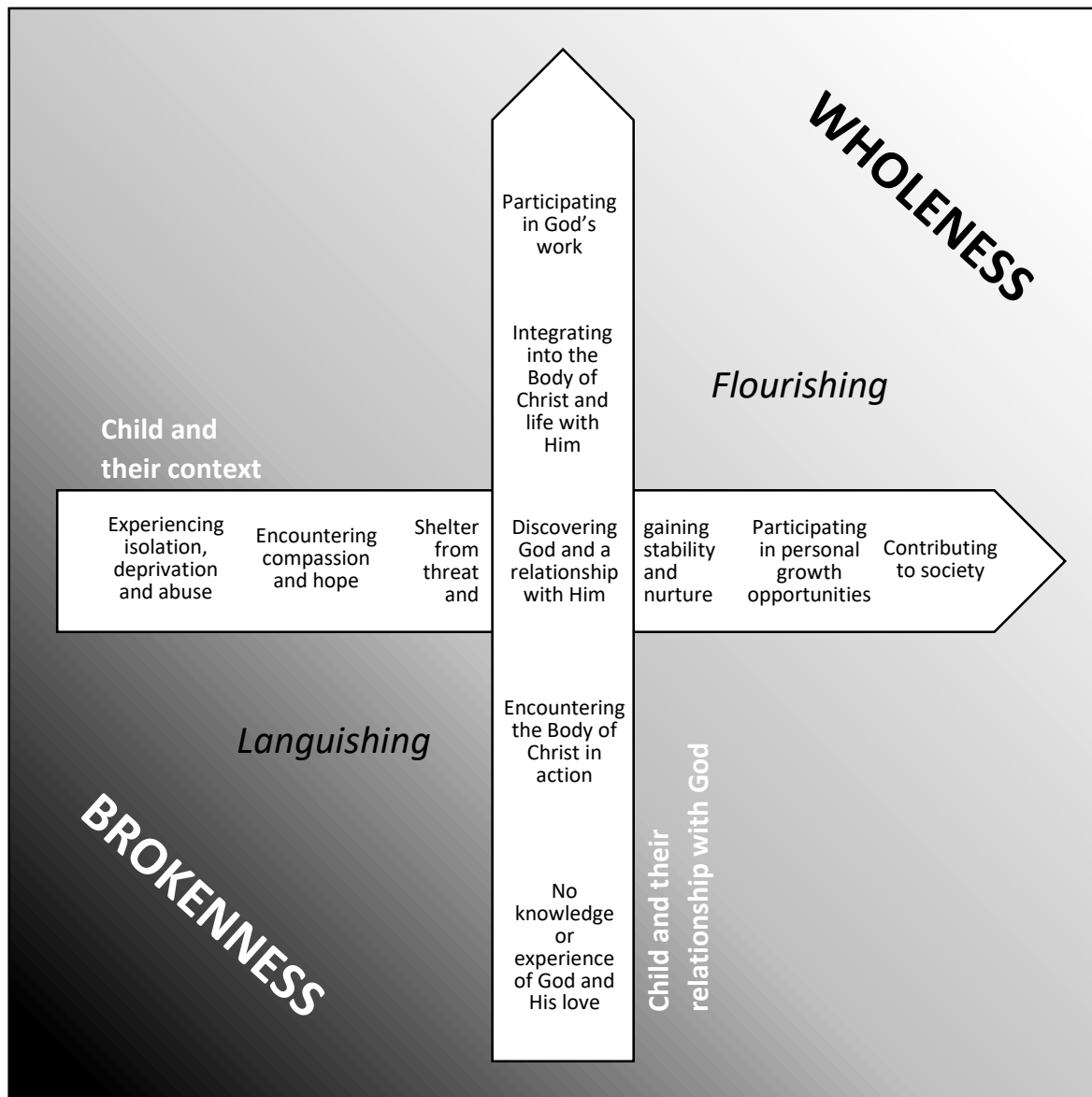


Brokenness To Wholeness

All your children will be taught by the Lord
and great will be their *shalom*.

Isaiah 54:13



This diagram shows the path from Brokenness of sin to the Wholeness of *shalom*. The two axes represent the two spheres of brokenness:

- **Horizontal:** Physical, personal, social brokenness which is evidenced by poverty, war, abuse, sickness, etc. Aid and development programs can help bring these children into a safe and healthy environment where they are enabled to develop personally and contribute to society.
- **Vertical:** Spiritual separation from God through sin and ignorance is healed as the church reaches out, shares the Gospel and guides them into a relationship with God. As part of the community of His Body, their relationship with God is strengthened and they are enabled to become active participants in His work.

All children are currently somewhere on this matrix – experiencing different levels of brokenness and wholeness in different areas of their lives. Our goal is to move them closer to the complete wholeness of Shalom, found in the upper right quadrant.

God's Big Story: Brokenness to Wholeness

*There are lots of stories in the Bible, but all the stories are telling one Big Story.
The Story of how God loves his children and comes to rescue them."*

Sally Lloyd Jones, *The Jesus Storybook Bible*¹

The Bible is the Story of God's redemption of the world. Unfortunately, it's all too easy to teach the Bible to children as though it were a curriculum on how to be a good person. Every Bible story, whether it is the story of Noah and the ark or David and Goliath, becomes a lesson in good behavior. But the Bible is one Big Story, not a book of rules, an owner's manual for life, or even a system of doctrines and theologies. It is the Story of God and it is, quite simply, full of story. Seventy-five percent of the Bible is told through narrative; fifteen percent is in poetic form; only ten percent of the Bible is instructional. Sadly, we've reversed these percentages. We spend most of our time teaching children the directives of the Bible and forget to ignite their hearts with the Story of God. It isn't any wonder our children walk away from the faith. Rules and commandments will not transform a child. But an encounter with the Hero of the Story will.

So, what is this Big Story? Written over hundreds of years, by dozens of authors, the Bible has one gigantic theme: the restoration of the world from brokenness to wholeness. In the beginning, God created the world and there was shalom. Neil Plantinga writes, "The webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight, is what the Hebrew prophets call shalom. We call it peace, but it means far more than peace of mind or a cease-fire between enemies. In the Bible, shalom means universal flourishing wholeness, and delight—a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed... shalom, in other words, is the way things ought to be."²

Indeed, the Bible is bookended by this great vision of shalom. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve flourish in a state of wellbeing with God. Humanity's relationships with God, with self, with one another and with creation are in harmony and at peace. But when sin enters this world, brokenness and corruption become the new normal. In their sin, Adam and Eve hide from God and ever after, humanity's relationship with God is broken as we too hide in the shadow of our sin. Whereas once these new humans walked the garden naked and unashamed, now sin and shame destroys their self-identity and they cover themselves with fig leaves. In fear, Adam and Eve blame one another for their sinful choices and ever after, our relationships with one another are filled with tension and hate. The brokenness that entered the world with sin even extends to Adam and Eve's relationship with creation; cast out of the Garden of Eden, they are made ever after to toil on this earth. Humanity's relationships with God, self, others, and creation are never again the way they were meant to be. The world has become a place of brokenness.

The good news of the Story of God is that God has the grandest rescue plan in history. God's plan is to mend the entire universe by restoring shalom to all things. Embedded in the first three chapters

¹ Sally Lloyd Jones, *The Jesus Storybook Bible: Every Story Whispers His Name* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 17.

² Neil Plantinga,

of Genesis is the promise of this restoration. A redeemer, born of woman, will crush the head of the enemy and all will be made right. Every story in the rest of the Bible unfolds this promise of all things healed and made whole. God's Story "tells how for the world's redemption God entered into history, the eternal came into time, the kingdom of heaven invaded the realm of earth, in the great events of the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ," writes F.F. Bruce.³ Every story in the Bible reverberates with God's salvation plan. We read of one faithful man who saves the degraded world in an ark; of a childless father blessed with descendants as numerous as the stars in order to be a blessing to all humanity; of a king whose throne is established forever when the King of Kings comes to reign. But Noah, Abraham, and David are not the heroes of God's Story; God is. It is God who breaks into history to save. All God's people, from Adam to Zerubbabel, partnered with God in tending to the shalom of the world, but it is in Jesus Christ, God Incarnate, that the fullness of salvation came. In Christ, all things are made new. "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (Col. 1:19-20).

How is it then that our world remains so broken? Where is the shalom of God in the global refugee crisis or the disability of a child? How can we proclaim such a hope-filled promise when everything around us appears so very hopeless? Indeed, there is tension between the reality we read and proclaim from God's Story and the reality of our everyday broken and bruised lives. Theologians call it the "already, not yet" tension. Christ has *already* conquered sin and death, but the world has *not yet* experienced its full reality. This is the hope of heaven for which all creation groans in longing. The grand ending of God's Story depicts a new heaven and a new earth in which there is no more pain and no more sorrow. On that day, God will make His dwelling among His people and shalom will reign.

But this cosmic renewal is yet to be fully realized. The temptation we face, in our longing for this redemption, is to imagine we either must work harder to make things better in the here-and-now or just endure this world until we are released from our mortality into heaven. N.T. Wright calls the former "evolutionary optimism" and the latter "souls in transit", but neither captures the Christian Gospel. Evolutionary optimists attempt to fix the world through man-made means, but their myth of progress cannot address evil. Meanwhile those who believe humans are simply "souls in transit" see no reason to address any material issues in the world, since they believe only the spiritual matters. Says N.T. Wright, "What creation needs is neither abandonment nor evolution but rather redemption and renewal; and this is both promised and guaranteed by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. This is what the whole world's waiting for."⁴

So, we live in this tension between the "already and not yet" and, as God's people, we pray "Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." We belong to the kingdom of God and as such, are called to partner with the King to bring His kingdom to earth until the new heaven and the new earth are realized. We do not work in our own strength, but we also do not ignore the work that must be done. We work with God, at God's invitation and God's direction, to tend to the shalom of all things. In doing so, we discover, to our surprise, that we have been invited into this grand Story of God. Indeed, we belong in this Story as shalom-tenders.

The Word of God is so much more than a manual on being good. It is the Story of our great God come to mend the universe from sin and shame and to restore things to the way they were meant to

³ F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* 6th Ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans: 1981), 2.

⁴ N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 107.

be. The good news of the Gospel is that brokenness can be made whole by the love of God! This is the Big Story of God children must be told.

Written by Anne-Marie Finsaas

Shalom – God’s heart for children

Shahid was physically broken – he was born paralysed and unable to use his legs. He lived in a broken environment - a poor urban area in South Asia where his family couldn’t even afford a wheelchair for him. He had a broken relationship with God – he had never even heard of God’s love. He had no hope for the future.

Into this situation came some Christians who were impelled by the love of God to bring change. Shahid was brought along to KidsHubs where he began to learn the basics of computing. He had never touched a laptop before but as he discovered the possibilities of this new skill his life was changed. “Suddenly he saw a future for himself working in IT – he had hope!” enthused his leader. A bit of Shahid’s brokenness was healed. While at KidsHubs, Shahid was also introduced to the God who loves him. His KidsHubs leader became his friend and continues to help him develop his computing skills and his relationship with God. Where once there was much brokenness, now there is hope and healing – Shahid is on the path to *shalom*.

The Biblical vision of *shalom*

The Hebrew word *shalom* (often translated as peace) has a depth of meaning which includes peace, health, wholeness and completeness. It describes an environment where children can grow to fulfil their potential and become contributing members of their community as they experience the presence of God and are surrounded by a loving and supportive community. This is what God desires for all of us. David proclaims: “Great is the Lord, who *delights* in blessing his servant with *shalom*” (Ps 35:27)

However, as we look at children around us today we see them suffering in the brokenness of their world - broken lives affected by sickness and sin; broken communities torn apart by war and injustice; a broken environment unbalanced and unhealthy. Because of children’s innate vulnerability, they are the first to suffer from this brokenness. When Jeremiah is describing the depth of the brokenness of Jerusalem, he laments: “Lift up your hands to God in prayer, pleading for your children, for in every street they are faint with hunger ... see them lying in the streets – young and old, boys and girls, killed by the sword of the enemy.” (Lam 2:19, 21) In many parts of the world, our children are also dying from hunger and are cut down. Some hunger for food and others for love. Some are cut down by physical aggression and others by the loss of hope and meaning.

Jeremiah voices his despair when he cries “*Shalom* has been stripped away and I have forgotten what goodness is.” (Lam 3:17) But this is not the end! Just a few verses later he affirms, “Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this: the faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness.” (Lam 3:21-23) God has not walked away and left us in this brokenness. He still desires us to experience *shalom* and promises to restore it to us. We don’t have to give up because God has not given up. In contrast to Jeremiah, Zechariah rejoices in his vision of the return of God’s presence and *shalom*. “Once again ... the streets of the city will be filled with boys and girls at play.” (Zechariah 8:5) The children will be secure, carefree and healthy, bubbling over with creativity and laughter. Isn’t this what we desire for our children?

This healing and *shalom* comes at a high price. The glory of the Gospel is that God loves us so much that He has chosen to give Himself to bring us back into the enjoyment of His *shalom*. This was the goal of the incarnation. When Jesus was born the angels proclaimed that he came bringing peace

(*shalom*). During his ministry, Jesus brought healing and wholeness to those he encountered. He proclaimed that he came to give us abundant life (John 10:10). He told his disciples that he was leaving them with his peace (*shalom*). The incarnation reached its goal in the cross. Isaiah explains: "He was beaten so that we would know *shalom*. He was whipped so that we could be healed." (Isaiah 53:5) He took our brokenness upon himself so that we could be healed, made whole again and enjoy God's *shalom*-bringing presence. Oh, how He loves us!

The path from brokenness to *shalom*

The journey from brokenness to *shalom* can take many paths because children are broken in different ways. Some children suffer from a broken environment, living with poverty or war or disease. Some are broken by twisted relationships that bring abuse and neglect and lovelessness. Some have never heard of a God who loves them and are cut off from that life-giving relationship. Others seem to have everything but lack meaning and hope. Our children need to be rescued from this brokenness and encounter *shalom* through the compassionate actions of the Body of Christ in action.

But rescue alone does not bring children into the full experience of *shalom*. God does not just desire to see them free from harm, He desires to see them flourishing as active, participating members of their community and the Body of Christ. *Shalom* involves developing as a person, gaining skills for life, growing in relationship with God and discovering His calling, contributing to the community and using Holy Spirit-given gifts in ministry to others.

Children's openness and vulnerability means that they often reflect the brokenness of this world. However, they can flourish in *shalom* and pass it on to others. We see this in the lives of several children in the Bible. Out of his relationship to God, David brought *shalom* to King Saul as he played his harp and sang his songs of praise. A little servant girl pointed Naaman, a mighty warrior, in the right direction to find physical healing and spiritual wholeness because of her trust in God. Josiah was rescued from threat and paganism, protected in the temple, introduced to the true worship of God and emerged to lead the nation back to God's *shalom*.

How can we be agents of God's *shalom*?

God calls us to be agents of His *shalom* in the lives of children. **We can seek *shalom* for children** by speaking up on their behalf in the face of danger, neglect and limited opportunities. This means that we are not timid about advocating for children in our communities and churches. *Home4Good* is a UK partnership which advocates within the church concerning its responsibility to be spreading *shalom* by fostering and adopting children from broken situations. One foster family says, "A very traumatised four-year-old English girl stayed with us for 20 months during which we saw God bring healing and restoration. She is now happily adopted and doing well. We meet up once or twice a year for a fun day together." In response to the current refugee crisis, *Home4Good* is also seeking to serve unaccompanied minors and influence the government's attitude towards them.

We can bring *shalom* to children by loving and nurturing them. A church in Australia runs a Homework Club once a week. Children whose parents are too busy or not interested enough to help with homework are given one-on-one attention to help them in their studies. Others in the church provide snacks and fun games and lead the Bible Time. Many of these children are relatively well provided for with material possessions and development opportunities but they are short on love - most importantly God's love. At the church they find this missing ingredient and are helped on their way to *shalom*.

We can experience *shalom* with children by opening up opportunities for them to join with us in growing in Christ and contributing to the community and church. In Tanzania, a group of 10 leaders and 10 children filmed material for a KidsHubsTV DVD to be handed out in their community. The segments included a short drama on sharing, a soccer skills session, a children's choir, a preschool activity and interviews with parents and children about health and hygiene and child abuse. The children experienced *shalom* themselves as they learned new skills and they shared *shalom* with others as they served alongside the adults.

You don't need to be a part of a large program or have special skills to spread *shalom*. Everyone can do something to help children experience more of the *shalom* God desires for them. A smile can help them feel valued. A prayer can bring God's intervention into their lives. A donation can provide clean water or healthy food. A kind deed can give them an experience of God's love. A story can introduce them to a relationship with God. A helping hand can strengthen their family. A vote can ensure child-friendly policies. A new skill can equip them for the future. An opportunity can free them to follow God's call on their lives.

We must become more aware of the children around us, get to know them and ask God to show us what we can do. Dr Wes Stafford (Compassion) said, "Every child who crosses my path ... I consider a divine appointment, an opportunity to lift that child up ... if only for a brief moment. It may just be that will launch a life or restore one that needs kindness today."

What can you do today to help a child along the path to *shalom*?

Written by Rebecca Douglass

Understanding Christian concepts of ‘human flourishing’ in relation to children

In recent decades there has been a growing trend for theologians to speak about the idea of ‘human flourishing’.⁵ ‘Flourishing’ is a biological, even ecological word, which evokes images of plants, gardens or whole ecosystems growing in a healthy manner.⁶ Theological ethicists and public theologians (those seeking to speak about God in the civic and political ‘public square’) use the term to try to capture a wholistic, biblical understanding of God’s intention for human beings, both as individuals, and as people embedded in communities. That is: far from simply surviving, or just experiencing salvation on a spiritual level, God intends, it is argued, for human beings to thrive in all dimensions of life, both as individuals and in their social environments. Christian thinkers who use the term tend to draw on two images at either end of the biblical story which describe human flourishing, firstly in the creation narrative in which God walks in the garden with his human creatures, who want for nothing (Gen 2:4-25; 3:8); and, ultimately, the imagery of a new heaven and new earth (Rev 21:1-2); of a river of life flowing from God’s throne (Rev 22:1-5), when suffering, crying and death shall cease and God will dwell with His people (Rev 21:3-5).

The human experience in between these two book-ends of creation and new creation, however, is not one of flourishing; more often than not a profound contradiction of this divine intention. In the shadow of the fall, human life and society been marred by manifold forms of suffering, brokenness, violence, and injustice, as well as a lack of relationship to God. This situation is unacceptable to God, who, in Jesus Christ and the Spirit comes to redeem and restore that which is fractured and fallen; to save that which is lost and languishing under the effects of human sin. God’s intention, it is argued, remains that human beings and all creation ought flourish again in His presence. While creation still groans, God Himself is presently outworking the resurrection, by the Spirit, toward this final goal of creation’s liberation from death and decay, and ‘the glorious freedom’ which will be experienced by the children of God (Rom 8:19-20).

The concept of flourishing thus embraces both the classical realms of ‘salvation’ and social justice. God, it is argued, acts to save and restore, in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and calls His people across both Old and New Testaments to act for the welfare and well-being of

⁵ The idea of human flourishing is not a new one; Augustine of Hippo in the fifth century was concerned with ‘the happy life’, which he saw as centred around a proper ordering of what one loves in life. At the centre of one’s loves and life must be God, and a life is happy occurs when one puts the ‘good’ things in life in an order which properly aligns with God’s own ordering of those things. As Miroslav Volf summaries, for Augustine ‘The supreme good that makes human beings truly happy – ... the proper content of a flourishing life – consists in love of God and love of neighbour and enjoyment of both.’ Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Common Good* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2013), 58. Other theologians have similarly been concerned to understand ‘the good life’ or related ideas. The term ‘human flourishing’ has, however, grown in currency in recent years.

⁶ For biblical references which give rise to such imagery, and the Christian tradition’s particular contribution to understanding human flourishing, see Miroslav Volf, *Flourishing: Why We Need Religion in a Globalized World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015).

others: in short, to love God, and love their neighbour (Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18; Mt 22:37). Evangelism, discipleship, and acting for love of neighbour (including social action to address conditions of life which prevent human beings from flourishing) are thus all conceived as aspects of the task of the Christian community.

A properly nuanced commitment to the idea of human flourishing, however, does not mean an expectation that heaven can be established on earth by human efforts (though sometimes this impression may be given). Any gains for human flourishing in the physical, psychological and social arenas are but glimpses – provisional and all too often fleeting foretastes – of the kingdom yet-to-come. God's act of renewing creation will alone bring about comprehensive and lasting restoration of human flourishing, in an environment in which it will be eternally sustained. Yet as glimpses and foretastes, action for and experiences of human flourishing find their inspiration in God's original and ultimate intention. And who's to say there will not be some significant continuity between that which is done in Jesus' name to facilitate human flourishing in the present age, and what occurs in the age to come? For 'your labour in the Lord is not in vain.' (1 Cor 15:58).

Related specifically to children, the idea of them 'flourishing' elicits images of children growing in a healthy manner in body, mind and soul; of children walking with Jesus and growing up in a physical and social environment where they can reach something approaching their full God-given capacities. A Christian concept of human flourishing, however, would also emphasize the offering to children of confident hope that their life matters, has meaning, and awaits a fuller future by the gift of God's eternal salvation. Such hope, along with a child's personal encounter with and faith in God, also provide a framework for them to understanding that even suffering and 'bad things' can have meaning and value (Romans 5:3-5; 8:28-30), and contribute to rather than simply detract from their flourishing.⁷ A Christian concept of flourishing would also understand that children flourish as they love and serve others: just as plants flourish best in a thriving garden and wider ecosystem, children can be seen to flourish best in families and communities that are healthy and, as far as possible in our fallen world, flourishing themselves.

The concept needs to be carefully understood, otherwise it can tend to overemphasize both the extent to which individuals and societies can be transformed, prior to the return of Jesus, and the extent to which *human* efforts can bring about such transformations. (Secular humanism has also long advocated utopias of human flourishing, whether wrought by communist or capitalist models, economic 'development' or, simply, by human Progress.) A robust appreciation for the continuing and pervasive impact of sin, both in and upon individuals, and in social, cultural, economic and political systems, gives Christians reason to be sober-minded realists about the extent to which things can be changed in this present age. There is also a tension for Christians between striving for the goal of flourishing, and the discipleship call to renunciation – that is, denying self and taking up one's cross (Luke 9:23), having the same attitude as Christ Jesus, who made himself nothing (Phil

⁷ Alison Webster, cited in Helen Cameron, John Reader, and Victoria Slater, *Theological Reflection for Human Flourishing: Pastoral Practice and Public Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2012), xxi.

2:5-8).⁸ Nevertheless, properly applied, the idea of human flourishing, and the concept of children flourishing together in families, churches and communities, can be helpful for widening Christian understandings of God's intention for His beloved creatures beyond mere 'saving' souls. It offers an account of God's loving and creative intention for the world, both originally, and ultimately. Trust in God's own acts toward the ends of flourishing – chiefly in the life, death, resurrection and return of Jesus – also give tremendous cause for hope, a hope which should infect both our hearts and hands in the here and now, so that we, too, witness to Jesus Christ in word and deed by tackling obstacles to human flourishing on all levels. We do so in anticipation of God's own, final and consummate act to bring the wholeness of heaven here to earth, under the lordship of Jesus Christ and in the power of the Spirit.

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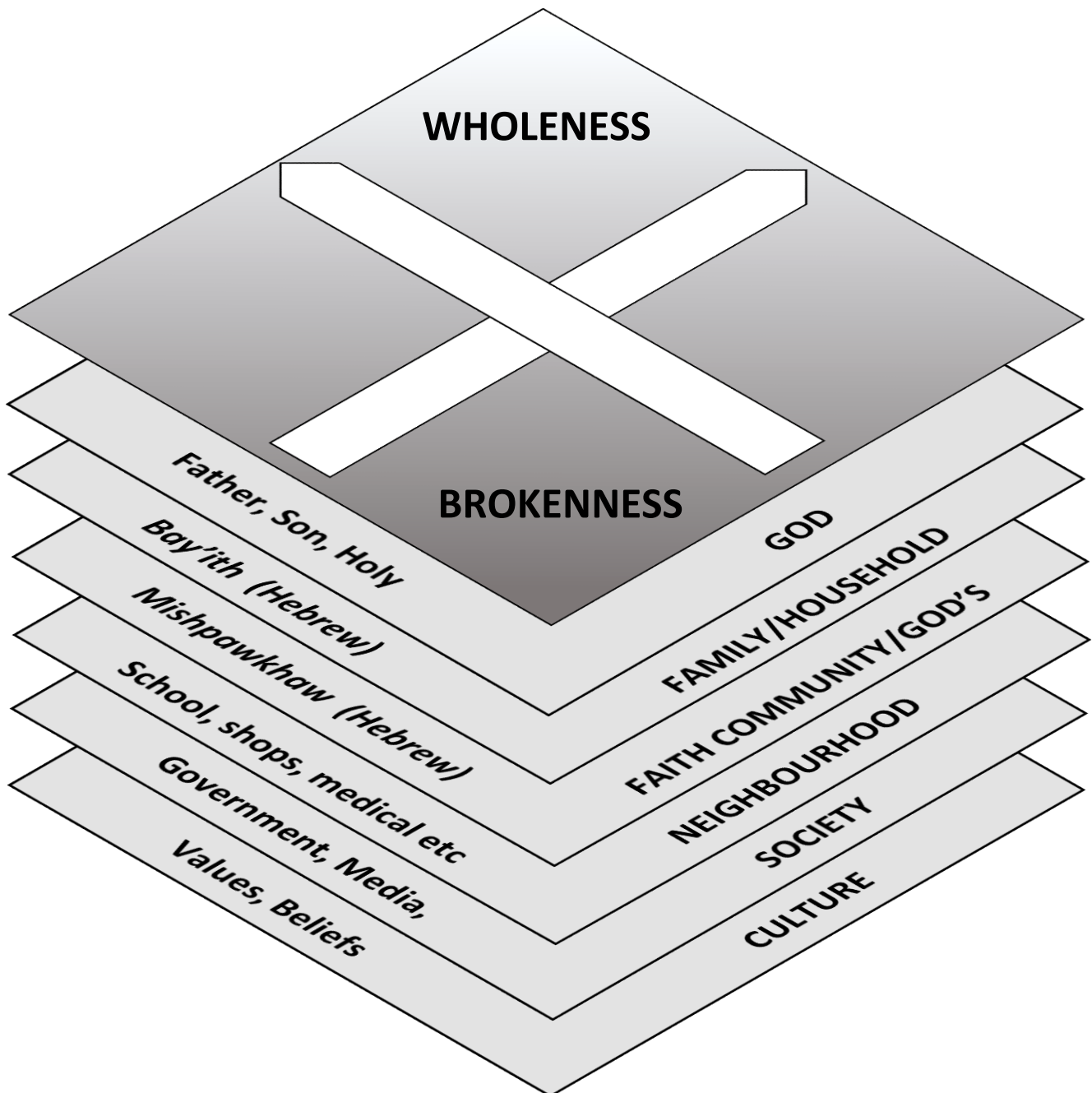
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Written by DJ Konz

⁸ Adrian Thatcher, 'Theology, Happiness, and Public Policy', in *Theology and Human Flourishing: Essays in Honor of Timothy J. Gorringer*, ed. Mike Higton, Christopher Rowland, and Jeremy Law (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 261.

The influences that move a child towards Brokenness or Wholeness



Each of these influences in the life of the child has the power to move a child towards brokenness or wholeness.

The first and foremost influence towards wholeness is **God** himself. Historically, He created them in His image and provided salvation through Jesus' death and resurrection. Presently, through the Holy Spirit, He is at work in the life of a child to provide pathways to wholeness. He works directly in the life of the child and through the other influences to carry out His purposes.

The **family** is intended by God to be the primary place of nurture for the child - physically, emotionally, mentally, socially and spiritually. God calls the family to use this influence to introduce the child to God and guide them in their relationship with Him. We realise, however, that in this broken world the family is broken and is not always able to fulfil this responsibility as it should.

God's people, both church and parachurch, are called to be the **faith community** which provides a supportive and nurturing environment for the child and their family. It is also called to be salt and light in the wider community, seeking justice, showing compassion and pointing people to God. Note: In the Bible, the faith community and neighbourhood were one entity - *mishpawkhaw* - but in most of our communities today, this is not so.

The **neighbourhood** is the microcosm through which the child first experiences the wider world. It can be a positive environment that provides nurture and security or it can be a negative environment where the lack of supply for basic needs causes the family and child to be at risk.

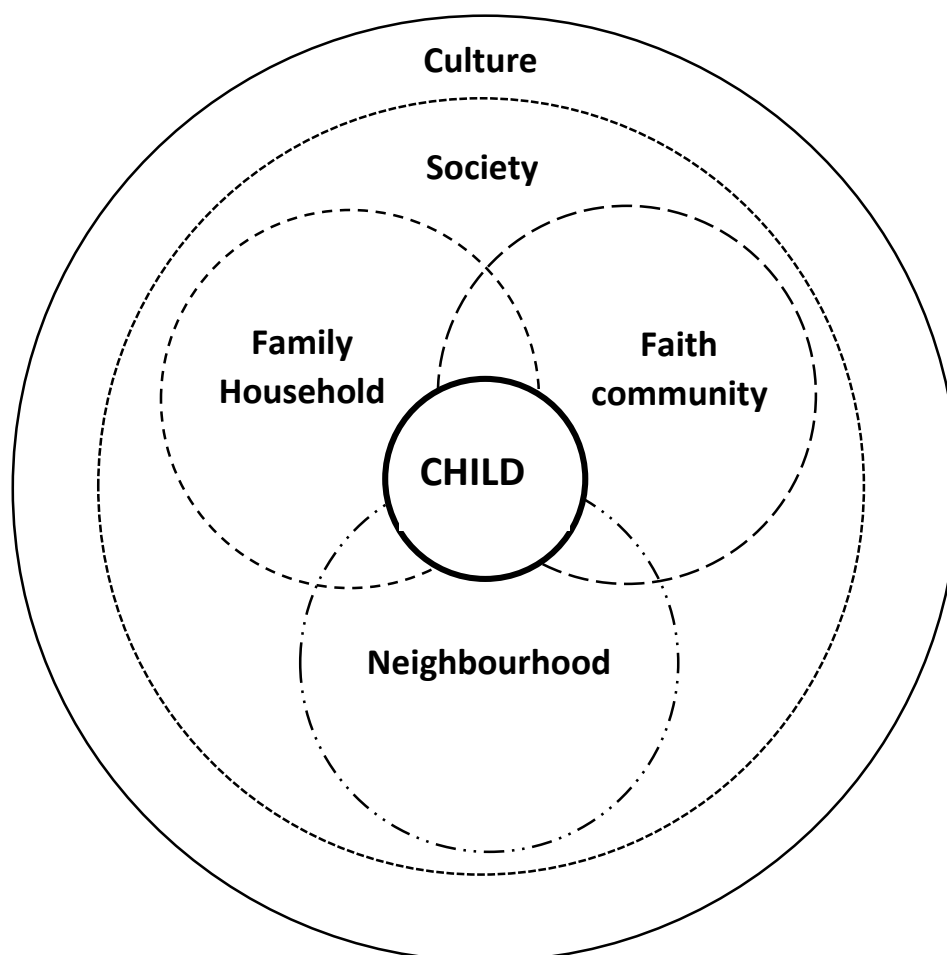
Society involves the basic institutions which provide the governance and functioning for a community/country. It will always reflect the brokenness of sin, but is ordained by God to provide order and structure in which a child can thrive.

The **culture** is the underlying beliefs and values of a people which influence the functioning of the society and neighbourhood – and in part the faith community. These contain remnants of God's glory and purpose but are deeply marred by sin. It is only as the faith community realises this that it is able to impact the culture and present an alternative.

Children will only know more of God's wholeness as these different areas work together. God's people can play a catalytic role in bringing people together to work for positive change. Until the new heaven and the new earth, this world and its people will always know brokenness. However, God calls His people to be agents of healing and redemption, just as Jesus was in His earthly ministry. Particularly on a local level, God's people can have a real impact as they work with families and the local neighbourhood to provide environments in which children can flourish.

Exploring a Child's World

This activity will help you to discover the influences around a child which shape the way they think and live. This can be used in conjunction with the “Looking and Listening Exercise” to also evaluate what activities are currently serving the children of your community and what new activities would be helpful.



Exploration activity

- Draw the above diagram on a large piece of paper or a white board.
- Hand out three different colours of Post-it notes (for example: orange, red, purple) Give each person several notes of the same colour.
- Tell all the people with orange notes to write down things they know about the families and family culture in the local area.
- Tell the people with red notes to write down things they know about the religious communities in the local area
- Tell the people with purple notes to write down things they know about the schools and neighbourhoods in the local area.

- Ask all the people with the same coloured notes to get together and compare notes and come up with the 4-5 most important things they came up with and have them put the notes in the respective circle
- Hand out another colour of Post-it note (e.g. blue) and have people pair together to write down their impressions of the local society – business/economy, government, media, etc Place these up on the board and group similar answers.
- In the large group, talk about the wider culture and decide together on the dominant beliefs and ideologies. Use green Post-it notes to record your conclusions.
- Get into groups of 3-4 and discuss what impact these realities have on the children in the local community. What have we learned about their world? How does this affect them? What are the dominant influences? What are the trouble spots? How does the church need to respond to these realities? Report back
- Finish with prayer for the children of the local community.