of the study were presented according to the six research questions. The data was analyzed based on the verbatim transcript of the interview and observations.

Findings from the study revealed *Space, Process, Imagination, Relationship, Intimacy*, and *Trust* as valid criteria for exploring methods that allow children access to spirituality towards resilience. The exploration of the six criteria unveiled the various and particular ways in which each criterion serves as a method for access to spirituality by children. Access to spirituality can take many forms. The findings illuminate valuable methods that are practical for allowing children to have access to spirituality, access that goes beyond being simply acquainted with the idea of spirituality, for the purpose of developing resilience.

In addition to the substantial discoveries regarding methods for accessing spirituality, this study confirmed the essential and illuminating value of children's perspectives and voices; established that children, irrespective of whether they are doing well or not, have their own set of challenges; revealed that children's access to spirituality is hugely dependent on the attitude, behavior, and lifestyle, of significant adults; affirmed the importance of taking children's access to spirituality seriously; and, brought attention to the 'need' and the 'deep desire' of the parents and the Sunday school teachers for children to experience resilience through their relationship with God while they are young and as they grow up.



All of the findings described in this chapter have significant implications for understanding and cultivating the spiritual life and well-being of children by parents and educators. These implications will be identified and discussed in the chapter that follows.

**Table 3. Summative Representation of the all the Case Insights According to the S.P.I.R.I.T Category**

<p><b>Space</b></p>	<p>1. Sunday school and church participation play a vital role in providing <i>space</i> that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <u>Children find church and Sunday school a designated space where God is available/accessible to them, and where they can freely focus on and encounter God.</u></li> <li>- <u>Children recognize, value, and take seriously the space provided to encounter God in church.</u></li> <li>- <u>The care/condition of the physical space send a message to children that can help or hinder a child’s access to spirituality.</u></li> <li>- <u>Church and Sunday School provide space for encountering God through relationships / interactions with others.</u></li> </ul> <p>2. The home environment is an important <i>space</i> that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <u>The home as a foundation for spiritual nurture.</u></li> <li>- <u>The home as a base for spiritual teaching.</u></li> </ul> <p>3. Physical places where children are comfortable and familiar are an important <i>space</i> that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.</p> <p>4. Emotional and auditory <i>space</i> as an important space that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <u>Listening before assuming and judging</u></li> </ul> <p>5. Understanding that God can be connected with from anywhere regardless of <i>space</i> is an important aspect that allows access to spirituality towards resilience</p>
<p><b>Process</b></p>	<p>1. Verbal assurance is an important aspect of <i>process</i> that allows children access to spirituality towards resilience.</p> <p>2. Encouraging children to pray in all situations is a significant aspect of <i>process</i> that allows children to access spirituality towards resilience.</p> <p>3. Parents giving children opportunities to pray by themselves in their presence is an important aspect of <i>process</i> that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.</p>

	<p>4. Allowing children to reflect on what they know about God gives children opportunity to understand God in their own way, and this can be an important aspect of <i>process</i> needed for access to spirituality towards resilience.</p> <p>5. Learning about God at a young age is a crucial aspect of <i>process</i> that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.</p> <p>6. Intentional learning is an important aspect of <i>process</i> that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.</p> <p>7. Seizing challenging moments and turning them into teaching moments is an important aspect of <i>process</i> that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.</p> <p>8. Challenges are an important aspect of <i>process</i> that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <u>Doing what needs to be done during challenges—Spiritual practices as steppingstones.</u></li> <li>- <u>Facing challenges is not about removing the problems but going through the problems.</u></li> <li>- <u>Facing challenges is also about preparation.</u></li> </ul> <p>9. Creating an atmosphere conducive to question asking is a crucial aspect of <i>process</i> that allows children to have access to spirituality towards resilience.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <u>Space for questions is necessary because of the growing complexity of the world.</u></li> <li>- <u>Creating a safe space for children to ask questions</u></li> <li>- <u>An atmosphere conducive to questions involves an explicit welcome of questions extended to the children by parents and teachers.</u></li> </ul> <p>10. Encouraging questions is an important aspect of <i>process</i> that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <u>Encouraging questions affirms natural inquisitiveness.</u></li> <li>- <u>Asking questions provides opportunity for parents and teachers to guide the children.</u></li> <li>- <u>Encouraging questions helps overcome doubts.</u></li> <li>- <u>Encouraging children to ask questions also requires not imposing boundaries or judgements related to the question.</u></li> <li>- <u>Encouraging questions calls for assuring children that all questions are important.</u></li> <li>- <u>Encouraging questions requires adults to be open and vulnerable</u></li> <li>- <u>Setting aside an intentional time for children to ask their questions</u></li> <li>- <u>Turning questions into a spiritual quest</u></li> </ul> <p>11. Paying attention to children’s experiences is an important aspect of <i>process</i> that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.</p> <p>12. Prayer can be a hindrance in the <i>process</i> towards access to spirituality towards resilience.</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <u>Magical prayers can be a hindrance in the process that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.</u></li> <li>- <u>Faith in the prayers' themselves rather than in 'God' can be a hindrance towards access to spirituality.</u></li> </ul> <p>13. Routine prayer with an explanation could be a <i>process</i> that increases access to spirituality towards resilience.</p> <p>14. Assuming that children are too young to experience God can be a help or hindrance in the <i>process</i> towards access to spirituality towards resilience.</p> <p>15. Language could be a help or hindrance in the <i>process</i> that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.</p>
<b>Imagination</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Conceptualization of God is an important aspect of <i>imagination</i> that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.</li> <li>2. Creative art is an important aspect of <i>imagination</i> that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.</li> <li>3. Stories are an important aspect of <i>imagination</i> that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.</li> <li>4. Media is one avenue for <i>imagination</i> that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.</li> </ol>
<b>Relationship</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Vicarious experiences of God through parents are an important aspect of <i>Relationship</i> that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.</li> <li>2. Sharing personal experience is an essential aspect of <i>Relationship</i> that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.</li> <li>3. Peers can provide an important aspect of <i>relationship</i> that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.</li> <li>4. Moral Values teachers in school could be an important aspect of <i>relationship</i> that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.</li> <li>5. The presence of parents is a crucial aspect of <i>relationship</i> that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.</li> <li>6. Parents as role models are a crucial aspect of <i>relationship</i> that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.</li> <li>7. Grandparents are a significant aspect of <i>relationships</i> that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.</li> </ol>
<b>Intimacy</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Not taking children for granted just because they are young is an important aspect of <i>intimacy</i> that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.</li> <li>2. Trust allows <i>intimacy</i> needed for children to access to spirituality. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <u>Encouraging children to communicate strengthens intimacy that allows access to spirituality.</u></li> </ul> </li> <li>3. The attitude of busy parents can be a help or a hindrance in nurturing <i>intimacy</i> that allows children access to spirituality towards resilience.</li> <li>4. Overreacting responses to children can impede <i>intimacy</i> that allows access to spirituality.</li> </ol>

	<p>5. Belittling attitudes of adults can hinder <i>intimacy</i> that allows access Spirituality.</p> <p>6. The lifestyle of the parents could be a hindrance towards allowing <i>intimacy</i> to flourish.</p>
<b>Trust</b>	<p>1. Children recognize the need for guidance from adults as they learn to <i>trust</i> in God.</p> <p>2. Children need opportunities that allow them to exercise their <i>trust</i> in God.</p> <p>3. Proactively teaching children about God and helping them understand about God is an important aspect of <i>trust</i> that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.</p> <p>4. Raising children in a godly way is an essential process of <i>trust</i> that allows access to spirituality <i>towards resilience</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <u>For children to trust in God, initially the word of God must be planted in their hearts</u></li> <li>- <u>For children to trust in God, teaching is crucial</u></li> <li>- <u>For children to trust in God by themselves, the nurture in the home environment and the Sunday school is crucial</u></li> </ul> <p>5. Trusting that children can connect to God by themselves can be a help or hindrance to <i>trust</i> that allows access to spirituality.</p>

## **CHAPTER V**

### **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Children need access to spirituality for the sake of resilience when faced with day-to-day problems as well as very difficult situations. Because growing up in a Christian home does not automatically guarantee accessibility to spirituality, parents and educators need to be aware and equipped to ensure that children have the needed spiritual resources.

Parents and teachers can gain valuable insight from the various approaches to accessing spirituality identified and discussed in chapter 4. The main objective of the study was to explore methods that would allow access to spirituality towards resilience among the selected children in Nagaland, India. This chapter presents a summary of the findings, implications, and conclusions that were drawn from the research. Recommendations are offered on how parents, teachers, and the church can be more effective in cultivating the spirituality of their children.

#### **Summary of the Findings**

In order to identify methods that allow access to spirituality towards resilience, this study investigated six different approaches. To gather the data for the study, the researcher conducted interviews with selected children, their parents, and Sunday school teachers. Each method investigated confirmed the essential significance of the method and brought to light variations for accessing spirituality contained within each method. The exploration of the six approaches demonstrated multiple ways and means for

children to access spirituality. The six approaches included space, process, imagination, relationship, intimacy, and trust. The study uncovered various insights regarding access to spirituality for each designated method explored. They are listed below.

### **Space as a Method of Access to Spirituality**

The initial inquiry focused on discovering how *space* may facilitate access to spirituality to foster spiritual resilience among the selected children in Nagaland. Here are the findings:

1. The parents, children, and Sunday school teachers identified Sunday school and church participation as playing a vital role in providing *space* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.
  - a. Children find church and Sunday school a designated *space* where God is available/accessible to them, and where they can freely focus on and encounter God.
  - b. Children recognize, value, and take seriously the *space* provided to encounter God via church. “I would go to the church and spend time with God. Not like playing around or, like, but like worshipping, closing our eyes, and, like, telling him to help your family.”
  - c. The care/condition of the physical *space* sends a message to children that can help or hinder a child’s access to spirituality.
  - d. Church/Sunday School provide *space* for encountering God through relationships/interactions with others. “They also see how their friends behave, how their friends conduct [themselves], how to search for God, how they pray, praying together, singing together.”

2. The parent and children respondents identified home environment as an important aspect of *space* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.
  - a. The home is a foundation for spiritual nurture: “For children to know God, everything starts from home.”
  - b. The home is a base for spiritual teaching.
3. The children respondents and one of the fathers identified physical places where children are comfortable and familiar as an important aspect of *space* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.
4. The mothers in the study identified emotional and auditory spaces as an important aspect of *space* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.
  - a. Listening before assuming and judging: “I think we should not be too judgmental. If they come to us, if the moment they share their problems, and we say no, it must be your problem. Why did you do that? It must be your fault.”
  - b. Listening intently, quietly, and seriously: “I just listen quietly. I try to take it seriously; I must listen intently. It may even be my child’s fault, but I just listen first and then try to figure things out.”
  - c. Choosing to listen to children despite being raised in a culture where it is not common to listen to children: “We also become, like, knowing all, we know everything—‘Just keep quiet and listen.’ . . . We do that a lot in our culture. I think we should listen to them, then we will know.”

5. The children in the study identified the understanding that God can be accessible from anywhere regardless of physical space, and this is an important aspect of *space* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.

### **Process as a Method of Access to Spirituality**

The second inquiry focused on investigating the ways in which the *process* provides access to spirituality towards resilience among the selected children in Nagaland and here are the findings.

1. The parent and children respondents identified verbal assurance as an important aspect of *process* that allows children access to spirituality towards resilience.
2. One of the Sunday school teachers pointed out that encouraging children to pray in all situations is a significant aspect of *process* that allows children to access spirituality towards resilience. “When we teach the child, from the lesson also, we always tell them, like, if you have any problem, pray to God. He is there to listen to your prayer and answer your prayer. Even if there are things that you cannot tell your parents or best friend, tell God. God is not going to scold you but listen to your prayer, and God will help you.”
3. Two sets of parents identified that parents giving children opportunities to pray by themselves in their presence is an important aspect of *process* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience: “Instead of us always talking and sharing, we must give them time also.”
4. The responses from the children indicated that allowing them to reflect on what they know about God gives children an opportunity to understand God in their own way



and this can be an important aspect of *process* needed for access to spirituality towards resilience.

5. Two of the fathers and one Sunday school teacher identified learning about God at a young age as a crucial aspect of *process* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience: “Sometimes, not just sometimes, a lot of times, we think, ah, that they are too young to understand this, and we don’t talk about God and we don’t try to explain certain things. But I feel it is not like that. Because they too understand.”
6. The responses from the children and their parents indicated that intentional learning such as going to Sunday school is an important aspect of *process* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.
7. One of the mothers in the study identified seizing challenging moments and turning them into teaching moments is an important aspect of *process* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.
8. The children respondents identified challenges as an important aspect of *process* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.
  - a. Doing what needs to be done during challenges and spiritual practices as steppingstones: “I did not know what to do, what to tell her, whether to help her or not. But I knew it was the right thing to always pray for my uncle and tell her that he would be cured soon”.
  - b. Facing challenges is not about removing the problems but learning to go through the problems: “I just prayed to God. I told him to get rid of the fear.’ When asked if the fear went away, he answered ‘Not too much, but I felt confident.’”

- c. Facing challenges is also about preparation: “When my mind is really free, like, not very stressed, I just pray to God and I tell him to help me not to stress out too much and get me through those difficult times.”
9. The parents and Sunday school teachers identified creating an atmosphere conducive to question asking as a crucial aspect of *process* that allows children to have access to spirituality towards resilience.
- a. Space for questions is necessary because of the growing complexity of the world: “In our time we were very innocent because there was no pollution. But these days [there are] too many pressures, too many pollutions.”
  - b. Initiating a safe space for children to ask questions.
  - c. An atmosphere conducive to questions involves an explicit welcome of questions extended to the children by parents and teachers.
10. The parents and Sunday school teachers identified encouraging questions as an important aspect of *process* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.
- a. Encouraging questions affirms natural inquisitiveness in their “formative stage:” “During this time they are so inquisitive, they are asking so many questions, why this is like that, why it happen[s] to my family like that.”
  - b. Asking questions provides opportunity for parents and teachers to guide the children.
  - c. Encouraging children to ask questions helps them overcome doubts.
  - d. Encouraging children to ask questions requires that no boundaries or judgment be related to the question: “It can be a silly question, but trying to entertain that question, I think, that is important.”

- e. Encouraging questions calls for reassuring children that all questions are important, “we feel that whether it is a small or very unnecessary question, importance should be given to them.”
  - f. Encouraging questions requires adults to be open and vulnerable: “Sometimes as parents, also when they ask questions, we are speechless, sometimes we have no words.”
  - g. Setting aside an intentional time for children to ask their questions.
  - h. Turning questions into a spiritual quest: “Listen, I don’t know about this so that that is not the end. I do not leave it at that. I do not know about this but let us do one thing. Let us find the answer about this together.”
11. One of the father’s responses indicated that paying attention to children’s experience is an important aspect of *process* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience
12. The responses of the parents and Sunday school teachers indicated that prayer can be a hindrance in the *process* towards access to spirituality towards resilience.
- a. Magical prayers could be a hindrance in the process that allows access to spirituality towards resilience: “It was like a Santa Claus . . . I want something, and I pray, if I need something, it was like that. . . . “God is a provider, God is a healer. Praying to God is not only about taking things from him, not a shortcut, but we need to live a life of faithfulness and obedience. Prayer is not that instant.”
  - b. ‘Faith in the prayers’ themselves rather than in ‘God’ can be a hindrance towards access to spirituality.

13. The responses from the parents also indicated that routine prayer with an explanation can be a *process* that increases access to spirituality towards resilience.
14. The responses from the parents and the children indicated that assuming that children are too young to experience God can be a help or hindrance in the *process* towards access to spirituality towards resilience.
15. The response from the parents indicated that language can be a help or hindrance in the *process* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.

### **Imagination as a Method of Access to Spirituality**

The third inquiry aimed to investigate the ways in which *imagination* can facilitate access to spirituality. Here are the findings:

1. The responses from the children indicated that conceptualization of God is an important aspect of *imagination* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.
2. The response from one of the fathers indicated that creative art is an important aspect of *imagination* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.
3. The responses from the several fathers indicated that stories are an important aspect of *imagination* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.
4. The response from one set of parents indicated that media is one avenue in *imagination* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.

### **Relationship as a Method of Access to Spirituality**

The fourth inquiry focused on investigating the ways in which *relationships* facilitate access to spirituality. Here are the findings:

1. The responses of the parents as well as a Sunday school teacher indicated that vicarious experiences of God through the parents are an important aspect of *relationship* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.
2. The responses from parents and a Sunday school teacher and the children indicated that sharing personal experiences is an essential aspect of *relationship* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience: “Of course, sometimes when we are too hurt, we do not even feel like praying. But sometimes, we pray and when we pray, they have seen us with tears rolling down. I feel those experiences speak to them. We pray; sometimes, we cry and pray, so I think it speaks to them.” “If we go through bad times, we share with [the children] also about what we are going through. In addition to sharing, we also tell them that still God is with us. After time passes by, we recollect and say ‘That time, that happened, but today God has blessed us with this. God has saved us. We were in sickness but as we prayed, God has answered us that today.’”
3. The response of one of the children also indicated that peers can be an important aspect of *relationship* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.
4. The response from one of the children and a Sunday school teacher indicated that moral values teachers in school can be an important aspect of *relationship* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.
5. The responses from the children indicated that the presence of parents is a crucial aspect of *relationship* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience
6. The response of a father indicated that parents as role models are a crucial aspect of *relationship* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.

7. The responses from one of the children as well as a father indicated that grandparents can be a significant aspect of *relationships* that allow access to spirituality towards resilience

### **Intimacy as Method of Access to Spirituality**

The fifth questioning strategy investigated the role that *Intimacy* plays in facilitating access to spirituality. Here are the findings:

1. The responses from one of the children and his parents indicated that not taking children for granted just because they are young is an important aspect of *intimacy* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.
2. Responses from the parents indicated that trust allows the *intimacy* needed for children to have access to spirituality.
3. The response from one of the fathers indicated that the attitude of busy parents can be a help or a hindrance in nurturing *intimacy* that allows children access to spirituality towards resilience.
4. The response of one of the mothers indicated that overreacting in response to children can impede *intimacy* that allows access to spirituality
5. The response from a Sunday school teacher as well as several mothers indicated that adults overreacting or displaying a belittling attitude can hinder *intimacy* that allows access to spirituality.
6. The response from one set of parents indicated that the lifestyle of the parents can be a hindrance towards allowing *intimacy* to flourish.

## Trust as a Method of Access to Spirituality

The final inquiry centered on discovering how *trust* provides access to spirituality.

Here are the findings:

1. The response from one girl indicated that children recognize the need for guidance from adults as they learn to *trust* in God.
2. The response from one set of parents indicated that children need opportunities that allow them to exercise their *trust* in God
3. One of the responses from a father in the study indicated that proactively teaching children about God and helping them understand about God is an important aspect of *trust* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.
4. The responses from the several parents in the study indicated that raising children in godly ways is an essential part of the process of *trust* that allows access to spirituality towards resilience.
  - a. For children to trust in God, initially the word of God must be planted in their hearts.
  - b. For children to trust in God, teaching is crucial.
  - c. For children to trust in God by themselves, the nurture in the home environment and the Sunday school is critical.
5. The response from one of the parents indicated that trusting that children can connect to God by themselves can be a help or hindrance towards *trust* that allows access to spirituality.

## Conclusions

1. Access to spirituality includes practices that are varied and engage multiple dimensions of human experience.

The six criteria—space, process, imagination, relationship, intimacy, and trust—necessary for a spiritual foundation, as laid out by Rebecca Nye, encompass practices that allow access to spirituality towards resilience that are varied and address different aspects of human experiences such as the intellectual, emotional, relational, creative. On one hand, these six methods provide distinct approaches that can be handpicked, but, on the other hand, the six approaches are intertwined and interrelated, and all of them need to be employed. Every method calls for intentional and essential implementation. As an analogy, even though the amount of flour will not be the same as the amount of yeast and sugar needed to bake bread, all the ingredients are equally essential aspects of the whole. While the insights gleaned regarding the six criteria might give the impression that one criterion is more important than the others, they are in fact all equally essential. Minor's (2012) research demonstrates that Godly Play© is one approach to religious education that incorporates Rebecca Nye's six criteria for spiritual nurture. Godly Play© has been used as an intervention for children who are going through difficult times and is found to help children make sense of challenging questions such as "Why am I here?" and "What is the meaning of life?" Although Godly Play© was not designed as a treatment plan, the Minor study found that it helped children express their difficulties in new ways and engage in open dialogue about their deepest questions and concerns (Minor and Campbell 2016). Researchers have also indicated that Godly Play© helped chronically ill children cope with anxiety and stress (Farrell et al. 2008). The findings, indicating that children



who practice Godly Play© demonstrate resilience during stressful situations, validate the usefulness of utilizing Nye's criteria for the study on how to preemptively train children to be resilient.

## 2. Access to spirituality requires caution.

Verbal assurance and prayers are two of the most common mechanisms that can come in handy in building access to spirituality. However, these practices can be detrimental if they are not balanced with understanding, personal growth, action, and responsibility.

Verbal assurances about the comforting presence of God can involve using phrases such as, "God will take care of us. It is okay. Child, God is here, God will help us. Do not be scared and do not be afraid." Telling a child that, if we trust in God, everything will be all right may give assurance to a child during difficult or challenging times, which is crucial. But, if communication with God is restricted to merely receiving solace in the form of verbal affirmation, this opens the door to an additional risk.

Children may struggle to develop a deeper understanding of their spirituality and the role that God plays in their lives if all they have to rely on are designated phrases for solace, and the children may become overly dependent on them. It is essential for children to have a solid foundation in their spirituality and learn how to connect with God in ways that go beyond simple or simplistic verbal affirmations. In the end, providing children with verbal reassurance can be helpful in comforting them; however, this should be accompanied by a more in-depth and involved engagement with spirituality.

Prayers can be quick, easy, and effective to help children cope with difficult situations, in that they provide strength and motivation to hope. Nevertheless, prayer can

also foster a passive mindset where children merely rely on prayer without implementing additional activity towards growing spiritually. This can also lead to prayer becoming a routine task or prayers becoming magical lists of needs to be obtained. Approaching prayer as a mechanical formula for satisfying a wish list or a routine task for addressing God creates the risk of turning relationship with God into a transactional and monotonous one. Children may develop a false belief or expectation that praying in a certain way or a certain number of times guarantees the desired outcome. This can lead to a skewed understanding of God's nature and can foster a sense of entitlement. Also, this attitude toward prayer might be restricting, as it can prevent children from experiencing the full depth and richness of prayer, which is meant to be an ongoing conversation with God. Reducing prayer to a list of things to be procured misses the opportunities to express gratitude, seek guidance, or simply offer praise and adoration to God. To mitigate prayer in this way is detrimental. Children can be taught to see prayer as a way of deepening their relationship with God through listening to God's voice and being willing to receive and experience the fullness of his love and grace. Children need prayers of various kinds. Moreover, they also need to be given an opportunity for first-hand experience of prayer. They need to be encouraged to express their own prayers in their own words, and they need opportunities to lead prayer in group settings.

### 3. Access to spirituality requires freedom of physical, emotional and auditory space.

Physical space: Children recognize the potential of spaces like the physical church building to do their spiritual work, such as talking to God and spending time with him and worshipping him and freely encountering him. Children are aware of this and treat the church with great respect for the opportunity that the church affords them to interact with

God. Physical places that are comfortable and familiar to children, such as their bedrooms, are also spaces that contribute to the potential enablement of children to meet with God, talk with God, think about God, and connect with God. In addition, children need to understand that God is accessible through prayer from any place.

Emotional space: When children talk to adults about their struggles, it can be difficult for the adults to provide them with emotional space if they have the attitude of judging, criticizing, or condemning the children. It is important to validate their feelings and let them know that their struggles are real and important. Judging, criticizing, or condemning may make children feel rejected or unsupported in their emotions, and it may also discourage them from opening up about their troubles in the future.

Auditory space: when children share their struggles, despite being raised in a culture where it is not common to listen to children, it is crucial for the adult to first choose to listen to children seriously, gently and intently, even though they may be at fault. By doing so, children will feel heard, validated, and supported, which will help them build trust with adults and open up about their struggles in the future. Adults may believe that they know what is best for children. However, adults may not be aware of the child's needs, making it critical to listen to what they have to say from their perspective. It is important to remember that children may not have the words to express their thoughts and feelings, and therefore, adults must be patient and put effort into understanding what the child is trying to communicate.

4. Access to spirituality requires innovative interface. For example: Turning questions into a spiritual quest; and, turning difficult moments into teachable moments are two examples of how this can be done.

5. Access to spirituality requires creative tools such as stories (the best way for children to comprehend the truth is to have it related to them in the form of a story); creative art as a medium to communicate with God; and monitored use of media such as YouTube, which offers a space to interact, question, and assess thoughts in personal ways.
6. Access to spirituality can be affected by the attitude of the adults. Practices such as an overreacting response, being overtly critical or dismissive, belittling, busyness, taking children for granted, and living a life that contradicts the biblical principles can hinder children from discussing spirituality with their parents. On the other hand, a respectful and compassionate attitude towards children and being biblical role models encourages children to discuss their thoughts about spirituality with adults.
7. Access to spirituality needs to be interactively cultivated in the form of an ongoing conversation. This requires safe spaces conducive for children to question explicitly, wonder, or disagree, and where adults can be open and vulnerable.
8. Access to spirituality must have a balanced approach, including both adult guidance and freedom to experience God for themselves, along with opportunities for personal initiative and exploration.

When adults believe that children are too young to have their own experiences with God and that they thus need to be constantly directed and instructed, this might create a barrier for children's access to spirituality. It is essential to encourage and facilitate children's access to spirituality in a manner that is courteous and developmentally suitable for their ages. It is also essential to recognize that children are spiritual beings in their own right and that adults are not the only ones who have the capacity for spiritual experience or connecting with God. While children do require

direction and instruction, they also need to discover and experience their relationship with God in a manner that is unique to them.

9. Access to spirituality is vicarious.

Children's connection to God will be strengthened if they feel loved and cared for by their parents. The physical presence of the parents helps children understand that God is with them. In addition, children have the opportunity to benefit from a vicarious experience of God when their parents are open and honest about their own experiences as well as their trust in God.

10. Access to spirituality is relational.

When children go through difficult times, it is parents who they look for and the presence of the parents itself gives them a sense of comfort. Children can also develop a personal and meaningful relationship with God through the help of their Sunday school teachers, moral values teachers in school, grandparents, and peers.

11. Access to spirituality is intentional.

Access to spirituality is also about intentionally and actively seeking out opportunities to teach children about God, to read the Bible, study the Bible, attend church, model faithful behavior, send the children to Sunday school, and provide a children's Bible, Bible story books, children's devotionals, etc.

12. Access to spirituality is reflective, unhurried, and non-inculcating.

All children may learn the same Bible story, but it will speak to each of them differently. It will speak to them according to their needs. For example, the general message of the story of the Good Shepherd is that Jesus is the true shepherd. However, that may not be what all the children needed to hear. A child may need to hear that Jesus

knows his name, that Jesus loves all children unconditionally, that they as children might feel like the lost sheep that needs to be rescued. There are endless possibilities as to how children see themselves in the story and how they relate to the story. Imaginative approaches to religious education such as *Young Children and Worship* and *Godly Play*© allow children to engage reflectively and unhurriedly in the stories of the Bible. These approaches do not concentrate on the specifics of the narrative or being able to repeat specific answers to complex inquiries; rather, they urge children to concentrate on the emotions of the characters in the Bible story as well as the child's own experiences by helping children enter the story and engage in a conversation with God and the community. These methods also offer a space for wonder, which is not the same thing as aimless wandering. Rather, children are provided an opportunity to listen to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and to find their own way to connect with the biblical truth by using “I wonder” questions such as “I wonder if you ever had to go through places of danger,” or “I wonder how the Good Shepherd feels about the sheep.”

## **Recommendations**

### Recommendations for the Church

1. According to the findings, parents play a significant part in their children's access to spirituality and their children’s ability to remain resilient. This suggests that the church has to take this matter very seriously and has a significant obligation to successfully nurture the spirituality of the parents as a priority. In light of this, here are several recommendations:
  - a. Host conferences that focus on family and faith.
  - b. Host seminars on raising children in today’s culture.

- c. Create a prayer ministry specifically for families.
  - d. Offer mentorship programs for parents to learn from more experienced spiritual individuals.
  - e. Offer parenting workshops on how to raise their children according to Christian values in a technology-driven world.
  - f. Create parent support groups to encourage and strengthen families.
  - g. Host family-oriented events and activities.
  - h. Offer parents classes on Biblical principles and practices.
  - i. Encourage families to have regular devotionals to help them nurture their children's spirituality.
  - j. Offer spiritual guidance and support for parents who are struggling emotionally, spiritually, or physically.
  - k. Offer leadership training to help parents become better leaders in their homes.
  - l. Offer counselling services and support for parents going through difficult times in life.
  - m. Conduct spiritual retreats for families so that parents can attend together with their children.
  - n. Offer spiritual retreats for parents.
  - o. Conduct Bible studies for parents.
2. The children interviewed mentioned that church is a place where they can spend time with God, find God, worship, and pray to God for their family. Church, according to the parents who responded, might be a place where children learn

about God's Word. Given the importance of the church as expressed by parent and children respondents, the following recommendations are directed to the church.

a. Include child-friendly sermons once in a while or, at the least, lead a three-minute children's devotion on Sunday mornings for the kids, one that is based on the topic of the sermon that will be given that day. Despite the fact that Sunday school is intended for children, there is a significant gap between listening to a pastor and listening to a Sunday school teacher. It is essential that the children's voices be heard and that attempts be made to link them to the church as adults convey the significance of the church as a place to connect with God.

b. Find ways for children to participate in the life of the church each and every Sunday. Include children in activities such as greeting guests and directing them to their seats during morning services, for instance.

3. The care or condition of the physical spaces for Sunday school was recognized as important by the children who participated in the survey. In light of its significance, the advice is for churches to at the very least have a location that is clean and that has sufficient lighting and restroom facilities. The significance that people give to children spending time with God is communicated by maintaining a clean environment in which these interactions take place.

#### Recommendations for the Sunday School Teachers

1. In the Sunday school classrooms offer a safe environment for children to explore and express their understanding about God.
2. Encourage children to rely on God in times of struggle.



3. Offer guidance and support for children facing difficult situations.
4. Encourage children to ask questions and explore their faith in God.

#### Recommendations for Bible Institutes and Seminaries

Theologians and seminarians of today are the ones who are being prepared to lead future churches that will inevitably have to accommodate for the presence of children. Theology educators are urged to provide careful consideration to a specific course that is exclusively centered on children, not just Christian education. Seminary students learn a range of topics that prepare them to work with adult citizens, such as missions, hermeneutics, homiletics, the New and Old Testaments, theology, pneumatology, and Christian history. These are just a few of the topics that they study.

However, all of these theologians will have children in their church, children of their own, children in their neighborhood, nephews and nieces, and even children of their nephews and nieces. If throughout their time in seminary they are not taught the importance of children, how can we expect them to place importance on children's ministry after they begin working in local churches?

The purpose of this recommendation is not to make all seminarians start studying children. Rather, it is to give them an idea so that when they go to their churches, they will recognize the importance of children's ministry and be able to give priority to the children's ministry rather than viewing children's ministry merely as a fun way to entertain children about God.

Seminarians will be better able to support ministry activities that address the special needs of children and families if they are taught about children. Children's ministry is critical to the growth of a church community. Children are the church's future,

and investing in their spiritual growth and development is crucial to guaranteeing the church's long-term growth and vitality. Many churches neglect and undervalue children's ministry.

Educating seminarians about the significance of children helps in transforming the church's culture in the direction of treating children as full members in the church community. Seminarians may also benefit from learning about children in order to better grasp God's love and kindness. Jesus personally values children and highlights the significance of allowing them access to his presence.

#### Recommendations For Parents/Teachers or Any Adult Who Works with Children

1. Respondents have highlighted the importance of emotional and auditory space that allows access to spirituality towards resilience. Considering this, in the light of the findings several recommendations follow.
  - a. When children tell their difficulties to their parents, the parents should listen to the children first, regardless of whether or not the children are to blame for the problems. When children confide in their parents about issues they are experiencing, it is because they realize that their parents provide the safest environment; thus, it is important for parents to convey this message.
  - b. When children share their problems, be mindful of your attitude. Do not start judging them right away by saying, "Maybe it is your fault, maybe you did something wrong." This kind of attitude only pushes the children away, causing them to close off and drift away.

- c. Listening to children does not imply putting them on a pedestal or basing all decisions on the perspectives they express. To listen is to comprehend that children certainly need our supervision, but we also require their point of view.
2. Parents, children, and teachers of Sunday school have all expressed their views on the significance of prayer, emphasizing its role as an essential conduit through which children may connect with their spirituality. Here are the recommendations when prayer is focused on as a form of access to spirituality towards resilience:
- a. Prayers need to be backed up by reading and understanding the Word of God. Simply praying without reading the Word of God cannot bring enlightenment. Living a prayerful life is crucial but be cautious of prayers becoming just a list-of-wants that children can pray and get. In order to avoid this, teach children to view prayer as a means by which they can strengthen their relationship with God by learning to listen to God's voice and by being willing to receive and experience the fullness of God's love and grace. Children have a need for many different types of prayers; moreover, they also need the chance to get first-hand experience of prayer. Adults should encourage children to express their own prayers in their own terms, and even during family prayer and devotions, allow children to take the lead in praying.
  - b. Routine prayers such as praying before meals, praying before leaving the house, praying before sleeping, praying in all situations is crucial, but it is important too that children start doing it by themselves--and not just

because they are told to do so. One of the respondents commented about prayer and this tip can be helpful to give a meaning to routine prayers:

“Explain to them properly why they need to pray, how our prayer should be, and what is the purpose of praying. When you do explain these to them, I find that they start doing it by themselves.”

3. Respondents also mentioned that they comfort the children by “talking about God, encouraging them,” and they also tell them about the assurance of God by using phrases such as, “It is ok, child, God is here, God will help us. Do not be scared.”

Children do affirm that what parents tell them helps them when they are going through difficult times. Considering this, here are the recommendations:

- a. It is essential to reassure the children and reassure themselves that "God is with us; do not be afraid, God will help us, and God will always take care of us." These are so comforting and so true at the same time. However, adults shouldn't be the only ones to tell children how they should feel; children should also be given the chance to voice their own opinions. This is because experiencing God does not solely consist of having a sense of comfort, and there are other ways to experience God. It is possible that the experience of God is something that happens during the challenge itself. It could be finding the courage that's required to face the challenge, or it could simply be a child's journey with God, which the parents need to support. Therefore, it may be harmful to the child's relationship with God when parents simply tell them to "toughen up," as this prevents the child from having the opportunity to experience God during their struggle.

Although verbal reassurance may be beneficial in calming children, it should be complemented with a more in-depth and committed involvement of understanding and learning the word of God

4. Respondents mentioned the importance of creating an environment conducive for children to ask questions, so here are the recommendations according to the findings:

- a. It is important for parents to begin talks with their children about God before they expect their children to ask questions about God. This will help youngsters understand that it is okay for them to speak and inquire about God.
- b. It is crucial that parents share with their children about their own journeys with God, and that they read the Bible together, conduct family devotions, and go to church as a family, living a life according to the Bible. Children will feel at ease asking questions about God if their parents have a pleasant and open attitude toward God and model that approach for them.
- c. Children might be discouraged from talking about God and seeking instruction on spirituality if parents are preoccupied with their own activities and dismiss their concerns and queries about God. It is essential to set aside time and let children know that the family prioritizes spending time with God.

5. Respondents mentioned that questions are an essential part of the process that allows access to spirituality towards resilience. These are recommendations based on the findings:

- a. Whenever a child asks questions about God, never shrug them off or tag them as stupid questions or embarrass them. Instead, you should take them seriously and make an effort to answer their questions in an open and straightforward manner while keeping it as simple as you can.
  - b. Let the children know that there are no limits to the kinds of questions they can ask parents.
  - c. Parents need to be open and vulnerable. If you do not know the answer, it is okay to admit that you do not know. However, do not end it there. Walk alongside the child to discover the answers together.
  - d. Instead of jumping to provide solutions to children merely because adults are adults and are supposed to know everything, it is crucial to foster children's natural curiosity, wonder along with them, and keep the dialogue active.
6. If you are a busy parent or feel like the questions are getting annoying, here are some steps to deal with those questions.
- a. Reassure the child that it is okay to ask a lot of questions, and encourage them to do so. Appreciate and encourage the curious nature that they possess.
  - b. Provide children with a journal or a notebook so that they can always note down all of the questions that they have and discuss it during the time that has been scheduled to talk about those concerns.
  - c. Schedule a specific time to discuss such concerns with the child.

- d. Have a question jar, sheets of paper, and a pen handy so that if the child has a question, they may jot it down, put it in the jar, and then discuss it at the allotted time.
7. Pay attention to the challenges that children go through and channel those challenges to allow children to access spiritual support. For example, one of the parents mentioned that their child was always worried about her parents getting old and not being with them always. That is the opportunity the parents took to explain the need to trust and believe in God.
8. Encourage children to connect to God in different ways such as art and music. For example, one of the parents mentioned that that the child started writing poems, so the parents are helping her understand that that could be one avenue for her to connect to God.
9. Children respondents also mentioned that stories they hear about God help them during their difficult times. The parents can tell them stories from the Bible or even get Bible story books for the children. They can encourage children to read the Bible on their own or as family.

#### Recommendations for Further Research

1. A case study examining the influence of modern technology and social media on the spiritual growth of children whose parents are constantly busy at work.
2. A qualitative case study examining the several approaches that time-strapped parents might take to foster spirituality in their children while still tending to their own obligations and responsibilities.

3. A qualitative investigation of the influence of harried parents on the spiritual development of their children and developing strategies for intervention.
4. A case study on the consequences of language barriers in spiritual access among children in the church, particularly for those children who grow up in mixed families and go to a church that doesn't use their primary dialect.
5. Qualitative research on listening to children from a cultural viewpoint investigating how this supports or inhibits access to spirituality in order to foster resilience.
6. A qualitative study on the extent to which cultural and religious backgrounds impact the efficacy of verbal assurances and prayer in promoting resilience in children.
7. Verbal assurances and prayer: What the underlying mechanisms are and how verbal assurances and prayer can be incorporated into formal resilience-building interventions or programs for children.



## APPENDIX A



Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary  
Ortigas Avenue Extension, Kaytikling  
Taytay 1920, Rizal, Philippines

### NOTIFICATION OF REVIEW APPROVAL

August 23, 2022  
Lotha, Wobeni  
[Wobeni.lotha@apnts.edu.ph](mailto:Wobeni.lotha@apnts.edu.ph)

**Protocol Title: “TOWARDS RESILIENCE: ENHANCING ACCESS TO SPIRITUALITY AMONG SELECTED CHILDREN IN NAGALAND, INDIA.”**

**Protocol#: AR-020**  
**IRB Review Date: August 19, 2022**  
**Effective Date: August 23, 2022**  
**Expiration Date: August 23, 2023**  
**Review Type: Expedited Review**  
**Review Action: Approved**

The IRB made the following determinations:

- Waivers: Waiver of informed consent documentation
- Other Documentations: All necessary attachments submitted
- Risk Determination: No greater than minimal risk

Please contact me at [cingsian.thawn@apnts.edu.ph](mailto:cingsian.thawn@apnts.edu.ph) if you have any questions.

Sincerely,  
Miss Cing Sian Thawn  
Director of Research  
Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary

**APPENDIX B**  
**LETTER TO THE SENIOR PASTOR**

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

To,  
The Senior Pastor  
Kohima Lotha Baptist Church

Sub: **Permission to Conduct Study at Kohima Lotha Baptist Church**

Christian Greetings!

My name is Wobeni Lotha and I am currently a student at Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary, Philippines, taking a PhD in Holistic Child Development. To complete my degree, I am conducting a research study entitled “Towards Resilience: Enhancing Access To Spirituality Among Selected Children In Nagaland, India.” The aim of this study is to hear from children, parents and Sunday school teachers about how to make a relationship with God accessible to children so that it can prepare them to rely on God when they are in difficult or challenging situations in the future.

I believe this study is important in helping parents, teachers, children’s ministry leaders and practitioners, theologians, and every person who has a heart for children to understand the importance of intentionally creating an environment that makes spirituality relatable to children. I also believe this study has the potential to create synergy towards enhancing the approaches that we put forth in nurturing the spiritual lives of children.

In light of my research, may I kindly request your permission to conduct my study among selected children, parents and Sunday School teachers? For your reference I have attached my interview protocol with this letter.

I would appreciate your kind consideration and support. Should you have any questions, please feel free to reach me through this email address: [Wobeni.lotha@apnts.edu.ph](mailto:Wobeni.lotha@apnts.edu.ph). If you agree to allow me to participate in this study, kindly please respond by return email.

Sincerely yours,  
Wobeni Lotha

## APPENDIX C

### LETTER TO THE SENIOR PASTOR (Translated version)

To  
The senior pastor

#### **Tumka- Ekhaeyan Ngala ngatung ekhiv tsukona jonji yilan.**

Christa lona monkhum yikrachi salumka.

Ayio\_to atsacho osi \_jilona kha yana vana. Ekhaeyan jilo ngochen echev tsukona enunga yuta shilo jo ana yantung yanri khia vana. Yidong tsakae elio jijo (topic ji kana).

Kako erana vamo ji tumka jijo Nonghoriden, Opvu-opo elani Emong khaphen jilo pungnoeden jiang thungi na kvutoli khi potsow lo shentakota lia vam sana hoji onte thungi na ntsi ekhiv tsukona. Elani hoji yakchia Nonghoriden jiang na ochi ovungi emhokelum sukhying oyi tsukata thung kvutoli potsow etho jilo enghikai vam sana hoji tsukona kako eram sala.

Ana Longtsuala, Ekha eyan shijo Opvu-opoden, pungnoeden, Nonghoriden thungi elhi tsoa vamo jiang, potsow motsu ekhaeden elani kyon ochoang na Nonghoriden jiang lumbum pia tsoa vancho sana jiang tsukona opvu tsotso tsov. Elani ekha eyan shina kvutoli nonghoriden jiang mon ekum ji shekupa vam sana hoji lanka e nzanchi khuka.

Ana yantung yanri khia vamo ji tsukona Ekhumkholo nonghoriden ejuma, Opvu-opoden osi Emong khapheni pungnoeden jiang thungi ngatung ngari ekhiv tsukona a lanchi wo to jonjiala. Janlan phyolanta tsukona eramo jijo chiti shilo thenhyae ni hantukala. Ekha eyan shilo ekyoerong nzanchi apicheo jijo emathata potsow myingthunga montso ni yenjanala.

Sincerely yours,  
Wobeni Lotha

## APPENDIX D

### LETTER TO THE CHRISTIAN EDUCATION DIRECTOR

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

To  
The Christian Education Director  
Christian Education Department,

Sub: **Permission to Interview Primary Class Children, Parents and Sunday School Teachers**

Christian Greetings!

My name is Wobeni Lotha and I am currently a student at Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary, Philippines, taking a PhD in Holistic Child Development. To complete my degree, I am conducting a research study entitled “Towards Resilience: Enhancing Access To Spirituality Among Selected Children In Nagaland, India.” The aim of this study is to hear from children, parents and Sunday school teachers about how to make a relationship with God accessible to children so that it can prepare them to rely on God when they are in difficult or challenging situations in the future.

I believe this study is important in helping parents, teachers, children’s ministry leaders and practitioners, theologians, and every person who has a heart for children to understand the importance of intentionally creating an environment that makes spirituality relatable to children. I also believe this study has the potential to create synergy towards enhancing the approaches that we put forth in nurturing the spiritual lives of children.

In light of my research, may I request for your permission to conduct research with the Christian Education Department which will include a few children, parents, and Sunday school teachers?

In addition, I need your assistance in selecting the participants. May I kindly ask to schedule a meeting with you? This meeting would allow me to elaborate my needs regarding the specific population targeted for my research.

I have attached the interview protocol with this email for your reference.

I would appreciate your kind consideration and assistance. Should you have any questions, please feel free to reach me through this email address: [Wobeni.lotha@apnts.edu.ph](mailto:Wobeni.lotha@apnts.edu.ph). If you agree to allow me to participate in this study, please kindly respond by return email.

Sincerely yours,  
Wobeni Lotha

## APPENDIX E

### LETTER TO THE CHRISTIAN EDUCATION DIRECTOR (Translated version)

To,  
The Christian Education Director

**Tumka-primary class, Opvu-opoden, Pungnoeden jiang ngatung ngari ekhiv tsukona jonji yilan.**

Christa lona monkhum yikrachi salumka.

Ayio\_to atsacho osi \_jilona kha yana vana. Ekhaeyan jilo ngochen echev tsukona enunga yuta shilo jo ana yantung yanri khia vana. Yidong tsakae elio jijo (topic ji kana).

Kako erana vamo ji tumka jijo Nonghoriden, Opvu-opo elani Emong khaphen jilo pungnoeden jiang thungi na kvutoli khi potsow lo shentakota lia vam sana hoji onte thungi na ntsi ekhiv tsukona. Elani hoji yakchia Nonghoriden jiang na ochi ovungi emhokelum sukhying oyi tsukata thung kvutoli potsow etho jilo enghikai vam sana hoji tsukona kako eram sala.

Ana Longtsuala, Ekha eyan shijo Opvu-opoden, pungnoeden, Nonghoriden thungi elhi tsoa vamo jiang, potsow motsu ekhaeden elani kyon ochoang na Nonghoriden jiang lumbum pia tsoa vancho sana jiang tsukona opvu tsotso tsov. Elani ekha eyan shina kvutoli nonghoriden jiang mon ekum ji shekupa vam sana hoji lanka e nzanchi khuka.

Ana yantung yanri khia vamo shilo Christian Ntsinran yangro yakchia Nonghoriden ejuma, opvu-opoden elani pungnoeden jiang thungi ngatung ngari ekhiv tsukona a lanchi wo to jonjiala.

Hojilo thepata, shilo ochoang thungi ngatung ngari ekhiv sana ethungi epiv tsukona nte nzanchi ethev lia. Elani nte thungi thyutav tsukona ntena yuta kokai api vo to jonjiala. Janlan phylanta tsukona eramo jijo chiti shilo thenhyae ni hantukala. Montsoka.

Sincerely yours,  
Wobeni Lotha

## APPENDIX F

### INVITATION LETTER FOR THE PARENTS AND SUNDAY SCHOOL TEACHERS

(TO BE INTERVIEWED)

Dear Mr. and Mrs.

My name is Wobeni Lotha and I am currently a student at Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary, Philippines, taking a PhD in Holistic Child Development. To complete my degree, I am conducting a research study entitled “Towards Resilience: Enhancing Access To Spirituality Among Selected Children In Nagaland, India.” The aim of this study is to hear from children, parents and Sunday school teachers about how to make a relationship with God accessible to children so that it can prepare them to rely on God when they are in difficult or challenging situations in the future.

I believe this study is important in helping parents, teachers, children’s ministry leaders and practitioners, theologians, and every person who has a heart for children to understand the importance of intentionally creating an environment that makes spirituality relatable to children. I also believe this study has the potential to create synergy towards enhancing the approaches that we put forth in nurturing the spiritual lives of children.

In the light of this proposed research, may I kindly invite you to participate in my study?

Here is what is expected of the study should you accept the invitation to participate.

1. I will conduct interviews online through Zoom call or WhatsApp video calls depending on which is convenient for you.
2. I will provide data for the internet connection.
3. The duration of the interview will be 45 minutes to 1 hour.
4. With your permission I would like to record the interviews.
5. I assure you confidentiality of all the responses and I will protect your privacy by using a code instead of your real name.
6. I would also like your permission for me to conduct follow-up interviews in case I need more explanations.
7. At the end of the study you will be given a small token of appreciation for your participation.

This study has the approval of the senior pastor and the Christian Education Department director.

I would appreciate your permission to interview you for this study. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at [wobeni.lotha@apnts.edu.ph](mailto:wobeni.lotha@apnts.edu.ph)

\*This study has already received permission from the senior pastor and the Christian Education Department director

Sincerely Yours,  
Wobeni Lotha

## APPENDIX G

### ASSENT FORM FOR THE CHILDREN PARTICIPANTS

Dear child,

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study.

Here are some of the things I want you to know before we start the interview.

1. Your answers will be used in my study but I will change your name and use a code so that I can protect your identity.
2. I would like to assure you that none of the information collected from this interview will be shared with anybody.
3. In this interview there are no wrong or right answers. I will not be grading you.
4. I would also like to record our conversation so that I can remember all that you have said. Is that ok with you? I will not be sharing this video with anybody and I will delete the video after my research study is over. You can also ask me to stop anytime if you do not want to be recorded.
5. You can use English or Lotha language, whichever you are more comfortable with.

If you agree to continue to do this interview, can you please say, "I agree." If you do not wish to be interviewed, you can also say, "I disagree."

Do you have any questions before we start the interview?

If you agree to go ahead with the study, can you give me a thumbs up

---

**(Agree/Disagree)**

---

Date



**APPENDIX H**  
CONSENT FORM FOR THE PARENTS AND THE SUNDAY SCHOOL  
TEACHERS TO BE INTERVIEWED

CONSENT FORM

WE/I (**Mr. and Mrs./Miss/Mr**) hereby give our permission to be interviewed. We understand the researcher's work is for academic purposes.

-We understand that the research title is "Towards Resilience: Enhancing Access To Spirituality Among Selected Children In Nagaland, India."

-We understand that the interview will last **45 minutes – 1 hour**.

**-We also understand that the video conversation will be recorded for the research purpose** and will be deleted at the end of the study.

-We understand that this **study does not indicate to bring any harm/risk/discomfort** .

-We also understand that the researcher has already obtained permission from the senior pastor as well as the Christian Education director to conduct this study.

-We understand that the researcher will conduct **follow-up interviews** if more explanation is needed from the participants.

-We also understand that that the researcher, hereby named **Wobeni Lotha**, will maintain the **anonymity** of the participants with regard to the interview responses.

-We also understand that at the end of the study a small token of appreciation will be sent to us.

We/I hereby give our permission in the form of our signature below.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signed**

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

## APPENDIX I

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

	<b>Children</b>	<b>Parents</b>	<b>Sunday School Teachers</b>
During the Interview	<i>Step 1:</i> Get to Know each other <i>Step 2:</i> Introducing the idea of the research <i>Step 3:</i> Identify confidentiality <i>Step 4:</i> Permission for recording the data <i>Step 5:</i> Discussion of break time <i>Step 6:</i> Question time <i>Step 7:</i> Obtaining the assent (from the children), Consent (From the parents and the Sunday school teachers). <i>Step 8:</i> Check the recording <i>Step 9:</i> Proceed to segment 1.		
<b>Segment 1: Demographics</b>			
	<b>Children</b>	<b>Parents</b>	<b>Sunday School Teachers</b>
Prompts	-Age -Class	-Can you tell me how long you have been parents? -Can you tell me the ages of your children?	-Can you tell me how long you have been teaching in Sunday School?
<b>Segment 2: Preparing the mind to talk about God</b>			
	<b>Children</b>	<b>Parents</b>	<b>Sunday School Teachers</b>
	-I wonder, do you ever think about what God is like? -Can you describe it for me? -Would you like to draw and describe it for me? -If you feel like it is difficult to draw God, you can draw anything like symbols or any pictures that could help you.	- I wonder, how you would describe God? Can you share with me your idea of God? You can feel free to use words, images or people or anything to describe your idea.	

	(Acknowledge the work of the child) and proceed to the questions.		
<b>Segment 3: The interview</b>			
	<i>Children</i>	<i>Parents</i>	<i>Sunday school teachers</i>
	Can you tell me what makes children sad? What makes children scared? What makes children worried? What makes children fearful? What makes children disappointed? What makes children excited? What makes children happy?		
<b>1. Space</b>	<b>1.1</b> If you want to talk or feel close to God, where do you go? <b>1.2</b> What are some attitudes of adults that can discourage children from talking to God? <b>1.3</b> Suppose your friend has a lot of questions regarding God or evil, what could your friend do?	<b>1.1</b> Based on your experiences, could you describe where children can best connect with God? <b>1.2.</b> What are some attitudes of adults that you think can discourage children from asking difficult questions of them? <b>1.3.</b> When a child asks questions about God, which sometimes may sound silly to adults, such as, “Did God have to eat vegetables when he was a child?”, how do you think	<b>1.1</b> Based on your experiences, where can children best connect with God?

		an adult should respond?	
<b>2. Process</b>	<p><b>2.1</b> Imagine that there are two students in Sunday school class. One got a very high grade and the other got a very low grade. Which of them do you think has more chance of God loving them and why?</p> <p><b>2.2</b> In your opinion what are some of the differences between learning about God in Sunday school and learning other subjects in school?</p>	<p>2.1. In your opinion what are some of the differences between learning about God in Sunday school and learning different subjects in school?</p>	<p>2.1. In your opinion what are some of the differences between learning about God in Sunday school and learning different subjects in school?</p>
<b>3. Imagination</b>	<p><b>3.1</b> Can you tell me what your favorite Bible story is?</p> <p><b>3.2</b> What do you picture in your mind when you hear that story?</p>	<p><b>3.1.</b> In your opinion, what are some of the ways children imagine that God is with them?</p>	<p><b>3.1.</b> How do you engage the children's imagination in the Sunday School class?</p> <p><b>3.2</b> In what ways does using imagination help children to trust God during difficult times?</p>
<b>4. Relationship</b>	<p><b>4.1</b> When children have a problem, who do they usually go to?</p>	<p>4.1. What are some of the ways parents teach children to trust God during difficult times?</p> <p>4.2. What are some of the ways that children learn from their parents</p>	<p>4. When children have difficulties and problems, who do you think they will approach first, and why?</p>

		how to deal with difficulties in life?	
<b>5. Intimacy</b>	<b>5.1</b> If children have questions which might sound silly or embarrassing, what should they do?	5.1. What helps children feel safe enough to talk about their problems or ask difficult questions? What hinders that?	5. What can be done for children to feel safe enough to freely express their doubts, fears, and questions without being judged?
<b>6. Trust</b>	<b>6.1</b> I wonder if children ever feel like God does not care for them. What do you think? Yes/ No <b>6.2</b> Can you tell me more?	6. I wonder if children have a capacity to have meaningful conversations with God. What do you think?	
<i>Cessation</i>	At the end of the interview, the researcher will thank the participant and will also ask them for a follow-up later to clarify information that they shared with the researcher.		

## APPENDIX J

### JOURNAL ENTRY GUIDE

<b>Before data collection</b>	<p>1. <b>What:</b> Write down my position statement including assumptions on how you perceive the dependent variables under study.  <b>Why:</b> It's a reference point of how you started and it allows you to compare it your stance afterwards.</p>
<b>Contacting participants</b>	<p>2. <b>What:</b> Write down the priorities in order to focus and manage your energy.  <b>Why:</b> Finding and contacting possible participants can be frustrating and overwhelming.</p>
<b>After the first interviews</b>	<p>3. <b>What:</b> Write down (cultural) customs and the participant's expectations regarding timing and relational aspects.  <b>Why:</b> To prevent yourself from making the same mistakes again and making the participants feel uncomfortable.</p>
<b>During interviews</b>	<p>4. <b>What:</b> Take notes on your interview techniques and its effects.  <b>Why:</b> It allows you to reflect on whether you pose steering questions, or simultaneously, limiting your data collection.</p> <p>5. <b>What:</b> Take notes on context such as work location.  <b>Why:</b> To deepen understanding of the relation between participant and the dependent variable in context.</p> <p>6. <b>What:</b> Take notes on long pauses, gaps, and contradictions.  <b>Why:</b> To avoid misunderstandings. Pauses might indicate difficulties with interpretation. Concepts might be too abstract or may have different meanings to participants.</p> <p>7. <b>What:</b> Take notes on body language, encouragements, and interruptions.  <b>Why:</b> Body language often signals difficult issues and/or emotions and is sometimes used to distract the attention from key issues. Encouragements may signal uncomfortable feelings. Interruptions point out vague questions or the need for elaboration.</p> <p>8. <b>What:</b> Take notes on your lack of knowledge on a topic.  <b>Why:</b> Pretending as if you know the topic allows you to keep participant talking during interview and allows you to look things up later.</p>
<b>After interviews</b>	<p>10. <b>What:</b> Take notes on similarities and differences in comparison to other interviews.  <b>Why:</b> Constant comparison allows you to discover patterns across individuals and countries and to adjust your interview questions.</p>

## APPENDIX K

### INVITATION LETTER FOR THE CHILDREN (THROUGH PARENTS)

Dear Mr. and Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_

Greetings in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,

My name is Wobeni Lotha and I am currently a student at Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary, Philippines, taking a PhD in Holistic Child Development. To complete my degree, I am conducting a research study entitled “Towards Resilience: Enhancing Access To Spirituality Among Selected Children In Nagaland, India.” The aim of this study is to hear from children, parents and Sunday school teachers about how to make a relationship with God accessible to children so that it can prepare them to rely on God when they are in difficult or challenging situations in the future.

I believe this study is important in helping parents, teachers, children’s ministry leaders and practitioners, theologians, and every person who has a heart for children to understand the importance of intentionally creating an environment that makes spirituality relatable to children. I also believe this study has the potential to create synergy towards enhancing the approaches that we put forth in nurturing the spiritual lives of children.

In light of my proposed research, may I invite your child to participate in this study?

Here is what is expected should you allow your child to participate in this interview.

1. The interviews will be conducted through WhatsApp or Zoom call, depending on which will work for you. I will provide you with internet data for the internet connection.
2. The child needs to be in a room with an electronic device for the video call. The child will be encouraged to use an earphone so that the recordings will be clear. If you do not have headphones to be used for the interview, I will provide them, then collect them at the end of the interview.
3. I will need your agreement to allow the child to be by themselves in the room so that they are comfortable to answer questions.
4. I would like to ask your permission to record the video calls, I will also get permission from your child to record the video. All the information recorded will be used only for my research purposes. All the recordings will be deleted at the end of the study.

5. I will protect the confidentiality of your child and I will use codes instead of their names in my study. I will be the only one to have access to all the recordings of the interview.
6. The interview will take around 45 minutes to 1 hour.
7. This study does not indicate to bring any harm/ risk/ discomforts to the child.
8. This study has received approval from the senior pastor and the Christian Education Department director.
9. I would also like your permission for me to conduct follow-up interviews if more explanation is needed from the child.
10. At the end of the study a small gift will be given to the child.

I would appreciate your permission to interview your child for this research. Should you have any questions, please feel free to reach me through this email address:  
[Wobeni.lotha@apnts.edu.ph](mailto:Wobeni.lotha@apnts.edu.ph)

\*This study has already sought permission from the Senior pastor and the Christian Education department Director.

Sincerely yours,  
Wobeni Lotha



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## CURRICULUM VITAE

### Wobeni Nyimtsemo Lotha

#### Personal detail:

**Permanent Address:** Lower Bayavu Hill Kohima Nagaland  
**Date of Birth:** 5<sup>th</sup> September 1989  
**Gender:** Female  
**State:** Nagaland  
**Language Known:** English, Hindi, Nagamese  
**Nationality:** Indian  
**Hobbies:** Reading, writing, exploring ways of teaching creatively, interacting with children.

#### Educational Background

- 2006 High School Leaving Certificate, Don Bosco Higher Secondary School Kohima, Nagaland 2006-2008
- 2008 Bachelor of Arts, English Honors, Patkai Christian College, Hagaland, India. 2008-2011
- 1993 Higher Secondary School Leaving Certificate 1993-2006
- 2012 Master of Arts in Theology, University of Mysore, June 2011-April 2013.
- 2013 Master of Arts in Theological Studies (Advanced)- Pastoral Theology and Counselling, South Asia Institute of Advanced Christian Studies (SAIACS) June 2013- March 2014.

#### Activities as a Student

- Worship leader: Worship Team, SAIACS June 2013-May 2014
- Cell Group Leader: October 2012-September 2013.
- Magazine Editorial committee
- Visiting Scholar, Asbury Theological Seminary, September -December 2021.

#### Student Internship:

- Teacher and counsellor: Harsha Nanda Memorial Foundation Bangalore a home for Girls aged 6-15 years 2011-2012.
- Blog writer, script editor: Worked with Trans World Radio (TWR) Bangalore as a part of Christian based Radio program ministry involving in writing blogs, editing scripts, and recording programs. 2012-2013
- After care team member: International Justice Mission (IJM) 28 October 2013- 22 November 2013.
- Chaplain and Counselor: Bangalore Baptist Hospital, India, 2013-2014.

### **Skills Training**

- Swift India Plus 2000 (54 Hours duration), National Institute of Information Technology, 2006
- Know your PC (6 hours duration), National Institute of Information Technology-2006

### **Work Experience**

- 2014 Teacher: IGNITE Children Ministry at SAIACS, Bangalore from 2011 – 2014
- 2013 Teacher: Children Team, Global SAIACS Alumni reunion 2013.
- 2013 Teacher and organizing team member Kolors Kids Club ministry at BDS garden, Bangalore June 2013-2014.
- 2013 Sunday School Teacher: Crossroad Church Bangalore 2013-2014
- 2015 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Teacher, Nirikshea School Bangalore, India 2014-2015
- 2017
- 2017-APNTS/AGST Admin Asst. PhD Dept 2017-2021
- 2017-Coordinator Awesome Children's Center 2017-2018
- 2019 Guest Lecture,
  - Specialized Education Ministries: Camping , Parachurch Ministries
  - Counselling Ministry in the Church
  - Children's Spirituality
  - Children in Worship

### **Conferences and Seminars Attended**

- 2013. Steward, "Global Leadership Forum," Lausanne Bangalore, June 2013
- 2013. Participant, "Seminar on Trauma Counseling" organized by Bible Society of India, March 2013.
- 2020. Speaker, "Children's Ministry Seminar," Primary Teacher Education Student Council Universitas Pelita Harapan, Indonesia, 1 Feb 2020.
- 2018 Participant, "Lausanne Forum on Children at Risk," Philippines, August 30, 2018.
- 2011 Participant, "National Seminar on Respect for Life," University Grants Commission sponsored at Patkai Christian College Nagaland, India, March 24-25 2011.
- 2008 Participant, "A Discourse on Philosophical Practice," University Grants Commission Sponsored Regional Seminar at Patkai Christian College Nagaland, India.
- 2018 Participant, "Workshop on Gender and Development (GAD) Integration in the Curriculum, Research and Extension," Commission on Higher Education Regional Office IV (Calabarzon), Philippines, July 30-31 2018.
- 2016 Participant, "KidUnique: Helping Kids Discover Who They Are," Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary, Philippines. April 23, 2016.
- 2018 Participant, "The Children's Spirituality Summit," Lipscomb University Nashville Tennessee, USA June 27-29 2018.
- 2021 participant, "Children's Spirituality Summit and InterGenerate online Conference," May 24-26, 2021.

- 2021 Participant, “Symposium on the Spirituality of Children,” Virginia Theological Seminary, USA. October 21-22, 2021.
- 2021 Presenter, “Acquaintance with Spirituality Does Not Mean Accessibility to Spiritual Resources For Children: Rethinking Spiritual Resiliency and Children’s Spirituality in Christian contexts,” ESJ School of Mission and Ministry, Asbury Theological Seminary, USA. November 11, 2021.

### **Publications**

- “Children’s Spirituality: Biblical Foundations, The importance of Laying a Solid Spiritual Foundation and the Nurturing Role of the Family and the Faith Community.” *The Mediator* 14, no.1, 2019.

### **Research Involvement**

- “Listening and Learning from Various Entities on the Perceived Dynamics that Help Children Thrive.” 2018 Lausanne National Forum on Children at Risk, Manila, Philippines.

### **Trainings**

- Module one: “Trauma and Crisis Care, Crisis Care Training International,” at Asia-Pacific Nazarene Theological Seminary, Philippines. July 13-14, 2016.
- Basic Whole Life Coaching training, Next Gen at Christ Commission Church, Philippines February 24, 2019.

### **Certified Courses**

- EE. Level 1 Training: Evangelism Explosion International
- 2009 Certificate in Biblical studies: New Testament Survey, Patkai Christian College, 2009.
- 2009 Certificate in Biblical studies: Bible Doctrines, Patkai Christian College, 2010.
- 2009 Clinical Pastoral Education Program, Bangalore Baptist Hospital, India, January 15 -April 15, 2014
- 2019 FBX001: Child Protection: Children’s Rights in Theory and Practice, HarvardX, Online Learning Initiative of Harvard University August 26, 2019.

