



BROCHURE

Measuring the Experience of God's Love in Children

A Global Framework for Hope, Faith, and Flourishing

AUGUST 8, 2025

 Claremont
Graduate
University



University of
East London



CENTER FOR SPIRITUALITY,
THEOLOGY AND HEALTH
DUKE UNIVERSITY

 spiritualcare
partners

World Vision 



Measuring the Experience of God's Love in Children

Introduction and Purpose

The *Measuring the Experience of God's Love in Children* initiative is a landmark global research study designed to understand how children perceive and internalize divine love across diverse cultural and spiritual contexts. Developed by World Vision in collaboration with theologians, psychologists, and researchers from leading institutions, the project created the first validated, cross-cultural tool to measure children's experiences of God's love, expressed through the theological lens of hope. The study affirms children as moral and spiritual agents, whose ability to feel loved and hopeful is critical to their emotional, social, and spiritual flourishing.

Hope as the Expression of Divine Love

For children, hope is experienced as belief in their own worth, trust in caregivers, and confidence in a meaningful future. Hope, in this framework, is not merely a positive outlook but a spiritually grounded psychological state. Rooted in Christian theology, hope is both a gift and a response to God's enduring love, made tangible through human relationships and spiritual practices. While the study draws from the Christian faith tradition, affirming hope serves as a universal force that sustains children, nurtures resilience, and fosters meaning and trust in a higher power or sacred purpose.

Design and Methodology

This comprehensive measure was developed through a three-part integrative approach:

1. **Voice of the Children:** Interviews with 658 children across eight countries provided insights into how love, hardship, faith, and hope are experienced in daily life. Their stories laid the foundation for item development, capturing authentic expressions of spiritual experience.
2. **Theological Wisdom:** A working group of theologians from multiple Christian traditions and countries, working in collaboration with leading experts in child development and spiritual formation, articulated a theology of hope rooted in divine love and human connection. The group completed an extensive literature review and a series of reflective exercises, leading to a consensus definition in that "the experience of God's love is most often encountered by children through nurturing relationships."

Researchers from Harvard, Duke, and Claremont Graduate University, in collaboration with the leadership at World Vision, conducted a modified Delphi study to identify measures of hope in children.

Measuring the Experience of God's Love in Children

The scale includes six core dimensions: Compassion, Joy, Purpose, Resilience, Wisdom, and Personal Faith. Measures within these dimensions were tested for reliability and cross-cultural adaptability with over 4,600 children.

Six Signs of Hope

Each sign of hope corresponds to children's flourishing and spiritual well-being:

- **Compassion** - A hopeful child is compassionate and aware of the needs of others, seeks to show kindness, and appreciates when people show compassion to them.
 - **Purpose** - A hopeful child is expressive and an active agent in community life, constantly learning and pursuing their dreams and aspirations.
 - **Resilience** - A hopeful child has both the inner strength and the capacity to draw strength from relationships, to face life challenges with courage. They learn and grow stronger from experience.
 - **Joy** – A hopeful child feels joy in simple experiences and has a grateful heart, which allows them to celebrate the kindness of others.
 - **Wisdom** – A hopeful child understands that they have value as a person, reflects on what they are learning through life experiences, sees the wisdom in demonstrating strong character, and tries to act accordingly.
6. **Personal Faith** – A hopeful child trusts in God, has a relationship with Jesus, sees the work of the Holy Spirit, and finds meaning in spiritual practices and rituals. *(For use in Christian contexts).*

Each theme was both biblically informed and supported by developmental psychology literature, making them developmentally appropriate and culturally adaptable.

3. **Scientific Rigor:** The final step in the process involved a rigorous psychometric validation of the instrument with over 4,600 children across eight countries, Albania, Bolivia, Iraq, Lesotho, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Uganda, ensuring its reliability, construct validity, and cross-cultural applicability.

Cultural Adaptation and Validation

To ensure inclusivity and global relevance, the instrument underwent rigorous translation and cultural adaptation using the TRAPD (Translation, Review, Adjudication, Pretesting, and Documentation) method. Facilitators were trained to administer the measure sensitively across religious and linguistic contexts. The tool's psychometric evaluation demonstrated high reliability ($\alpha = 0.80\text{--}0.92$), construct and convergent validity, and measurement invariance across cultures, age, gender, and faiths. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses validated its structure, and cognitive interviews ensured clarity and resonance for children aged 10–18.

Measuring the Experience of God's Love in Children

Impact and Application

The tool provides World Vision and its partners with an empirically supported way to assess and improve children's spiritual well-being. Using a benchmarking technique, World Vision determined how many children they serve experience each sign of hope across countries. Early data showed that over 40% of children surveyed demonstrated strong signs of hope. Regional variations highlighted unique strengths and challenges, providing insights to guide culturally tailored interventions.

This measure enables faith-based organizations to track how children experience God's love through relationships, community, and spiritual engagement, shifting the paradigm from viewing children as passive recipients of aid to recognizing them as active participants in their own flourishing.

Conclusion

The *Measuring the Experience of God's Love in Children* project is both a theological and scientific breakthrough. It affirms that love and hope are measurable, transformative forces that reflect divine presence in children's lives. By centering the child's spiritual experience, this tool offers a new pathway for global child wellbeing, revealing that even in hardship, when a child is loved and heard, hope grows and with it, compassion, joy, purpose, resilience, wisdom, and personal faith.