

From shema to shomea: Tracing a theology of listening as a foundation for Christian value education among the digital generation

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Abstract: Generation Z and Generation Alpha are formed within a digital ecosystem that structurally trains distraction rather than listening—a crisis addressed far more often through psychology or technology criticism than through theology. Scholarship in Christian religious education (Christian education) in Indonesia typically invokes Scripture as a general source of values rather than excavating it philologically as a theological locus in its own right. This article constructs a text-grounded theology of listening by tracing the Hebrew root *shama* from the *Shema Yisrael* command (Deu. 6:4–9) to Solomon's request for a *lev shomea*, “a hearing heart” (1 Kgs 3:9), asking how this theology is constructed and how it can be transformed into a pedagogical framework for Christian value education among Generation Z and Alpha. Using a library-based, exegetical-intertextual method, the study analyzes six canonical texts sharing the *shama* root or its conceptual resonance through a text-theme-value-indicator procedure. The study finds a coherent, obedience-oriented theology of listening, translated into four educational virtues—patience, relational humility, discernment, and responsive obedience—and four correspondingly designed pedagogical practices that directly counteract digital distraction.

Keywords: Christian religious education, digital distraction, Generation Alpha, Generation Z, *lev shomea*, *shama*, theology of listening

Introduction

Generation Z and Generation Alpha are the first cohorts to have spent their entire adolescence in the shadow of the smartphone. In her extensive study of the post-2010s generation, the psychologist Jean Twenge observes that the surge in smartphone ownership since the early 2010s correlates with drastic shifts in adolescent patterns of social interaction, levels of anxiety, and capacity for concentration, a shift she judges sharper than any intergenerational transition preceding it.¹ From the standpoint of cognitive neuroscience, Nicholas Carr reinforces this concern: the culture of rapid reading and digital multitasking shaped by the internet, he

¹ Jean M. Twenge, *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood—and What That Means for the Rest of Us* (New York: Atria Books, 2017).

argues, trains the brain to process information shallowly and in fragments, thereby eroding the capacity for sustained attention.² This is not merely the moralizing complaint of an older generation; it is an empirically documented pattern.

This crisis cannot be treated as merely a psychological or cognitive matter outside theological concern. The capacity for sustained listening is a precondition of nearly every process of Christian faith formation: faith comes from hearing (Rm. 10:17); spiritual growth rests upon a word that is heard and meditated upon; and the teacher–learner relationship in Christian education, whether in the classroom, the family, or the church, presupposes precisely the kind of full presence that the culture of digital distraction dismantles. In other words, the crisis of attention that Twenge and Carr map psychologically and cognitively carries far higher theological and pedagogical stakes: if the capacity to listen is itself eroded, then the entire process of faith formation and Christian value learning loses its basic precondition. At this point, the problem demands an approach not only psychological or technological, but also biblical, theological, and pedagogical.

Within Christian religious education in Indonesia, a similar unease has already generated a body of scholarship that generally moves from sociological observation to pedagogical and pastoral strategy: mapping the identity crisis and moral disruption of Generation Z under intense digital exposure, and then formulating a Christian education strategy in response. Such an approach is valuable and contextually attuned, yet its theological and exegetical foundation remains comparatively thin. Scripture is invoked more often as a general source of values than philologically excavated as a locus of theological construction in its own right.

At the broader level of Christian formation theory, the philosopher-theologian James K. A. Smith has persuaded many readers that human beings are formed not primarily by what they think but by what they love, and by the liturgies that shape that love, including the liturgies of digital culture, which shape their users' desires and attention without those users noticing.³ This framework explains why digital distraction is so powerfully formative, but it halts at a general philosophical and formative level: a liturgy may be any ritual whatever that forms love, and Smith himself does not tie his account explicitly to a single biblical category as a counter-liturgy. From this stopping point, the present study proceeds. If digital liturgy operates by forming patterns of attention and desire, then the most fitting counter-liturgy is not a generic one but one that targets the very same capacity, that is, the capacity to listen. Scripture, as will be shown, possesses a theological category of precision for this capacity: hearing (*shama*), traced from its root in the Torah to the petition of a young king.

This study begins philologically with Deuteronomy 6:4–9, the text known as the *Shema Yisrael*. According to Patrick Miller's theological exposition of Deuteronomy, the command *Shema* in this text cannot be reduced to auditory reception; throughout Deuteronomy, the root consistently binds hearing to obedience and internalization: the word heard must be absorbed into the heart and taught repeatedly to children and grandchildren.⁴ The *Shema Yisrael*, in other

² Nicholas Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), 116–18.

³ James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016), 37–39.

⁴ Patrick D. Miller, *Deuteronomy, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 99–100.

words, is not only a theological command but also a pedagogical prescription: hearing is an act to be handed on, not a private experience that terminates in the self.

The same root, *shama*, resurfaces in 1 Kings 3:9, when Solomon, offered by God whatever he might ask, chooses to request a *lev shomea*, a hearing heart, so that he might govern God's people and discern good from evil. In his commentary on Kings, Choon-Leong Seow observes that this request conspicuously bypasses the options a young king would ordinarily desire: long life, wealth, or victory over his enemies.⁵ The reappearance of the root *shama* at this decisive moment—a leader's personal choice rather than a collective command, as in Deuteronomy—links the two texts textually as well as thematically.

This philological and theological trace from *Shema* to *Shomea*, as the discussion will show, does not stand alone. It resonates with a constellation of other canonical texts that likewise position hearing as a theological category: Eli's formation of the young Samuel, the contrast between Martha and Mary, Jesus' method of teaching through parables, and James' ethic of quickness to hear and slowness to speak. From this constellation, the study assembles a theology of listening and translates it into concrete Christian educational values, like patience, relational humility, discernment, and responsive obedience, which can be mapped directly onto a pedagogy that counters the patterns of digital distraction shaping the daily lives of Generation Z and Alpha.

Proceeding from this gap, the study poses two research questions. First, how is the theology of *lev shomea* constructed philologically and intertextually, from Deuteronomy 6 to a wider canonical constellation? Second, how can that theological construction be transformed into a framework for Christian religious education responsive to the crisis of digital distraction among Generation Z and Alpha? To answer them, the article proceeds in five parts. The method section sets out the library-based exegetical design and procedure employed. The first part traces the philological path from *Shema* to *Shomea* as an exegetical foundation. The second expands that path into a broader canonical constellation. The third translates that constellation into Christian educational values. The fourth maps those values onto a pedagogy of listening that specifically counteracts the pathologies of digital distraction among Generation Z and Alpha. Along this line of argument, the study contends that a theology of listening rooted in the text, rather than a generic principle of formation, constitutes the most relevant foundation for Christian value education amid a generation growing up in digital noise.

This study employs a library research design that is exegetical-theological and canonically intertextual in character rather than field-based or empirical. The research procedure unfolds in three stages. The first stage is text selection. Six canonical texts were selected using two criteria: (a) the explicit occurrence of the Hebrew root *shama* at a decisive theological moment (Deu. 6:4–9; 1 Kgs 3:9–11; 1 Sam 3:1–10), or (b) a clear conceptual resonance with the theme of hearing as a theological category even where the same Hebrew root is absent, the text being in Greek (Lk 10:38–42; Mrk. 4:9; Js. 1:19). These six texts were also chosen so as to be distributed across canonical genres and periods—Torah, Historical Books, Gospels, and General Epistles—as a methodological condition for the claim of canonical coherence, as stated at the opening of Part II.

⁵ Choon-Leong Seow, "The First and Second Books of Kings," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 3 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 41–43.

The second stage is philological and intertextual analysis, carried out in two layers. In the Hebrew texts (Deu. 6; 1 Kgs 3; 1 Sam 3), analysis proceeds at the level of direct philology: the semantic range of the root *shama* is referred to a standard lexicon (Brown-Driver-Briggs)⁶ and to its usage within the literary context of each book, following standard commentary (Miller, Seow, Brueggemann). When the study moves from the Hebrew texts to the Greek texts of the New Testament (Luke, Mark, James), the method deliberately shifts from a direct philological relation to a conceptual-canonical reading: what is sought is no longer a shared root but a shared theological theme of hearing as a category that demands response. This methodological shift is stated openly here so that readers do not mistakenly assume that all six texts of the constellation stand in an equally close philological relation.

The third stage transforms the exegetical findings into values and pedagogical practices through a text–theme–value–indicator procedure. Each text is mapped onto the theological theme it displays (for example, the Martha–Mary contrast onto the theme of focused attention). A theme that appears consistently across two or more texts is elevated to the status of a Christian educational virtue, accompanied by a theological and pedagogical justification explaining why that particular term, and not a neighboring educational term of similar meaning, was chosen. Each virtue is then translated into a concrete pedagogical practice, along with observable learning indicators. The full procedure and its results appear as a matrix at the opening of Part III.

From shema to shomea: The philological trace of a theology of listening

This section answers the first research question as formulated in the Introduction: how the theology of *lev shomea* is constructed philologically and intertextually. At the outset, the term “philological” in this study refers to the analysis of words and linguistic meaning (linguistic-textual analysis), not to formal philosophical inquiry (ontology, epistemology, or axiology); the approach employed is biblical-theological exegesis, as explained in the method section. The construction of a theology of listening proposed here rests upon a single philological premise: that the Hebrew root שָׁמַע (*shama*) is not a neutral verb meaning merely “to hear” in a passive, auditory sense, but a verb carrying a theological freight of its own in its Old Testament usage. The standard Hebrew-English lexicon compiled by Brown, Driver, and Briggs records that *shama*, which occurs more than a thousand times in the Hebrew text, ranges from the most basic sense, “to hear a sound,” to a far denser one: to pay attention, to understand, and, in many crucial contexts, to obey.⁷ On this basis, the study argues that every occurrence of *shama* at a significant theological moment deserves to be read not as an incidental linguistic detail but as a signal about the kind of relation being demanded: a relation that requires response, not merely reception.

This distinctiveness becomes sharper still when set beside the fact that Biblical Hebrew possesses no separate verb meaning purely “to obey” apart from “to hear”: *shama* bears both burdens of meaning at once. When a prophet rebukes Israel for failing to *shama*, the rebuke is not about malfunctioning ears but about a heart that receives sound without allowing it to

⁶ Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906), 1033–34, s.v. “שָׁמַע.”

⁷ Brown, 1033–34.

bear fruit in action. This study's implication is significant: within the Hebrew framework, a theologically formed capacity to listen can never be separated from the capacity to obey. A *lev shomea* (a heart that does *shama*) is therefore by definition a responsive heart, not merely a receptive one.

The use of *shama* that most decisively shapes it as a theological category appears in Deuteronomy 6:4–9, the text known as the *Shema Yisrael*, named for its opening word. According to Patrick Miller, the literary structure of this chapter deliberately links the command to hear (v. 4) with the command to love (v. 5), and then with a series of highly concrete pedagogical instructions: the word must be “in your heart,” taught repeatedly to children, and spoken about within the rhythms of daily life. Miller stresses that this sequence is no accident: hearing precedes loving, and loving precedes teaching, forming a kind of theological choreography in which right hearing becomes the root of right love, and right love in turn becomes the root of the intergenerational transmission of faith.⁸

The word *lev* (heart), joined to *shama* in Solomon's request, likewise requires clarification, since in Hebrew anthropology *lev* is not identical with the popular contemporary concept of the “heart” as the seat of emotion. In his classic study of Old Testament anthropology, Hans Walter Wolff shows that *lev* in Hebrew thought is the center of the human will, intellect, and moral deliberation, the organ that thinks and decides, not merely the one that feels.⁹ Understood in this way, the phrase *lev shomea* becomes far more precise in meaning: it is not a request for sensitive feeling but a request for a center of will and deliberation trained to respond obediently to what it hears.

In this light, Solomon's request in 1 Kings 3:9 reads more sharply. Confronted with God's open offer at Gibeon, Solomon asks for a *lev shomea*, not long life, not wealth, not the defeat of his enemies, as verse 11 reiterates. What is striking, and frequently overlooked, is that the root *shama* reappears in verse 11 itself, in the phrase *havin lishmoa mishpat*, which many translators render as “understanding to discern what is right.” In other words, *shama* is not only the word Solomon chooses in verse 9; it is also the root taken up again when God confirms the request in verse 11, a twofold textual reinforcement indicating that *shama*, and not some other wisdom term, is the theological key term genuinely at stake in this narrative.¹⁰

The convergence of Deuteronomy 6 and 1 Kings 3 is therefore not a mere similarity of sound but a theological unity operating at two different levels. In Deuteronomy, *shama* is a collective, covenantal demand: all Israel is called to hear and to hand that hearing on. In 1 Kings, *shama* becomes a qualification for personal leadership: a young king pleads that his own heart be formed by the same disposition. That an identical root is employed at these two different levels—community and leader, command and petition—indicates that hearing in Hebrew theology is not one virtue among many but the basic disposition required of an obedient people and a wise leader alike.

This philological foundation, *shama* as a verb binding hearing to obeying, *lev* as the center of will that it forms, and the twofold resonance between Deuteronomy 6 and 1 Kings 3, constitutes the argumentative point of departure for this study. Four kinds of relation

⁸ Miller, *Deuteronomy*, 99–100.

⁹ Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 46–47, 51–53.

¹⁰ Seow, “First and Second Books of Kings,” 41–43.

employed here must be carefully distinguished: lexical relation (the shared *shama* root in both texts), canonical resonance (the recurrence of the theme of hearing across books), intertextuality (the possibility of one text's conscious reference to another, which cannot always be demonstrated in the case of Deuteronomy and 1 Kings), and theological construction (the conceptual synthesis proposed by the author on the basis of these patterns). The recurrence of the same root in these two texts demonstrates a lexical relation and a strong canonical resonance; the claim of this study, however, is located at the level of theological construction, not at the level of a claim to conscious intertextuality that the available textual data cannot establish. With this distinction in place, the study argues that *lev shomea* is not a poetic phrase the writer of Kings happened to select but the culminating point of a theology of listening already initiated in the Torah. The next section will show that this trace does not end here but continues to resonate throughout the canon.

Expanding the canon: A constellation of listening texts in scripture

The philological trajectory from *Shema* to *Shomea*, as demonstrated in the preceding part, would remain an interesting yet argumentatively fragile finding were it to stand alone as the sole textual evidence. The strength of a biblical-theological construction lies precisely in its coherence across canonical genre and period, not in a single verse plucked in isolation. This part therefore extends the *shama* trajectory to four additional texts across the historical books, the Gospels, and the general epistles: the formation of the young Samuel by Eli, the contrast between Martha and Mary, Jesus' method of teaching through parables, and James' ethic concerning hearing and speaking. If in all four the capacity for listening is consistently positioned as a decisive theological category, then the claim that Scripture possesses a coherent theology of listening, rather than a linguistic coincidence occurring in two texts, becomes considerably more secure. As explained in the Method section, this part shifts the discussion from the Hebrew texts of the Old Testament to the Greek texts of the New, moving from direct philological analysis to a conceptual-canonical reading.

The first point is 1 Samuel 3:1–10, the narrative of the young Samuel's call. The opening context is deliberately bleak: the word of the LORD was rare in those days, and Eli's eyes had begun to grow dim so that he could no longer see clearly. Walter Brueggemann observes that the dimming of Eli's eyes functions as a structural metaphor for the spiritual decline of that entire era, a generation that had lost the sensitivity to recognize the presence of God.¹¹ What matters for the present study is that Samuel himself did not at first recognize the voice calling him; he required Eli, three times over, to teach him how to respond: "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening", deploying once again the same *shama* root. This pattern establishes that *lev shomea* is not a capacity possessed automatically but one that must be formed through the accompaniment of an adult who has learned to listen first, a pedagogy of listening in its most literal form.

The second point shifts to Luke 10:38–42, the narrative of Jesus' visit to the house of Martha and Mary. Martha, the text says, was *periespato*, the Greek verb περισπάω, which, according to the standard New Testament lexicon of Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, means to be drawn in various directions, overburdened with occupation, and having one's attention

¹¹ Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 24–26.

divided.¹² The word is a *hapax legomenon*, occurring only once in the whole New Testament, precisely in this verse, and its root joins *peri* (around) with *spao* (to draw forcibly). Its contrast with Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened (*ēkouen*) to his word, could hardly be sharper: one woman drawn in many directions, the other concentrated to listen in one. When Jesus names Mary's choice as "the one thing needful," he is speaking quite literally about distraction versus concentrated listening, one of the New Testament texts that most directly touches the central concern of this study. In contemporary educational terms, this contrast may be read as running parallel to the concept of *attention formation*, the process by which the capacity to concentrate is formed through habituation rather than received as native endowment, so that Mary's posture is not merely a spiritual exemplar but a precedent for the pedagogy of concentrated attention to be developed in Part IV.

The third point concerns not the content of Jesus' teaching but his method. Klyne Snodgrass, in his comprehensive study of the parables of Jesus, demonstrates that the parabolic form is deliberately designed to require the hearer's active participation in construing meaning, rather than delivering that meaning plainly.¹³ The formula recurring throughout Jesus' teaching—"whoever has ears to hear, let them hear" (Mk 4:9)—is no mere rhetorical flourish but an explicit acknowledgment that hearing rightly is an achievement, not something to be taken for granted. Jesus himself, in other words, practiced a pedagogy of listening: his method of teaching formed the capacity of *lev shomea* in his hearers, and not merely the content of his teaching contained counsel about listening.

The fourth point moves from Gospel narrative to the practical counsel of the Letter of James, which many scholars, including Luke Timothy Johnson in his commentary, classify as a representative of New Testament wisdom literature, heir to the same tradition as Solomon's petition for wisdom. James 1:19 offers a compact ethical instruction: let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger. Johnson notes that this sequence is no rhetorical accident but reflects an ethic of speech long established within the Jewish wisdom tradition: hasty words are the symptom of a heart that has not truly listened.¹⁴ Of all the texts in the constellation examined here, this counsel confronts most directly the reactive digital culture of instant comment, emotional posting, and currents of public anger that go viral before their context can be understood.

When these six texts, Deuteronomy 6, 1 Kings 3, 1 Samuel 3, Luke 10, Mark 4, and James 1, are read together, they display a consistent theological pattern and furnish a firm basis for the construction of a theology of listening. Listening emerges as a coherent theological category across the Torah, the Historical Books, the Gospels, and the General Epistles; at the level of the community and the individual; as command, petition, call, narrative contrast, pedagogical method, and ethical counsel. Not one of these six texts treats listening as a neutral

¹² Walter Bauer, Frederick W. Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 803, s.v. "περισπάω."

¹³ Klyne R. Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 8–10.

¹⁴ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 37A (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 199–201.

or automatic capacity. Each, in its own manner, insists that right listening is a theological achievement that must be formed, trained, and transmitted.

Before turning to the constructive work, we must make explicit the direct pedagogical implication for Christian Religious Education. If these six texts are read together, the very nature of learning within Christian education cannot be reduced to the transfer of doctrinal knowledge. Learning, within the framework of this theology of listening, is a process of hearing God that internalizes the word into the heart (*lev*) and issues in obedience and altered action, a process involving accompaniment (the Eli–Samuel pattern), concentrated attention (the Martha–Mary pattern), active participation in interpretation (Jesus' parabolic method), and the discipline of response (the ethic of James). It is this understanding that forms the direct bridge to the constructive work of the following part: the translation of this nature of learning into educational virtues that can be taught deliberately.

With this expanded canonical foundation, the remaining question is no longer whether Scripture possesses a coherent theology of listening but what concrete values that theology forms. The following part shifts from exegesis to constructive work: translating the textual constellation above into Christian educational virtues that can be taught, trained, and sustained under the pressure of digital distraction.

From theology to value: The virtues formed by *lev shomea*

This part begins to answer the second research question: how the theological construction is transformed into a pedagogical framework for Christian education. Having established that listening is a coherent theological category across the canon, the next step is constructive: translating that textual constellation into concrete virtues that can serve as the *telos* of Christian education. The approach follows the tradition of practice-based Christian formation as articulated by Craig Dykstra: Christian character is not formed by implanting abstract propositions to be memorized but by repeated participation in practices lived out within a community of faith, which gradually shape an interior disposition (*habitus*).¹⁵ This framework aligns with the wider tradition of character education, including Thomas Lickona's insistence that enduring values are trained through habit and community rather than merely taught as information.¹⁶ From the six texts already examined, four virtues emerge consistently and mutually reinforce one another: patience, relational humility, discernment, and responsive obedience.

To show that these values are not merely intuitive, the logic of the transformation is set out explicitly below, following the text–theme–value–indicator procedure explained in the Method section. The Martha–Mary contrast yields the theme of concentrated attention over being drawn in many directions, elevated into the virtue of patience. The Eli–Samuel pattern of accompaniment, together with the intergenerational structure of the *Shema*, yields the theme of listening formed through relation, elevated into relational humility. The clause “to discern between good and evil” in Solomon's petition, together with Jesus' parabolic method, yields the theme of active deliberation, elevated into discernment. And the ethic of James 1:19,

¹⁵ Craig Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 41–43.

¹⁶ Thomas Lickona, *Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility* (New York: Bantam Books, 1991), 50–52.

together with the philological premise of *shama* as hearing-and-obeying, yields the theme of response that alters action, elevated into responsive obedience. Concerning the term “patience” in particular: it has been selected, rather than a neighboring educational term such as *sustained attention* or *attentiveness*, because its biblical root in the Martha–Mary contrast emphasizes the dimension of will and choice (Mary chose one focus) and not merely the cognitive capacity to hold attention. “Patience” is accordingly understood in this study as a disposition of the will to actively choose one focus amid the pull of many directions, a sense closer to its theological meaning than to the popular sense of passive self-restraint.

The first virtue, patience, is drawn most clearly from the contrast between Martha and Mary in Luke 10. Patience here is not passive self-restraint but the active ability to choose one focus amid the pull of many directions, precisely the inverse of the *periespato* condition Martha suffered. Within Christian education, this kind of patience must be trained deliberately, since the digital environment structurally trains its opposite: instant reward, immediate gratification, and social penalty for whoever is slow to respond.

The second virtue, relational humility, is drawn from the Eli–Samuel pattern of accompaniment and from the intergenerational structure of the *Shema Yisrael*. Humility here means the willingness to acknowledge that the capacity to listen does not arise from oneself but is formed through relation with another who has learned to listen first. Parker Palmer, in his reflections on the spirituality of education, proposes that genuine knowledge always involves a willingness to be known in turn, a relational and vulnerable process rather than an objective mastery held at a distance.¹⁷ Relational humility of this kind directly critiques a digital culture that encourages defensive self-curation and validation through followers rather than through relationships of genuine mutual knowledge.

The third virtue, discernment, is drawn directly from the clause accompanying Solomon's petition: a listening heart is requested “to discern between good and evil” (1 Kgs 3:9). Discernment is not merely the ability to gather information but the ability to weigh and to decide, a capacity likewise demanded by Jesus' parabolic method, which deliberately withholds meaning from plain delivery.¹⁸ Amid the flood of digital information and misinformation, discernment of this kind becomes the most immediately relevant of the virtues; so far as can be traced in the available Christian education curriculum literature, it also appears to have been trained less explicitly than the other virtues, though this claim would require a more systematic curriculum mapping before it could be established empirically.

The fourth virtue, responsive obedience, returns to the basic philological premise of this study: that *shama* never halts at hearing but always demands response. James, already discussed, counsels quickness to hear and slowness to speak, and in the same passage insists that the congregation become “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (Js 1:22)—an insistence that once again binds hearing to concrete action. Responsive obedience is therefore not blind compliance but the willingness to let what has genuinely been heard alter what one does.

¹⁷ Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: A Spirituality of Education* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 31–33.

¹⁸ Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent*, 8–10.

The significance of a theology of listening for Christian Religious Education does not end with establishing four virtues as a list of values; it penetrates the core components of the Christian education curriculum itself. At the level of aims, this theology shifts the goal of Christian education instruction from mastering doctrinal knowledge to forming a *lev shomea* (a heart that hears and obeys) as a holistic spiritual competence. At the level of content, this theology requires that the six canonical texts examined here, not only the memory verses customarily deployed, be made explicit instructional material, so learners do not merely know that “listening matters” but grasp the textual argument for why.

At the level of process and instructional strategy, a theology of listening requires methods that deliberately train, rather than merely lecture about, the capacity to listen, consonant with Jesus' own parabolic method, which demands the hearer's active participation, as Snodgrass has shown.¹⁹ This means that the one-directional lecture strategy dominant in many conventional Christian education classrooms must be balanced by strategies that train pause, reflection, and active interpretation. At the level of the educator–learner relation, the Eli–Samuel pattern points toward a model of mentoring relation that is asymmetrical yet dialogical: the educator functions as one who has learned to listen first and who accompanies the learner in recognizing the “voice” that must be answered, rather than as a one-way source of information.

At the level of the learning environment, a theology of listening requires spaces deliberately designed to reduce digitally competitive stimulation, slow the rhythm, create intentional silence, and reduce device interruptions throughout the learning process. At the level of evaluation, the most demanding consequence of this theology is that instructional success cannot be measured by cognitive mastery of the material alone but must encompass behavioral and relational indicators: the learner's ability to give full attention without distraction, willingness to seek and receive accompaniment, accuracy in weighing information before responding, and consistency between what is heard and what is done. These levels—aims, content, process and relation, environment, and evaluation—will be operationalized further into concrete pedagogical practices in Part IV.

These four virtues are not a disconnected list but a single coherent portrait of the person formed by *lev shomea*: one able to concentrate attention, who knows his or her own limits and need of others, who is able to weigh matters wisely, and who allows what has been heard to bear fruit in action. This portrait constitutes the *telos* of the Christian value education proposed here, not a list of rules but the formation of integral character. The question that remains is one of praxis: through what concrete practices can these four virtues be trained, especially in the face of the pressure of digital distraction that Generations Z and Alpha encounter daily? The following part answers that question by mapping each virtue onto a specific pedagogical practice.

A pedagogy of listening as counteraction: Implications for Generations Z and Alpha in an age of digital distraction

Before outlining the four practices, this study must define what it means by a “pedagogy of listening.” Drawing on Craig Dykstra's framework of Christian practices, a pedagogy of listening is defined as a series of intentional learning practices, undertaken repeatedly within

¹⁹ Snodgrass.

a community of faith and directed toward forming the learner's capacity for *lev shomea*, not an incidental single activity but a pattern of habituation possessing clear learning objectives, a defined role for the educator, a defined learner experience, and observable learning indicators. This definition supplies the explanatory framework for the four practices that follow.

If Part III answered what values *lev shomea* forms, this part answers how: what concrete pedagogical practices can cultivate those four virtues while directly counteracting the patterns of digital distraction described in the Introduction. Each virtue is mapped onto the specific digital pathology it opposes, and onto a practice that can be integrated into the Christian Religious Education curriculum, family life, and congregational life alike.

Against the fragmentation of attention fostered by notifications and digital multitasking, patience can be trained through rhythms of intentional silence and slowness within the learning process, contemplative pauses before discussion, device-free reading periods, exercises in sitting still as preparation before an instructional session, and the imitation of Mary's posture. Cal Newport, though writing from a secular perspective on productivity, proposes practices that align to a surprising degree: scheduled periods of "digital declutter" and solitary time free of digital input as a means of retraining an eroded capacity for focus.²⁰ Christian education may borrow this practical structure while giving it deeper theological meaning: silence is not merely a productivity detox but a space for training the *lev shomea*. As an instructional design, this practice carries a specific learning objective: the learner can remain in device-free silence for a given duration while concentrating attention on a single word of Scripture or reflective question. The educator's role is to guide, not to fill, that silence, for instance by offering a single question for contemplation at the outset and accompanying the reflection at the close. The learner's experience takes the form of scheduled stillness (five to ten minutes is suggested for early adolescents, extendable by stages) before the Christian education session, family instruction, or communal worship begins. Its theological reflection is tied explicitly to Mary's posture in Luke 10: silence is not emptiness but the space in which *lev shomea* does its work. Observable learning indicators include how long the learner can sustain without checking a device, along with the quality of the questions or reflections produced after that period of silence.

Against the algorithmic curation that narrows social contact to circles of the like-minded and erodes face-to-face relation, relational humility can be trained through personal intergenerational accompaniment—imitating the Eli-Samuel pattern and the intergenerational teaching mandate of the *Shema*. In the Indonesian context, this can be realized through strengthening the role of parents and church mentors as companions in children's digital literacy rather than merely as supervisors imposing limits, as recent Christian education scholarship on the importance of reflective accompaniment in the face of Generation Z's digital identity crisis has shown.²¹ A mentoring relation of this kind structurally ruptures the algorithmic bubble, since it compels an encounter with a voice the algorithm did not select. This practice must distinguish three different pedagogical functions rather than blending them indiscriminately. The Christian education teacher, in the school or campus

²⁰ Cal Newport, *Digital Minimalism: Choosing a Focused Life in a Noisy World* (New York: Portfolio/Penguin, 2019), 66–68.

²¹ Novida Dwici Yuanri Manik, Shalomita, and Miranty Helena Adoe, "Strategi Reflektif Pendidikan Agama Kristen dalam Menanggulangi Krisis Identitas Generasi Z di Era Digital," *Jurnal Luxnos* 12, no. 1 (2026): 114–16.

sphere, accompanies curricularly and on a schedule, linking instructional material to the learner's reflective questions about their own use of digital media. The parent, in the domestic sphere, accompanies daily and personally, present in conversation about the content the child consumes, imitating Eli's pattern of listening before correcting. The pastor or church mentor, in the congregational sphere, accompanies narratively and communally, connecting young congregants' digital experience to the wider narrative of faith through intergenerational small groups. All three share the same learning objective (that the learner recognize the capacity to listen as formed through relation rather than through solitary effort) but differ in context, duration, and form of accompaniment. The observable learning indicator is the frequency and quality of the learner's reflective conversations with an intergenerational companion concerning the digital content they consume.

Against the crisis of discernment amid a flood of digital misinformation, discernment can be trained through a digital literacy curriculum that is explicitly theological: not merely teaching the technical skill of recognizing hoaxes but training ethical-theological evaluation of content, asking not only "is this factually true?" but also "does this build up or destroy, unite or divide?" Exercises of this kind directly operationalize the clause "to discern between good and evil" in 1 Kings 3:9, rendering it a competence that can be taught and assessed rather than an exegetical phrase merely admired. So that this theological digital literacy becomes operational and does not remain a normative exhortation, this study proposes five concrete dimensions that can be arranged as curriculum indicators: (1) factual verification, the technical ability to ascertain the truth of a piece of information; (2) ethical assessment, the ability to weigh the impact of a piece of content upon one's neighbor; (3) theological discernment, the ability to assess content from the standpoint of faith rather than merely of social propriety; (4) comprehension of algorithmic influence, the awareness that what appears on the screen has been filtered by the platform's interests and is not neutral reality; and (5) determination of a Christian response, the ability to decide whether and how to respond to a piece of content in accordance with the virtue of responsive obedience discussed above. These five dimensions can serve as an assessment rubric for learning rather than as a mere list of skills taught without any measure.

Against the algorithmic reactivity that rewards instantaneous and emotional response, responsive obedience can be trained through a pedagogy of pause-before-response: habituating learners to refrain from instant comment or reaction, and providing structured space for reflection before the forum responds to the issue at hand. The discipline of James 1:19 is thereby translated into a concrete habit trainable from an early age, rather than left as an abstract moral counsel. Three levels of this practice must be distinguished so that they do not collapse into a single generic exhortation. As a personal spiritual discipline, pause-before-response means the habit of brief prayer or contemplation before replying to a message that provokes emotion. As Christian character formation, it means the long-term internalization of the disposition of James 1:19 through repetition rather than a momentary rule. As a planned Christian education instructional strategy, it is implemented through concrete classroom activity: learners are given an issue or a social media post that provokes a reaction, allotted a structured pause (for instance, writing three reflective questions before being permitted to respond), and only then is the forum opened for response. Its learning objective is to habituate pause as the standard first step before responding; the educator's role is to guide the process of pause and reflective questioning; and the observable learning indicator is a decrease in the

proportion of impulsive responses and an increase in the quality of the reflective questions learners write before responding.

These four practices, rhythms of silence, intergenerational accompaniment, theological digital literacy, and pause before response, are not discrete techniques but a single coherent pedagogy of listening, one that can be integrated into the formal Christian education curriculum, family life, and congregational life alike. Herein lies the principal practical contribution of this study: the demonstration that a theology of listening rooted in the text can be translated into concrete educational praxis, with observable indicators of change across four dimensions: *attentiveness* (the duration and quality of attention without distraction), *relational listening* (the quality of reflective intergenerational conversation), *theological discernment* (accuracy in weighing content according to the five dimensions of theological digital literacy), and *responsive action* (the proportion of reflective as against impulsive responses). This study treats these four indicators as operational measures of success in subsequent empirical research.

Conclusion

The Hebrew root *shama* runs from the *Shema Yisrael* command in Deuteronomy 6:4–9 to Solomon's request for a *lev shomea* in 1 Kings 3:9, showing that the two texts share a coherent theology of listening, not passive auditory reception but a disposition of the heart that obeys and is handed on across generations. This philological and theological trace was extended through a constellation of other canonical texts: Eli's formation of Samuel, the contrast between Martha and Mary, Jesus' parabolic method, and the ethic of James, before being translated into four Christian educational values (patience, relational humility, discernment, and responsive obedience) and four pedagogical practices that directly oppose the pathologies of digital distraction confronting Generation Z and Alpha.

This study's principal findings can be stated explicitly in two propositions. First, exegetically: *shama* within the Hebrew-Christian canon is not a neutral category but a theological one that consistently binds hearing to obedience, and this pattern holds coherently across canonical genres. Second, pedagogically: this theology of listening can be transformed into an integrated conceptual framework of four values and four practices for Christian religious education. The epistemic status of that framework must be stated honestly: the “pedagogy of listening” proposed here is a conceptual framework generated by theological and textual construction, not an instructional model that has been empirically validated, and neither is it merely a collection of loose practices without theoretical foundation. It stands between the two: a theoretical proposition ready to be tested. The principal contribution of this study is to show that a Christian response to the crisis of digital distraction need not stop at borrowing a generic formation framework but can—and should—be rooted in precise textual exegesis and explicit dialogue with the tradition of practice-based Christian character education. *Lev shomea* is not merely a poetic phrase but the culmination of a theology of listening initiated as early as the Torah and resonating throughout the canon.

This study is limited to textual and conceptual work and deliberately does not pursue a field research design, as explained in the method section. Further research is recommended to take two sequential steps rather than proceeding directly to testing an application: first, developing instruments and indicators of a pedagogy of listening on the basis of the four dimensions proposed here (attentiveness, relational listening, theological discernment, and

responsive action), together with their assessment rubrics; and second, only then testing those instruments empirically in Christian education learning at school, within Christian families, or in church communities. Further research might also extend the textual constellation to other wisdom traditions within Scripture not treated here.

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Credit authorship contribution

Andri Budiman: Conceptualization, investigation, writing original draft. The author confirms that this work is entirely his own, has reviewed the article, approved the final version for submission and publication, and takes full responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

AI disclosure

The author states that he used AI tools to refine existing drafts, identify relevant references, and generate suggestions for discussion points. AI assistance was restricted to testing and expanding upon ideas initially proposed by the author. The final manuscript reflects the author's collective deliberation and remains fully attributable to him.

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