

## A Bible-Based Pastoral Approach to Children's Faith Education in the Digital Age

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### Abstract:

*The aim of this article is to analyse the relevance of a Bible-based pastoral approach in children's faith education in the digital age. The issue raised is how the church and the family can nurture children's faith amidst the challenges of digital technological developments that influence the way children learn, interact, and understand spiritual values. The method used is qualitative, employing a literature review approach through the analysis of various books and journals relevant to the research topic. The results indicate that a pastoral approach plays a crucial role in shaping children's faith through contextual accompaniment, open dialogue, and the wise use of digital media. Children's faith education focuses not only on doctrinal aspects but also on pastoral relationships that support holistic faith growth.*

**Keywords:** digital age; pastoral approach; faith education; holistic faith development; church and family

## **Introduction**

Children's faith education from a biblical perspective has a strong theological foundation and is rooted in the practices of God's people from the Old Testament era through to the New Testament. In the ancient Israelite tradition, as reflected in the Old Testament, education was not merely the transfer of knowledge, but also the transmission of faith and the remembrance of God's works in the history of His people (Susanta, 2019). Seto Marsunu emphasises that the Israelites recognised education as a vital element for the survival of children as the people of the covenant (Marsunu, 2013, p. 147). Similarly, in the New Testament, Jesus' ministry to children (Mark 10:13–16) demonstrates that children occupy a central place within the community of faith and cannot be regarded as marginal.

In the Old Testament, the family serves as the primary setting for faith formation. This is evident in the command to teach children God's steadfast love and laws continually (Deut. 6:6–9). Faith formation takes place through narratives, rituals, and daily practices that help children remember God's saving acts in the history of His people (Darmawan, 2019). The process of passing on the faith involves introducing children to various spiritual practices such as reading the Bible, praying, worshipping, singing, serving others, as well as hearing and reflecting on stories of faith that shape religious identity (Bunge, 2019, p. 128). Faith education is not only oriented towards cognitive aspects, but also encompasses character formation, spirituality, and a living relationship with God.

In the context of the early Church, this spirit of faith formation was passed on through the teaching of the apostles and the life of a community that mutually strengthened one another in the faith. Children were regarded as part of the covenant community who needed to be nurtured and guided pastorally. A pastoral approach is essential because faith education is not merely about the transmission of doctrine, but also involves accompaniment, living example, and loving relationships between adults and children within the faith community (Sutcliffe, 2018, pp. 112, 201). However, technological developments present new challenges for the practice of children's faith education. The digital age has transformed the way children learn, interact, and form their understanding of the world. The presence of digital technology, social media, and the rapid flow of information influences how children absorb values and build their sense of self (Gulo et al., 2024). In this context, the church and the family are no longer the sole sources of values formation, as children also learn from various digital platforms that often lack a clear theological framework (Paembonan & Ronda, 2024).

Changes in children's learning patterns and interactions, brought about by the development of digital technology, indicate that the process of faith formation no longer takes place solely within the family and church environments, but is also influenced by various digital media. This situation requires the church to re-examine its approach to children's faith education in a contextual manner. Therefore, a pastoral approach rooted in biblical values needs to be developed creatively so that it can respond to the challenges of the digital age without losing its theological essence.

## **Method**

This study employs a qualitative approach within the framework of *library research* ((Matthews, 2018, p. 390). The qualitative approach in library research does not focus on direct observation of field phenomena, but rather on an in-depth examination of texts, ideas, and concepts found in various sources of scientific literature (Ismail, 2024, pp. 18–20). The data collection process was carried out through the identification and selection of literature relevant to the research topic, particularly that relating to children’s faith education, pastoral theology, Christian education, and the influence of digital technology on child development.

Subsequently, the data was analysed using thematic analysis techniques. The analysis process began with a critical reading of all the sources collected, followed by the identification of key concepts emerging from the literature (Braun & Clarke, 2022, pp. 47–49). These concepts were subsequently grouped into specific themes, such as the role of parents in faith education, pedagogical approaches in Christian education, and the challenges and opportunities in the digital age. Following this, the researcher interpreted these themes by relating them to the context of children’s lives today. Through this analytical process, the researcher sought to identify patterns of thought, theological principles, and pedagogical approaches that could serve as a foundation for understanding and developing children’s faith education in a contextual manner amidst the changes brought about by the development of digital technology. Thus, this study is not merely descriptive, but also analytical and interpretative in formulating an understanding relevant to the current context.

## **Results and Discussion**

### ***Children’s Faith Education from a Biblical Perspective***

#### **Children’s Faith Education from an Old Testament Perspective**

A review of the literature on ancient Israelite tradition not only highlights the role of parents as pastoral agents but also indicates that faith education has, from the outset, been relational and rooted in daily life (Bunge, 2019, p. 128). The author argues that these findings confirm that children’s faith education was never intended as a purely institutional activity, but rather as a living faith practice within family relationships. Here, the family can be understood as the primary theological locus in the formation of a child’s faith. Therefore, parental responsibility is not only concerned with meeting the child’s physical needs, but also encompasses spiritual accompaniment, moral guidance, and the teaching of faith rooted in God’s work in the history of His people (Yulandi et al., 2023).

The biblical basis for the role of parents as guides in the faith can be clearly found in Deuteronomy 6:6–7, which emphasises that the word of God must be taught to children continually, whether at home, on the journey, when lying down, or when rising. This text not only demonstrates that faith education is informal in nature, but also carries theological implications that faith is transmitted through repeated and consistent practices of daily life. In this context, the author observes that one of the primary methods employed within this tradition is the oral tradition, namely the transmission of the teachings of the faith through storytelling, the repetition of the word, and dialogue in everyday life. This oral tradition is not merely a means of communication, but a pastoral method that enables the deep internalisation of the

values of faith through the relationship between parents and children (Susanta, 2019). The author observes that this pattern challenges modern approaches to faith education, which tend to be fragmented and detached from daily life. When faith education is delivered solely in a formal and structured manner, the relational dimension and the experience of faith are diminished. Therefore, effective faith education should be integrative, woven into the rhythm of family life, and should reclaim oral traditions as a living pastoral tool within daily interactions. Furthermore, this text also indicates that faith education is not understood as a formal activity separate from daily life, but as a continuous process of spiritual formation within the relationship between parents and children (Pembroke, 2025). From a pastoral perspective, this pattern demonstrates that parents act as spiritual guides who help children understand and live out their faith in daily life.

The pastoral role of parents is also evident in Proverbs 22:6, which states, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” This verse shows that the formation of a child’s faith is a responsibility entrusted to parents. Education provided from an early age is not only intended to shape good behaviour, but also to instil values of faith that will guide a child’s life into adulthood. Furthermore, Psalm 78:47 emphasises the importance of passing on faith from one generation to the next. The text states that God’s works must be recounted to the next generation so that they may know the Lord and place their hope in Him. This process of storytelling takes place primarily within the family environment, so parents act as the transmitters of the tradition of faith to their children (Darmawan & Priskila, 2020). These two verses not only emphasise the responsibility of parents but also highlight the long-term dimension of a child’s faith education. The authors argue that faith education is not merely a process of shaping behaviour, but a spiritual investment that shapes a child’s faith identity into adulthood. In this context, a failure in faith education from an early age has the potential to result in spiritual disorientation later in life. Furthermore, it highlights the role of parents as pastoral agents tasked with guiding children to know God through narratives of faith and shared life experiences within the community of God’s people.

In the context of Israelite society, the pastoral function of parents is also linked to moral and spiritual responsibilities in guiding children to live in accordance with God’s will (Manihuruk et al., 2022). Such guidance takes the form not only of teaching but also of a life example reflecting obedience to God. Therefore, the parents’ faith life exerts a significant influence on the formation of the child’s spirituality. The role of parents as pastoral agents within the family can also be understood within the framework of covenant theology. The family is viewed as part of God’s covenant community (Harisantoso, 2023, p. 22). Consequently, the responsibility to educate children in the faith is part of the people’s fidelity to the covenant with God. Children born into an Israelite family are regarded as part of God’s people who need to be guided to understand their identity as a covenant people.

This finding indicates that, within the Old Testament tradition, the faith education of children possesses a strong pastoral dimension. Parents act as spiritual guides who

accompany children in the process of coming to know God, understanding the values of faith, and living out that faith in daily life. Thus, the family becomes the primary pastoral space for the growth of a child's faith before the child encounters broader faith formation within the community of God's people. This perspective also provides a theological foundation for the development of a pastoral approach to children's faith education in the present day. If, in the Israelite tradition, parents are understood as pastoral agents for their children, then in the context of the modern church this role remains relevant. Parents do not merely function as educators in a pedagogical sense, but also as spiritual companions who help children face the various challenges of life, including those arising in the digital age.

### **Children's Faith Education in the New Testament Perspective**

The New Testament pays significant attention to the presence and growth of children's faith within the community of believers. The educational system of the Old Testament was adopted within Jewish tradition and underwent further development. The teachings and actions of Jesus, as well as the practices of the early church, indicate that the development of schooling was already beginning to take shape. In Jesus' ministry, children were regarded as an integral part of the community of faith (Keeley, 2018, pp. 14–18). Thus, children's faith education in the New Testament can be understood through the example of Jesus, the teachings of the apostles, and the life of the early church community, which provided space for spiritual growth.

One of the main foundations for understanding the importance of children in the faith community lies in the attitude and teaching of Jesus. In the Gospel of Mark 10:13–16, it is recounted that people brought children to Jesus so that He might touch them. Although the disciples tried to prevent this, Jesus rebuked them and said, "Let the little children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God". This statement not only affirms the importance of children within the faith community, but also reconstructs the theological perspective on children. The author observes that Jesus did not merely accept the children, but positioned them as spiritual subjects possessing the capacity for faith. This corrects the paradigm of faith education which often treats children merely as objects of instruction.

Furthermore, Jesus also held children up as spiritual models for His followers. In Matthew 18:3, Jesus states that one must become like a little child to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. This statement indicates that characteristics such as humility, sincerity, and simple trust and love for God are important spiritual qualities in the life of faith (Holt, 2017, p. 40). Thus, from a New Testament perspective, children are not merely the objects of faith formation, but also serve as examples of spirituality for the faith community as a whole. Concern for children is also evident in Jesus' warning against those who cause children to stumble in their faith. In Matthew 18:6, Jesus issues a stern warning against anyone who leads "one of these little ones who believe in me" astray. This statement demonstrates that Jesus is deeply concerned for the spiritual well-being of children and affirms the moral responsibility of the faith community to protect and guide children in the faith.

In addition to Jesus' teachings, the New Testament's approach to children's faith education is also reflected in the apostles' instruction to Christian families (Hutabarat, 2023). In Ephesians 6:4, the Apostle Paul advises parents, saying, "And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." This verse emphasises that parents bear the primary responsibility for guiding their children in the Christian faith. Children's faith education is not merely the task of the church as an institution, but begins within the family as the most fundamental community of faith. A similar principle is found in Colossians 3:21, which advises parents not to grieve their children's hearts lest they become disheartened. This advice indicates that children's faith education must take place within a relationship characterised by love and care, not through pressure or violence (Mudak, 2025). Children's faith education in the New Testament is not merely about doctrinal teaching, but also about fostering healthy relationships between parents and children.

An understanding of children's faith education in the New Testament can also be seen through the Jewish educational background experienced by Jesus himself during his childhood. Jesus was born and raised within a Jewish tradition that placed great emphasis on the importance of religious education for children (Andalangi et al., 2023). Within the context of first-century Jewish society, a child's education began within the family environment and was subsequently reinforced through learning activities in the synagogue. The family was the primary setting for a child to become acquainted with the Law of Moses and the traditions of the Israelite faith. Parents were responsible for teaching God's word to their children through the reading of Scripture, prayer, and the practice of daily religious life (Dadon, 2024). This educational model reflects the continuity of the Old Testament tradition, which placed the family at the centre of faith education.

The Gospel of Luke provides an account of Jesus' spiritual development within the context of this Jewish education. Luke 2:41–52 recounts that when Jesus was twelve years old, He went with His parents to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. During this event, Jesus was found in the Temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking questions. This event demonstrates that from a young age, Jesus was engaged in a process of religious learning that formed part of the Jewish educational tradition. The narrative also shows that Jesus did not merely receive religious instruction passively, but was actively involved in theological dialogue and reflection. This reflects the Jewish educational method, which often involved discussion, question-and-answer sessions, and the interpretation of the Scriptures (Susanta, 2019). Thus, the development of Jesus's faith during his childhood was inseparable from the context of family and synagogue education, which shaped his understanding of God and God's will.

In the practice of early church life, children were also understood as part of the faith community. This is evident from various epistles that directly address children as part of the congregation. For example, in Ephesians 6:1–3, Paul advises children to obey their parents in the Lord. The fact that children are addressed directly in letters to the

congregation indicates that they were regarded as members of the church community who participated in the shared life of faith. Thus, a study of New Testament texts reveals that children's faith education is based on several key principles. Firstly, children are viewed as part of the community of God's Kingdom and hold significant value in the life of faith. Secondly, the family-particularly parents-bears the primary responsibility for guiding children in the Lord's teachings. Thirdly, the faith community, whether in the context of the synagogue or the church, plays a vital role in supporting children's spiritual growth through teaching and shared life. These findings indicate that children's faith education from a New Testament perspective possesses a strong pastoral dimension. Children are not merely understood as objects of instruction, but as members of the faith community who need to be accompanied, protected, and guided in their spiritual growth. This perspective provides an important theological foundation for the development of a pastoral approach to children's faith education in the present day, particularly in the face of the challenges posed by social change and the development of digital technology.

### ***A Bible-Based Pastoral Approach to the Formation of Children's Faith***

The pastoral approach is not understood as synonymous with education, but rather as an approach that goes beyond education in the narrow sense (Da Costa et al., 2025). Faith education generally relates to the structured process of conveying knowledge, values, and teachings of the faith, whilst pastoral care encompasses a broader dimension, namely relational accompaniment, spiritual care, and the holistic formation of the life of faith (Trentham, 2023). Thus, pastoral care functions not only as a means of education but also as a theological practice emphasising presence, relationship, and the experience of faith in daily life. In this context, children's faith education is understood as part of pastoral ministry, yet it cannot be reduced solely to pedagogical activities, as pastoral care encompasses deeper aspects of nurturing, accompaniment, and the transformation of life.

The formation of children's faith is a vital part of the ministry of the church and the Christian family. Children's faith is not formed instantly, but through a gradual process of formation involving teaching, living examples, and ongoing spiritual accompaniment (Watak et al., 2024). In this context, a pastoral approach plays a vital role because faith education involves not only the transmission of theological knowledge but also relational dimensions, spiritual experiences, and character formation rooted in Christian values (Stonehouse & May, 2010, pp. 21–22). A Bible-based pastoral approach allows the process of faith formation to take place in a more personal and contextual manner, where children not only receive teachings of the faith cognitively, but also experience and internalise that faith in their daily lives (Bellous, 2021). The author observes that the primary strength of the pastoral approach lies in its relational dimension, namely the presence of faith educators-whether parents or the church community-who consistently accompany the child in the process of spiritual growth. In this regard, the formation of faith occurs not only through formal teaching, but also through interaction, life experiences, and concrete examples. Thus, the pastoral

approach functions as an integrative framework that connects faith knowledge, spiritual experience, and daily life practices in the process of a child's faith formation.

The pastoral approach in children's faith education emphasises the importance of relational and loving accompaniment. In pastoral ministry, the child is viewed as a person developing holistically-spiritually, emotionally, socially, and morally (Panuntun & Sirupa, 2021). Therefore, the nurturing of a child's faith must be carried out through an approach that considers the child's developmental needs and fosters a healthy relationship between the faith educator and the child. The pastoral approach also emphasises that faith formation occurs through the life experiences children encounter within the faith community. Children learn about faith through interactions with parents, Sunday school teachers, and other church members (Meka et al., 2025). Through these experiences, children not only understand the teachings of faith cognitively but also internalise the values of faith in their daily lives. Furthermore, the example set by parents and church leaders plays a crucial role in the process of shaping a child's faith. Children tend to learn through observation and imitation of the behaviour of the adults around them (Takanyuai & Nelly, 2020). The pastoral approach in children's faith education not only emphasises accompaniment but also incorporates a transformational dimension in the relationship between educator and child. The author argues that the primary strength of the pastoral approach lies in its ability to bridge the gap between faith knowledge and life experience. Without this relational dimension, faith education risks becoming purely cognitive and losing its formative power. Parents and church ministers need to demonstrate an authentic life of faith so that children can see directly how the values of faith are embodied in real life.

Thus, the pastoral approach plays a vital role in the formation of children's faith as it emphasises relational dimensions, experiential and spiritual, as well as the example of lived faith within the faith education process. This approach helps children develop a faith that is not merely cognitive, but is also reflected in their attitudes and daily behaviour.

### ***Challenges in Children's Faith Education in the Digital Age***

The development of digital technology has brought about significant changes in human life, including in the world of education and the spiritual lives of children. Children born in the digital age are often referred to as '*digital natives*' because they grow up in an environment heavily influenced by digital technology such as the internet, social media and various electronic devices. This situation influences the way children learn, communicate, and build social relationships (Prensky, 2017). The challenges of children's faith education in the digital age lie not only in access to negative content, but also in the changing ways in which children construct knowledge and meaning. The author observes that digital culture fosters a mindset that is instant, visual, and interactive, which is epistemologically distinct from traditional approaches to faith education. This difference demands a reconstruction of faith education methods to remain relevant to the way children learn today. The internet provides a wide range of content that children can easily access without adequate filters (Syafa'atun Nahriyah, 2018). This can influence children's perspectives on moral and spiritual values, particularly if they do not receive adequate guidance from parents or the church.

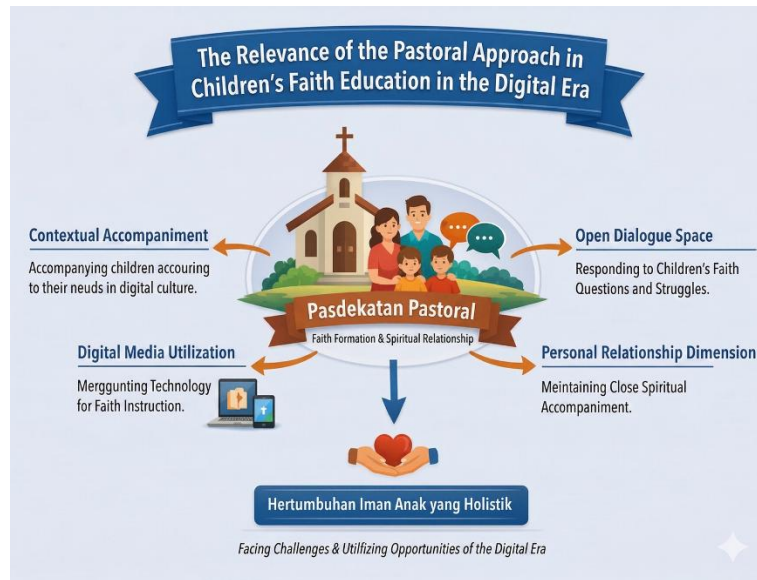
Furthermore, excessive use of digital technology can also reduce direct social interaction between children and their families (Husna et al., 2024). Yet, the family is the primary environment in the process of a child's faith education. When children spend more time with digital devices than interacting with family members, the process of forming faith values can be hindered. Therefore, parents need to be mindful of regulating the use of digital technology in their children's lives so that it does not interfere with their spiritual development. Another challenge arising in the digital age is the rise of an 'instant culture' in accessing information. Children have become accustomed to receiving information rapidly without undergoing a process of deep reflection (Arifianto et al., 2025). In the context of faith education, this situation can hinder a child's spiritual growth, as faith requires a reflective learning process and involves profound spiritual experiences.

On the other hand, the development of digital technology also presents new opportunities for children's faith education. Various digital media can be utilised as creative and engaging tools for faith learning. For example, the use of animated Bible videos, digital Bible apps, spiritual podcasts, and various online learning platforms can help children understand the teachings of faith in a more contextualised manner that aligns with the times (Diana et al., 2023). Therefore, the challenges of children's faith education in the digital age are not only related to the negative impacts of technology, but also to how the church and the family can wisely utilise this technology as a means to support the growth of children's faith.

### ***The Relevance of a Pastoral Approach in Children's Faith Education in the Digital Age***

The relevance of a Bible-based pastoral approach in children's faith education in the digital age does not lie in preserving its traditional form, but in its ability to adapt contextually. The author observes that the Bible-based pastoral approach needs to be reconstructed to be more dialogical, reflective, and open to digital realities, without losing its theological depth. Thus, the pastoral approach not only survives but also evolves as a contextual model of faith education. Through this approach, faith education focuses not only on the transmission of doctrine but also on fostering a deep relationship between the faith educator and the child (Pembroke, 2025). Pastoral accompaniment in the digital age must also take into account the reality of children's lives, which are deeply intertwined with technology. Children often face various questions of faith related to information obtained from the internet and social media. Therefore, pastoral companions need to create an open space for dialogue so that children can honestly express their questions, experiences, and struggles of faith (Immanuela, 2024).

The pastoral approach also encourages the church to utilise digital technology as a means of faith ministry. Digital media can be used to convey faith teaching through various creative and engaging methods, such as online catechism classes, Bible study videos, and various other forms of digital ministry. The use of such technology can help the church reach children in ways that are more relevant to their lives. The concept described here can be illustrated as follows with the aid of a ChatGPT design, where the author acts as the concept creator: (Paembonan, 2026)



Source: Yanni Paembonan, A Pastoral Approach to Faith Education  
Figure 1

The diagram illustrates the rationale behind how a pastoral approach remains relevant in children’s faith education amidst the developments of the digital age. This diagram shows that the pastoral approach is central to the process of nurturing children’s faith, involving the family, the church, and the wise use of technology. At the centre of the diagram is the main concept, namely the “pastoral approach”, represented by the symbols of the church and the family. This indicates that children’s faith formation occurs through collaboration between the church and the family as communities of faith that provide spiritual guidance to children. The pastoral approach emphasises faith formation that is relational, loving, and oriented towards the children’s spiritual growth.

From this central concept emerge four key aspects that explain how the pastoral approach is applied in the digital age: Firstly, contextual accompaniment, which involves guiding children in accordance with the realities of life within a digital culture. Secondly, an open space for dialogue. In the digital age, children often face various questions and struggles regarding their faith due to information obtained from the internet and social media. Third is the use of digital media in children’s faith education. Fourth is the personal relational dimension, which aids the faith education process; the pastoral approach continues to emphasise the importance of personal relationships between faith educators and children. These four aspects then lead to the ultimate goal: the holistic growth of children’s faith. Holistic growth in faith means that children not only understand the teachings of the faith intellectually, but also experience spiritual growth that encompasses all aspects of life, including morality, social relationships, and Christian character. Thus, this framework demonstrates that the pastoral approach remains relevant in children’s faith education in the digital age, as it enables the church and families to address the various challenges posed by technological development whilst utilising existing opportunities to support the comprehensive growth of children’s

faith.

Based on the overall findings, the author emphasises that children's faith education cannot be separated from relational dynamics, cultural contexts, and technological developments. The pastoral approach offers an integrative framework because it focuses not only on cognitive aspects but also on the formation of a holistic faith experience. However, without serious contextualisation efforts, this approach risks losing its relevance amidst changing times. Therefore, there is a need to develop a model of faith education that is not only rooted in theological tradition but also responsive to the epistemological changes occurring in children's lives in the digital age.

## Conclusion

This paper demonstrates that the pastoral approach remains relevant and essential in nurturing children's faith in the digital age. The principles of faith from the Bible in the Old and New Testaments can be applied contextually in addressing the challenges of technology, as proven to be true. Findings indicate that families and faith communities play a vital role as pastoral agents supporting children's spiritual growth through loving relationships, spiritual experiences, and exemplary living. A pastoral approach must integrate the wise use of digital media and create open spaces for dialogue that are contextualised to the realities of children's lives. It must also emphasise that collaboration between families, the church, and the use of digital media is key to ensuring a holistic faith-nurturing process amidst the developments of the digital age. For further research, it is recommended to explore innovative strategies for integrating digital technology with pastoral approaches in a more practical manner, as well as to examine its impact on children's faith and character development across various cultural and social contexts.

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