

“AND A LITTLE CHILD WILL LEAD THEM”

Last year, Viva co-published ‘God’s Heart for Children: Practical Theology from Global Perspectives’. Lucy Hefford writes about its focus and how people are engaging with it.

God’s Heart for Children is a groundbreaking book. It is among the first predominantly non-Western authored titles of its kind concerning God’s heart for ministry with and for children in some of the world’s most vulnerable situations. **It seeks to provide an overview of a kingdom approach describing our responsibility to, for, and with children.**

Our goal in convening this new book has been to diversify the authorship of the former ‘Understanding God’s Heart for Children’ to ensure that we **hear African, Asian and Latino perspectives** on practical theologies of children more clearly. Furthermore, we set out to update the practitioner contributions and case studies to reflect issues which children-at-risk are facing in 2022, including adding a new chapter entitled ‘Engaged in Creation Care’.

The book affirms **eight core beliefs** regarding the place of children – that they are:

1. Created with dignity
2. Intended to be placed in families
3. Cared for in community
4. Advocated by society
5. Secured in hope

6. Affirmed in God’s church
7. Included in God’s mission, and
8. Engaged in creation care

It traces the impact of such far-reaching issues as displacement, climate change, human trafficking, persecution, and gender discrimination on childhood development.

Written by over 20 contributors from around the world, each section roots its premise in contextual theology, examines the implications for praxis, provides a case study, and includes questions for discussion and reflection.

It is already proving to be a **vibrant and meaningful tool** to guide dialogue and improve practice, especially when practitioners are informed and shaped by contextual theology. We’re delighted that at least 600 copies have so far been sold.

Following on from the publication of the book, Viva is co-ordinating **a series of webinars** throughout 2023, in partnership with All Nations Christian College, the Global Children’s Forum, the Lausanne Movement and Langham Publishing.

“The church is called to break out from the cells of theoretical theology to stand on the ground of children’s experience, where dignity is still a mirage for the majority.”

DR JESSY JAISON



The webinars are equipping and encouraging people working for and ministering with children, as well as students and church leaders, to be able to take away key practical insights for ministry, and to be able to ground what ‘God’s Heart for Children’ means for them and the children they work with in a variety of global contexts.

They hold a mirror to the wider church and draw upon the unique intersection of childhood, development, theology and mission studies and practice.

In the first webinar, held in January 2023, we explored the ways in which dignity is so often not afforded children. Over 220 participants from all over the world registered.

Hiba Al Jamal, Director of SKILD Centre in Lebanon, helped us think through how to ensure that children with special needs are treated with the God-given dignity they were each born with.

Jan Grobbelaar, a theologian from South Africa, challenged us to allow children to take the lead as a way of affirming their dignity.

I wonder what this might look like in your context? Maybe in your home? Or your church? How can we give space for children to be heard, to lead, to reveal God to us in new ways? As you allow the little child to lead you, do share with us, what did you learn?

In March, we hosted another webinar on the theme of Placed in Families, and there are four more scheduled for the coming months. **Will you join us? Find out how to register your place by turning to the advert on the**

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