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ABSTRACT

PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT IN THE BAPTISMAL PROCESS
AT FLORIDA HOSPITAL SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST
CHURCH

by

Gregory J. Creek

Adviser: Raymond Andrew McDonald

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Professional Dissertation

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT IN THE BAPTISMAL PROCESS AT FLORIDA
HOSPITAL SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

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Date completed: May 2021

Problem

Baptism, one of the few spiritual milestones in the life of a young person, is not experienced at Florida Hospital Church with the intentional inclusion of parents, a group that has a greater spiritual influence for their children than any other person.

Method

To help engage parents in the process, a baptismal preparation program was developed that provided training and resources for parents who then prepared their children for baptism. The program consisted of a session with parents, children, and the pastor; two sessions with parents and the pastor; and four sessions done by parents in the

home with their children. The program was intended to be done over a period of three weeks.

Results

Over a period of a year, three different groups met. They were comprised of 12 family units totaling 16 children. Based on the results of initial and final assessments, parents were more engaged in the spiritual development of their children and felt more positive about their own faith walk as a result of going through the program. Additionally, families reported a stronger faith walk, higher satisfaction with family worship, increased dialogue in spiritual topics outside of family worship, and a perceived increase in Bible knowledge, doctrinal knowledge, and prayer.

Conclusion

Parental engagement in the baptismal process grows the spiritual life of both parents and children. In a culture where young people are walking away from their faith due to a lack of familial engagement, this program could be used to continue the faith dialogue with parents, which studies indicate is a key factor in faith retention for young people. It is recommended that Florida Hospital Church use this program as the primary means for baptismal preparation for young people.

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT IN THE BAPTISMAL PROCESS
AT FLORIDA HOSPITAL SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST
CHURCH

A Professional Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
Gregory J. Creek

May 2021

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DEDICATION

To Gina—my light and my love.

To Gideon—my sweet boy and cool dude.

I love you both to the moon and back.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FHC	Florida Hospital Church
MTD	Moralistic Therapeutic Deism
NSYR	National Survey of Youth and Religion

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In an age where many parents hire coaches to help their children achieve in sports, music, academics, or life, the development of faith has become another element where parents rely on professionals to coach their children. For many years this seemed like a tremendous idea. Who better to teach than those who have specialized training in theology, hermeneutics, and apologetics? Faith formation for the majority of youth in North America has largely been done in church youth groups. Recent research conducted by Barna and Kinnaman (2014) has started painting a picture that having these professionals lead the way is not having the effect that was once promised. “The de-churched (those who have been churched in the past but are currently on hiatus) are the fastest growing segment, presently one-third of the population” (Barna & Kinnaman, 2014, p. 7). Kendra Creasy Dean (2010) states very pointedly, “Parents matter most in shaping the religious lives of their children” (p. 112). The system currently employed in the majority of churches in North America keeps parents, children, and youth groups separate. Barna and Kinnaman posit that as these young adults grow up with a nonexistent faith, their children will likely avoid church in adulthood.

This chapter seeks to lay the foundation that parental engagement in the spiritual lives of their children should be of utmost importance. It will lay out the ministry context

for a real-life laboratory where this notion will be cultivated. It will give the framework for the project along with a definition of terms and a summary.

Description of the Ministry Context

Florida Hospital Church (FHC), founded in 1926, has a membership of 1,015 with an average attendance of roughly 800. The church has a Russian-language Sabbath school and the second service is translated into Russian. In addition, large contingents of Portuguese and Spanish speakers attend. The church has balanced age and gender demographics, which reflects the diversity of the city of Orlando. The 2010 census for the city of Orlando lists the population at 238,300. Of that number, 21% are under the age of 18. Ethnically, 57% report as Caucasian alone, 28% as African American, 25% as Hispanic or Latino, and a small percentage of several others.

Approximately 111 families with unbaptized children between the ages of 12 and 18 are currently affiliated with FHC. As the Youth and Young Adult Pastor, my primary responsibility is working with those aged 12–35, but for 18 and older I serve as an advisor and am less involved.

In the central Florida Seventh-day Adventist community, FHC is seen as a progressive and creative church. While there are youth pastors at churches in the central Florida community, the closest Seventh-day Adventist churches to FHC do not have youth pastors on staff. Additionally, FHC is a constituent of a pre-kindergarten through eighth-grade school, Orlando Junior Academy. These factors contribute to the higher numbers of elementary-school children in attendance at FHC than at the next two closest Adventist churches, one mile north and one mile south.

The senior pastor of FHC has been in that position for three decades. The implementation of a project does not happen in a vacuum, and thus the culture of the church and the support of leadership were directly tied to the success of the project. Through his tenure, he has positioned himself as one who is curious and always willing to explore and experiment. This culture made the creation and implementation of this project possible.

Statement of the Problem

The National Survey of Youth and Religion (NSYR) and research conducted by Fuller Youth Institute note a lack of interaction between parents and children in matters of faith (Powell & Clark, 2011, pp. 69-92; Smith & Denton, 2005, pp. 54-57, 267). It is suggested this lack of involvement atrophies the spiritual life of both parents and adolescents. This research indicates those who stay in the church as they mature had a significant contribution from their parents or legal guardians in faith formation.

In the Seventh-day Adventist Church, due to its large parochial school and church network, one might have the impression that faith formation is a responsibility of the clergy, not necessarily the parents. While this is only anecdotally suggested, it is a mindset shared by many Seventh-day Adventist pastors. What also gives this idea credence is the baptism practices mandated by the Church Manual, which, until 2010, stated that only pastors could prepare individuals for baptism (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005, 2010). While the wording has changed to allow someone other than a pastor to conduct baptismal preparation, the culture of the pastor doing this work has been enmeshed for decades and remains.

Parents at FHC have not been an intentional part of the process of preparing their adolescents for baptism, one of the major spiritual milestones, as noted by the staff of FHC. The lack of empowerment and training from the pastoral staff inhibited parents from being a part of the process.

Statement of the Task

The task of the intervention was to develop, implement, and evaluate a training program for parents to teach their children the basics of Christianity in preparation for baptism and continue the faith formation journey with their children after baptism at FHC. The intervention sought, either to create a starting point for parent/child communication in regards to spiritual matters, or to give parents additional tools to continue spiritual conversations they were already having. While baptism preparation was the catalyst for this intervention, the purpose of the intervention was to foster an environment of continued spiritual engagement between parent and child that would hopefully extend beyond baptism.

Delimitations of the Project

This project was limited to English-speaking FHC attendees with children between the ages of eight and 18 who had expressed a desire for baptism. Baptism at FHC is taught as a step of “going public” with one’s belief in Jesus Christ as Savior and initiates one into the universal body of Christ. In addition, candidates are taught the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, and those wishing to be members are, subsequent to baptism, voted into denominational membership. This project covered only the first step.

Description of the Project Process

The project process included a reflection on two key Old Testament passages, a review of current literature, the development and implementation of the project, and an evaluation of the project.

Theological Reflection

The *Shema*, a section of scripture found in Deuteronomy 6:4–9, is a prominent passage in Jewish culture. It became a prayer daily recited by Jews and holds utmost importance even to this day (Merrill, 1994, p. 163). In the New Testament, Jesus, in response to a question about which are the greatest commandments, quotes the *Shema* and commands people to love God, love others, and love self (Mark 12:28–31). In the Deuteronomy passage, a command is given to parents to impress the truths of God upon their children. The command also includes several examples of how parents can go about teaching their children. The reflection sought to determine whether parent-led faith formation was the plan instilled from early on in the Judeo-Christian narrative and whether that still applies to the current culture.

Review of Literature

Current literature written in the last 10 years was reviewed, including research on faith formation, familial relationships, and baptism/catechism practices. During the few years of this project, much changed in regards to parent-led faith formation. What was once a proverbial desert started to bloom, with more and more books being published centering on parental engagement in faith formation. Attention was first given to understanding the cultural and sociological shift in faith formation from home to church and how that change has affected both the church and the home. The review also

explored potential solutions taken from the literature specific to both church and home. It closed with a brief exploration of baptism, both in the Christian world and specific to Adventism.

Creation of the Intervention

While several different avenues could have been explored, it was decided to have the parental engagement focused around the baptismal process. Part of this was out of necessity, as a portion of my time centered around baptismal preparation studies. Through the course of study, it became apparent that a concrete and tangible plan or system would need to be implemented due to the fact that parents would be leading the children through the baptismal process. The research showed that a majority of parents feel awkward and out of place in the faith development of their children. The intervention and supporting documents needed to be clear and written with directions to help assuage a potential lack of confidence for the participants in this study. The intervention also required the approval of FHC leadership, as I did not have the final say in whether or not it could be implemented in the local setting.

Implementation of the Intervention

The implementation of the program had three parts: (a) a meeting with all the program participants facilitated by the pastor; (b) two parental training sessions conducted by the pastor; and (c) parent-led instruction sessions in each home with their individual children. The program consisted of three meetings, one in the spring, and two in the fall. The three meetings happened weekly unless interrupted by a holiday or a scheduling conflict.

The program began with a group meeting conducted by the pastor and attended by both parents and children. The purpose was to go through the Baptismal Primer used by FHC, which leadership requested to continue using as part of the intervention. At this meeting, the parents received additional instruction separate from their children, along with resources to lead four different conversations at home. The expectation was that the parents would have two conversations per week. After one week, the parents and pastor reconvened to debrief the two conversations the parents and children had. The pastor then discussed the upcoming two conversations with the parents. After another week, the parents and pastor reconvened again to debrief the conversations the parents had with their children. After completing the four conversations, the parents created spiritual growth plans for their children and worked individually with the pastor to determine baptismal dates for their children.

Evaluation of the Intervention

The purpose of the intervention was to increase parent-child engagement in spiritual matters. The effectiveness of this program was evaluated primarily by the responses from the initial and final assessment, which was used to understand the spiritual practices of the families. It was given to the parents at the beginning of the first session and again at the conclusion of the final parent meeting. The challenge with a spiritual assessment being handled by the pastor of the parishioners was the potential for those parishioners to feel judged if they were honest. To help mitigate this, the assessment was anonymous. It was both objective and subjective. The objective questions were multiple choice and not aligned in a systematic way. For example, the responses to a question about how often family worship happened were not in order of most frequent

to least frequent, but randomized to allow people to pick where they were instead of where they felt they should be, from either internal or external pressure.

While the assessment was the primary means of evaluation, special attention was given to two other areas, the first being the percentage of families who completed the intervention. It was possible that those who had started with the intervention might not want to finish. While they might continue spiritual engagement in their own way, it could not be tracked. Completion of the program meant that parents had one general session with their child and pastor, two sessions with the pastor, and four sessions in their home, then potentially developed a spiritual growth plan for their child. The second area of attention was the feasibility of the intervention to be the primary means of baptismal preparation for FHC beyond the scope of this project.

Definition of Terms

Baptism is found in every Christian denomination in some capacity. It is outside the scope of this paper to analyze all of them, so special attention will be given to the method of baptism in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. Two elements were important for this project: the method of baptism and the qualifications needed for baptism. The following is taken from the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*:

Pastors must instruct candidates in the fundamental teachings and related practices of the Church so they will enter the Church on a sound spiritual basis. While there is no stated age for baptism, it is recommended that very young children who express a desire to be baptized should be encouraged and entered into an instruction program that may lead to baptism. . . . The Church believes in baptism by immersion and accepts into membership only those who have been baptized in this manner . . . Those who acknowledge their lost state as sinners, sincerely repent of their sins, and experience conversion may, after proper instruction, be accepted as candidates for baptism and Church membership. (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2015, pp. 43-44)

Discipleship, for the purposes of this study, is defined as an intentional, lifelong approach to developing and nurturing one's spiritual life. It is not an event, nor is it something that is ever completed (Hull, 2006, pp. 18-20).

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD) is a term coined in research by Christian Smith and Melinda Denton (2005, pp. 162–163). They codified MTD with the following points: a God exists who created and orders the world and wants its inhabitants to be nice to each other; the central goal of life is to be happy and feel good about oneself; God's help is only needed when there is a problem to be resolved; good people go to heaven when they die. The research of Smith and Denton is used in this paper, and their work influenced other authors used in this project as well.

Parent is a broad term used to define an individual who is responsible for the primary care of an individual. The term *parent*, in this study, references anyone who is responsible for the primary spiritual care of an individual. It may apply to a biological, adopted, or foster mother or father, grandparent, aunt, uncle, sibling, other family member, guardian, or friend.

Young adult is a broadly defined term. Most authors are in agreement about young adulthood starting at 18 years of age (Powell & Clark, 2011, p. 216). There is little agreement as to when that age ends. The context of this paper, which is in alignment with FHC definitions, is that a young adult is someone from age 18 through pre-parenthood.

Youth, like the previous term, is broadly defined. Most are in agreement that youth ends at 18 years of age (as noted by Powell and Clark previously) or perhaps at graduation from high school. There is no agreed-upon age when the "youth" period begins. As ministry to young people, especially in larger, urban settings, has become

more nuanced, many ministries rely on school grades to help define youth. For example, some churches might refer to “youth ministry” as ministry targeted to those in middle school and high school, while others might only have “youth” apply to high school students. At FHC, *youth* typically means students in Grades 6-12.

CHAPTER 2

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON THE PARENTS' ROLE IN FAITH FORMATION FROM DEUTERONOMY 6:4–9 AND PSALM 78:4–8

Introduction

The Bible is clear about the need for baptism and replete with commands to baptize and stories of baptism (Matt 3:13–17; 28:19–20; Acts 2:38; 8:12; 8:36–40; 16:29–34). Additionally, the Bible often speaks about parents instructing their children in the ways of the Lord (Deut 6:6–7; 11:19; Prov 1:8–9; 22:6; Eph 6:1–4). What guidance can the Bible provide about the role of parents in the baptismal process of their children? Do baptism and the instruction of children by parents overlap at all? This chapter explores the role of parents in the spiritual instruction and development of their children. But where does baptism fit in?

In this biblical-theological exploration, three assumptions were made. The first was that the Great Commission (Matt 28:18–20) was given to all believers. The commands to go, baptize, and teach, and ultimately, to make disciples, are not reserved for pastors or church workers. These commands are given to all believers. The second assumption was that *spiritual instruction*, *mentoring*, and *discipleship* are synonymous terms.

The third assumption was that baptism is an *event* that happens, based on a choice made by an individual, during the process of discipleship. Biblical baptism requires

someone to have knowledge of God and the salvation offered through Jesus, claim belief in Jesus, and choose to live a life seeking to follow his commands. While baptism is an event, it is one that happens as a result of a faith relationship that has some history and a future.

This project encompassed the parents' role in the baptismal event, which is only a portion of the discipleship process. The focus of this chapter is the biblical mandates for parents to be a part of the discipleship process, of which baptism is a part, with an examination of Deuteronomy 6:4–9 and Psalm 78:4-8. In order for parents to be a part of the baptismal process and event, they must be actively engaged in discipling their children before and after baptism.

You Shall Teach Them Diligently to Your Children

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deut 6:4–9, ESV)

Deuteronomy in Jewish and Christian Faith

Deuteronomy focuses on a crucial time in Israel's history. Israel had been wandering the desert for many years, and was set to soon enter the Promised Land. On the eve of such an exciting event, it was important to remember what, and more specifically *who*, had gotten them there in the first place. Deuteronomy is “a greatly expanded and more detailed rendition of the covenant text because of the anticipated changes that would be brought about by entrance into settlement in the land of promise”

(Merrill, 1994, p. 52). God wanted Israel to remember the agreement. Additionally, Moses, the traditional author of Deuteronomy, knew he would not be granted entrance into the Promised Land (Num 20:12); thus, Deuteronomy contains a set of farewell addresses. It was an opportunity for him to pass on decades' worth of wisdom and insight.

The importance of Deuteronomy continued for thousands of years and found additional emphasis in the New Testament and in the formation of Christianity. Jesus and the apostles quote it often (Matt 4:4, 7, 10; 5:21, 31; Mark 7:10; 10:19; 12:19; Luke 10:27; John 8:5, 17; Rom 10:8). When tempted by Satan in the wilderness, Jesus responded to each of the temptations by quoting from Deuteronomy. When asked which was the greatest commandment (Matt 22:34-38), Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:5, giving the passage much importance. As can be seen with these examples, the Old Testament, particularly Deuteronomy, was intended to continue to be a part of Christian life.

God's Instruction

The opening chapters of Deuteronomy recall how God previously engaged with Israel, specifically in relation to the covenant given at Horeb (also known as Mt. Sinai). God wanted the people "to hear my words so that they may learn to revere me as long as they live in the land and may teach them to their children" (Deut 4:10). As with the Horeb covenant, in Deuteronomy 6:4-9 God stated that the commands, decrees, and laws were to be learned by the parents (6:1), who were to then teach them to their children (6:7). The result of this would be long life.

This idea is repeated in Deuteronomy 6:20-25. Here, it serves as an anecdote from a future time in Israel's history. In the future version the children have forgotten, or

not been fully instructed in the history of their ancestors. These verses share that what was to be communicated was the oral history of the Israelites alongside the laws, decrees, and regulations.

Looking back at Deuteronomy 6:4, it opens with an imperative *Shema* (Hear!), a command, to listen or pay attention. As the passage continues in verse 5, we find the passage quoted by Jesus in his dialogue with the Pharisees. Jesus states that the entire law and prophets hang on this passage and on Leviticus 19:18. This command, as with previous portions, was given to parents. This command embodied a total, all-inclusive “love” of God with “heart,” “soul,” and “might.”

Many would say that *love* is a fickle word in today’s culture. It is generally used to refer to emotions, or feelings, particularly in pop culture and the media. Using marriage as an example, someone might tell their spouse they do not love them anymore. A tangible reason may not even exist. What is communicated is that the feeling simply is not there anymore. This has become normal in Western thought and culture. It was the exact opposite in Hebrew thought. In marriage it is a vow, but with God’s people it was a covenant, and the covenant was what fueled the love. Obedience to God was seen as love for or to God (Moran, 1963, pp. 81–82). The feeling might come and go, but the covenant was there eternally, and that bound each party to obedience. It is not unreasonable to assume that when the Israelites initially heard the command to love God, they heard “Obey God with all your heart, soul, might.”

In our modern vernacular, *heart* tends to refer to the emotional component of our actions, almost synonymous with *love*. A decision made with the “heart” might seem illogical or foolish. However, in Hebrew thought, it was the opposite of our current

understanding. The “heart” (*lēb*) was where rational decisions were made. The “soul” (*nepes*) “referred to the invisible part of the individual . . . including the will and sensibilities” (Wolff, 1974, pp. 46–51). As Merrill (1994) describes it, “might” is “the physical side with all its functions and capacities” (p. 164). This command to love or obey God was to be followed with every physical resource available (Bruckner, 2005, p. 4). Deuteronomy 6:5 is an all-encompassing command to practice thorough obedience.

Again, using a Hebrew interpretation of *heart*, we read that these commandments were to be on the minds of the parents (6:6). This is a powerful command for parents to take their own faith walk seriously. These commandments were to be on the parents’ minds with a fervent intentionality.

Much can be learned from this all-inclusive command for parents to obey God. A parent with a defunct love or obedience to God is not following through with the first portion of the command. As verse 7 opens with a command to teach their children these same commandments, it seems, a case can be made for the order. In English, the expression “putting the cart before the horse” is meant to convey that two things are out of order. A cart is not to be pushed by a horse, nor is the cart intended to pull the horse. Likewise, teaching a child something that is not known by the parent seems to be out of order. If the order given in Deuteronomy is intentional, parents lacking commitment in their own obedience to God will not be able to properly educate their children to fully follow God. It would stand to reason that those children would also lack intentionality in their obedience to God, as that is what they learned.

In verse 7, the focus shifts from the parents and their own love and obedience to communication of that love and obedience to their children. “You shall teach diligently”

is the *piel* of *šinan* (“to repeat”). In Hebrew, *piel* is the intensive active stem, meaning that the teaching was to be done with great fervor (Willoughby, 1977, p. 82). Some scholars have translated this intensified repetition as “teach diligently” (ESV), “repeat them again and again” (NLT), and “recite them” (NRSV). The last translation is particularly interesting, as it conveys the need for the parents to memorize the words of the Lord (v. 6) and not simply read them out of a book.

As the passage continues, it only intensifies its emphasis on the need for repetition or constant teaching of one’s children; it uses pairing (merisms) to do so. Krašovec (1983) defines a merism as “the art of expressing a totality by mentioning the parts, usually the two extremes, concerning a given idea, quality, or quantity” (p. 232). They were often used in Hebrew literature. We see one in the creation account of Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” It says that God created the heavens and the earth (two contrasting spaces) to show that he created everything, and that there was evening and morning (two contrasting times) to show he created everything in between. We also see merism used in Genesis 39:5 when Joseph was put in charge of “all that he [Potiphar] had, in *house* and *field*” (ESV, italics added). This was a figure of speech common to the Hebrews and to Moses, who authored the Pentateuch.

In the passage in Deuteronomy 6 there are actually two sets of merisms, or a double merism. Parents are instructed to talk of the commandments (a) “when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way” and (b) “when you lie down and when you rise” (Deut 6:7). The first was to symbolize inactivity and activity, and the second to encompass the totality of the day. This is noteworthy, as double merisms are used

sparingly in the Pentateuch. In addition to the context (Moses' farewell address) and the use of the *piel*, the multiple merisms serve to amplify the forcefulness of these verses.

For a variety of reasons, it is also important to notice the words chosen for the merisms. First, these were examples from everyday life. The instruction of children in the ways of the Lord did not require a trip to the tabernacle or temple. The intention was that *in everyday life* these children would gain instruction regarding God and his commandments. The people walked everywhere they went, so walking was an activity that happened all the time. A modern-day translation in Western thought/culture would no doubt be "when you sit at home or when you drive somewhere."

Second, no sanctuary services, sacrifices, or any other elements are mentioned as necessary in the instruction of children. This is not to say that instruction did not happen during those events, but that, based on this passage, the instruction was to happen with parents, not in the tabernacle or temple. The instruction was to repetitively happen in the context of the home.

It must also be noted, particularly in light of verse 8, that these commandments were not to be taught at the exclusion of the other elements of life. Spiritual instruction was to be at the forefront and connected to trades, chores, etc. This is important, as some interpret portions of this passage very literally when it was intended to be figurative. Moses is using figures of speech and metaphors to drive home the literal point of parents having the commands of God ever present in the life of their family. The message is clear that parents are to learn the commandments and practice love and obedience to God and then teach the commandments to their children. Those commandments should be at the forefront of all that is done, not at the exclusion of everything else. This is important, as

verses 8-9 present challenges in a modern-day setting if people are intended to carry these out exactly as instructed. It can be challenging at times to determine what should be literal and what should be figurative, but the following seeks to highlight the figurative possibilities of the passage.

In the opening verses of Philippians 3, Paul makes a case for what a great Jew he was, and by the standards of his time he was indeed a model Jew. Yet, we know that he also was a skilled tentmaker (Acts 18:3). Thus, his status as a prominent Jew was in conjunction with the fact that he had no doubt learned tent making when he was younger.

Moses, the author of Deuteronomy, and David, the author of another passage to be studied later, were both shepherds. They are revered in Jewish culture, but were still engaged in other affairs. Clearly, they understood the figurative nature of the passage.

It is also seen in the life of Jesus that the intention was not to exclude the learning of other things. Luke 2:52 tells us that “Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man” (ESV). This verse occurs after Jesus’ first trip to Jerusalem after he was 12. He went missing and was found in the house of his Father (Luke 2:49), a possible indication he was beginning to grasp or had already grasped his messianic identity.

Jesus is described in Matthew 13:55 as being the son of a builder. The crowds from the hometown of Jesus refer to him as a builder as well (Mark 6:3). These texts seem to clearly indicate Jesus had learned a trade. The examples of Jesus and Paul show the intention was never that people should only study the commandments, but that they should take a place of prominence over all other endeavors. This distinction will be important moving forward, for if this passage still has relevance in today’s world, how

does one navigate these commands to seemingly talk about nothing else and tie them to heads and hands? Unless one chooses to do this, are they not truly living out the commands of Deuteronomy 6:4–9?

It is in verse 8 that the practice of wearing a phylactery was most likely introduced to Jewish culture (Spence & Exell, 1975, p. 423). While this practice has become quite commonplace and seen as fulfilling a commandment based on the passage, some commentators feel this was not intended to be taken literally (Keck, 1998, p. 344). As evidence of the figurative nature of verse 8, Merrill (1994) comments on the impracticality of wearing these elements on a daily basis in a culture where manual labor was the norm. Added to that is the practice of wearing those items on special occasions in modern Judaism (Merrill, 1994, p. 168).

Whether intended to be figurative or literal, the passage stresses the importance of parents placing these commandments of God constantly at the forefront. But, for the purposes of practicality, a figurative interpretation is necessary. Following the commands in this passage literally, in a modern-day setting, would mean the only thing discussed would be the commandments of God. Families would spend the entirety of their day reading the Bible and talking about the Bible, but never putting into practice other portions of scripture like feeding the hungry, giving water to the thirsty, and caring for vulnerable people groups like widows and orphans (Matt 25, Deut 14, Isa 1). A practical application of this command to bind to the head and hand by today's standards would be to make the commands of God the home screen on a smartphone, tablet, or computer. These perhaps would serve as more prominent reminders than a phylactery tied to the hand or forehead.

Verse 9, similar to verse 8, is given literal and figurative interpretations by different parties. Postbiblical Jews place a *mezuzah* (which in Hebrew means “doorpost”) on their doorframes. It is a small metal receptacle at the right of the doorway containing Deuteronomy 6:4–9 and Deuteronomy 11:13–21 in 22 lines (Landsberger, 1960, pp. 149–150, 152).

Western culture has interpreted “gates” to mean whatever fence surrounds one’s home. However, this was not the case in ancient Israel. People did not have fences or borders like the ones that separate most suburban or city homes. The gates being referenced here were no doubt the city gates. It is with this element that a more figurative understanding of the passage makes a strong argument. As the verse progresses, the influence of God’s commandments grows wider and wider. It starts with the command for the parent or person of age to learn the commands. It then moves to a parent-child relationship, instructing parents to teach children. The passage then commands a nearly impossible task in the form of phylacteries, thus indicating a potential shift to a more figurative understanding. Again, the idea was for these commands to be at the forefront of thought and action. Expanding the circles would then lead to considering the totality of the home, and then of the community.

A literal interpretation would pose many problems, both in ancient times and today. A Jew in captivity would likely not have been able to place such an item on display at the city gates of a conquering people or possibly in their residences. Thus, if this were intended to be a literal command, it would have been nearly impossible for God’s people to follow. In today’s Western culture this would be impossible, as many residences do not have gates. Additionally, with large numbers of people living in

apartments in large cities, some would not even be able to post these things in their own doorways due to rules.

It must be noted there is nothing wrong with a literal application (when possible), as it may serve as a reminder and conversation starter, especially for younger children who find it difficult to grasp more abstract elements. However, a figurative interpretation seems to more closely align with the message being conveyed in other portions of the passage: that these commands were to be always on one's mind regardless of the setting.

Following the commands of Deuteronomy 6:4–9 starts with the parents making it part of their own life and then conveying it to their children, and going out from their home to influence the communities where they live. The appearance of this in Deuteronomy, a portion of the Old Testament, does not diminish the applicability to the New Testament and later. As has been shown, Jesus quoted often from Deuteronomy, the Gospel writers included it in their narratives, and other early church leaders referenced it as well. Deuteronomy 6:4–9 is just as important today as it was thousands of years ago.

We Will Not Hide Them From Their Children

We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might, and the wonders that he has done. He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to their children, that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments; and that they should not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a generation whose heart was not steadfast, whose spirit was not faithful to God. (Ps 78:4-8, ESV)

Background of Psalm 78

Psalm 78 is a historical psalm (Keck, 1998, p. 989). It must be understood that to current Western culture the phrase “historical psalm” connotes an objective account, but

this is not the case. Psalm 78 is a “creative retelling of Israel’s story” (Keck, 1998, p. 989). Thus it serves as a reminder of the notable points, both good and bad, in Israel’s history.

Another aspect where many scholars agree is the use of this psalm in the liturgy of ancient Israel (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991, p. 680; Spence & Exell, 1975, p. 124). This is of special importance for the project at hand, as this was not a psalm tucked away in the recesses of collection. This was a psalm most likely recounted during an annual festival (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991, p. 680). On at least a yearly basis, the Israelites would gather to hear these words and the charge to teach their children the mighty acts of God and his laws so that all future generations of Israel would set their hope in God.

Dating many of the psalms is a challenging endeavor, and Psalm 78 is no exception. The dating of the psalm is important for the purposes of this paper, as an early dating once again makes a strong case for organized religion and home working together to teach children the commandments of God. The dates for authorship range anywhere from “the time of David to the post-exilic era” (Keck, 1998, p. 990). A post-exilic time frame completely removes the parent-child discipleship relationship from being connected to the original temple built by Solomon. This alone does not make or break the importance of this passage. However, a Davidic or Solomonic time frame adds hundreds of years to the history of the passage in the culture of Israel and firmly engrains it into thought and culture. The New Testament’s predilection for Deuteronomy, particularly the previous passage studied, intertwines these two, as the message is much the same. The command of the Psalm 78 passage for parents to educate their children, heard in the liturgy regularly, would have had a strong connection to Deuteronomy 6:4–9.

A strong case can be made for a dating during the time of David and Solomon, solidifying that tie even more. First, the psalm's superscript itself states Asaph as the author, and Asaph was a temple musician during the time of David and Solomon (1 Chr 6:39; 15:17; 16:5, 7; 25:2; 2 Chr 29:30). Second, the language of the psalm seems to indicate a timing applicable to David or Solomon. While some feel that the rejection of the tribe of Ephraim in verse 67 applies to the destruction of the Northern Kingdom in 722 BCE (Keck, 1998, p. 990), others make a case for an earlier episode in Ephraim's history. "Ephraim' in verse 9 probably refers, not to the tribe, but to the Northern Kingdom (Israel) that had split from Judah and Benjamin when Rehoboam became king (1 Kings 12)" (Wiersbe, 2004, p. 253). Psalm 78:9–11 describes a group of people, Ephraim, that had forgotten what the Lord had done and refused to keep his covenant. At this point in Israel's history, the defection of one of the tribes would have had incredible significance. The commands in verses 4–8 were intended to keep further defections from happening. Third, the history of Israel ends abruptly in verse 72 at the time of David, and "(apparent) mention of the temple in verse 69 indicate that Solomon's reign was begun" (Spence & Exell, 1975, p. 123). These factors combined make a strong case for Asaph as the author and a date during the Davidic-Solomonic timeline. Psalm 78 encapsulates the message of Deuteronomy 6:4–9 in the liturgical history of Israel dating back to the time of Solomon, adding the importance and value of the message for parents to educate their children in the ways of the Lord.

Exposition of the Passage

Verse 4 is not easy to translate. The phrase "their children" in English indicates the children are of no relation to the author. But going back to verse 3b we see the phrase

“that our fathers have told us.” Thus “their children” are the children of “our fathers,” the psalmist’s own generation. While this may seem strange, it must be remembered this is a psalm, a poem. If it was commissioned for use in the liturgy, meter, rhyme, and other elements would have played a role in the wording. Regardless of the poetic elements used, Asaph seems to clearly understand and take responsibility for the need to teach their own generation of children. This was not viewed as a command for the next generation to follow because the current generation had failed or because Asaph interpreted his generation as being the generation of children, thereby releasing his generation from passing it on to the next generation.

Just as in Deuteronomy, in order for parents to convey these stories of deeds, might, and wonder to their children, the parents must know these stories themselves. Written materials were not common in ancient Israel, so these stories were all told through the oral tradition. Telling them to the coming generation meant the parents needed to know the stories well enough to teach them.

“Testimony” and “Law” are used interchangeably in verse 5, as in Psalm 19:7, and they both refer to the Torah (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991, p. 681). However, *torah* is the word being translated, and “law” is too narrow of definition in Hebrew culture, as it can also be translated as “direction” or “instruction” (Brown, Driver, & Briggs, 1977, p. 435). It was not simply a list of rules: it was a manual for how to live life, a collection of human and divine wisdom that told the story of humanity (Keil & Delitzsch, 1996, p. 523).

Of special importance to the study at hand is the second portion of verse 5. God commanded multiple times that parents teach their children his laws (Exod 12:26–27;

13:8, 14-15; Deut 4:9; 6:7; 12:19; 32:46 are just a few examples), but none of these was probably more well-known than Deuteronomy 6:7, as it was part of a passage of utmost importance for the Jewish faith (Willoughby, 1977, p. 77). Again, as the psalm was most likely used in a liturgical service, this is a great example of the organized religion of the day emphasizing and adding value to the role of parents to transmit these truths to their children.

Making clear the need for each generation to perpetuate the teaching is verse 6. This was not a charge given to a specific generation, but one that needed to be followed by each subsequent generation to then teach their children (Keck, 1998, p. 990). The covenant requirements were to be continued through the generations, and by following them, each generation would also reap the benefits.

The transmission of the teaching was what caused future generations to set their hope in God (v. 7). This is a challenging concept in today's culture, as "laws" or "commands" are typically seen as things that take away freedom or joy. Yet here we see that the transmission of the law would cause future generations to place their hope in God and also allow for the remembrance of his works and lead to a keeping of his commandments.

Verse 8, however, might seem to contradict the entire case made so far for the transmission of God's law and love from one generation to the next: "that they should not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation." It is unknown whether "fathers" refers to the actual parents of the current generation or their ancestors.

Regardless, it challenges the notion that the transmission of these tenets means alignment

with God, as the previous generation or generations passed these truths down but failed to follow them.

The closing portions of verse 8 seem to give a hint as to why the previous generation failed to remain faithful to God. The author describes them with the words “stubborn,” “rebellious,” “heart not steadfast,” and “spirit not faithful to God.” A simple transmission of these truths is possible without taking them to heart. What is seemingly conveyed in verse 8 is a group of people who taught the words but did not live them. Jesus, responding to a woman blessing his mother, said, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it” (Luke 11:28, ESV). It is possible to hear and even to recount the word of God without obeying it. Psalm 78, particularly the later portions that detail the apostasy of the tribe of Ephraim, enhances the message of Deuteronomy 6:4–9, as Ephraim is a stark example of not taking the words to heart and simply transmitting them.

What is being advocated for is a generation that will learn the *torah*, the teaching/instruction/law, follow it, and pass it on to their children. This is similar to the passage in Deuteronomy. The law was to influence every facet of life. Having it at the forefront of all decisions ensured that not only the older generation would follow God, but the following generation as well.

Summary

By looking at Deuteronomy 6:4–9 and Psalm 78:4–8, this chapter sought to show that God intended the transmission of his instruction and word from one generation to the next to happen primarily through parental influence and instruction. In these passages, it is clear that God’s intent is for parents to transmit this information to their children,

through word and action, thereby raising another generation of people who follow God. The discipling process happens before baptism and ceases only when the person ceases. Parents are called by God to be actively engaged in the spiritual instruction of children, with the natural progression leading to baptism and continuing after it has happened. To remove parents from the baptismal process would be an affront to what God has called parents to do.

The passages chosen for this chapter are two of the more prominent ones; further research would no doubt reveal a much wider basis for the premise that God wants parents to disciple their children. More research could also be done to determine if any biblical specifics or principles exist to give parents more tools and resources to accomplish the task of discipling their children.

As our culture today becomes more and more specialized in areas including youth ministry, the temptation exists to allow youth pastors, youth workers, or churches to spiritually raise children. These passages indicate we must fight the trends, stay true to God's word, and help parents to be the primary spiritual instructors in the lives of their children.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW ON FAITH FORMATION IN THE CHURCH AND HOME

Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, faith formation of children was intended to happen in the home from a biblical perspective. As will be seen, this is not the current majority position. The following literature review has three major sections. The first explores the current majority method: primary faith formation in the church. A brief exploration of how this came into existence will start the section, followed by ways parents and churches perpetuate this method. The second section explores an approach growing in momentum: primary faith formation in the home. It looks at what parents and churches are doing to shift faith formation back to the home. The third section deals specifically with baptism and parents' role in the process, both in Christianity at large and specifically in Adventism.

Section 1: Faith Formation in the Church

The Industrial Revolution sparked a phenomenal change in the United States. Up to this point, the country was primarily agrarian. Epstein (2010) noted that “young people worked side by side with adults as soon as they were able” (p. 23). As more and more people moved to the cities for factory jobs, this ceased to be the case. Dean (2010) wrote that legislation was drafted to forbid children from working in factory jobs to ensure

work for older individuals (pp. 8–9). While this may have been a concern for some, the deplorable conditions in which children were working created public outcry that ultimately led to the change (“Child Labor in U.S. History,” n.d.).

With child labor laws firmly in place, it created a vacuum of adults for this group of young people now referred to adolescents. As McKinney (2013) noted, they were essentially a group that were not children anymore, but could not provide for themselves with a job (pp. 84–85). This resulted in profound sociological changes that have continued into today. Root and Dean (2011) noted that today’s adolescents have less adult contact than any generation in human history (p. 72). Parker (2010) concluded that this isolation resulted in the creation of a separate subculture in society (p. 7). While adolescents still spend a large majority of time with their own peer group, recent research by Boushey (2007) found that mothers and fathers were spending more time with their children (p. 2). Time diaries found that mothers spent five more hours parenting and fathers spent four more hours parenting in 2007 than they did in 1985.

At face value, this seems like a great thing, but closer examination reveals something different in regard to faith formation. Venne (2007), speaking about faith development, noted that “each era, until the mid-twentieth century, was characterized by family involvement” (p. 3) but “faith development was no longer an important part of family life” (p. 24). Holmen (2010) relayed that western culture is a “land of plenty where there is plenty to do, have, be and achieve, we have gotten caught up doing more, having more, being more and achieving more and as a result we have forgotten God” (p. 33). Many feel this does not adequately state the situation and believe that God has not been forgotten, but purposefully ignored, due to the influence of popular culture.

Dollahite, Layton, Bahr, Walker, and Thatcher (2009) wrote that “parental requests for children to give up valued time, activities, possessions, and status for religious reasons runs contrary to what the popular culture expects of parents” (p. 6).

Children and families are absent from church and refraining from conversations about faith at home (this will be discussed more in the next section), which has led to challenging realities. Smith and Denton (2005) realized that most youth lacked the vocabulary to discuss matters of faith and that the interviews they conducted were the first time an adult had engaged them in a faith conversation (p. 133). Kinnaman (2011) reminded his readers that “a person sets his or her moral and spiritual foundations early in life, usually before age thirteen” (p. 31). Thus, God is truly missing from the formational times in the lives of young people.

Holmen (2010) stated, “What happens in the home is more influential than what happens at the church” (p. 33). What is happening in the home is what Smith and Denton (2005) labeled Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD). This viewpoint holds that people should be good, kind, and nice to each other, but that they should also be happy and feel good about themselves. If those two come into conflict, feeling good about oneself is of primary importance. It is also believed that God created the world but does not meddle much, unless needed. The authors feel this creates the opportunity for God to be a genie of sorts, granting wishes as needed (Smith & Denton, 2005, pp. 163–165). And this plays well into popular culture. Dean (2010) noted, “Youth and parents are correct if they think that MTD will outfit them better for success in American society than Christianity will” (p. 191).

Additionally, when God is not part of daily life, teenagers have trouble making a connection to God and are thereby unable to imagine identity in Christ (Dean, 2010, p. 142). This is especially troubling because adolescence is a time of major uncertainty. In a study by Kroger, Martinussen, and Marcia (2010), they found adolescence, and even young adulthood, to be a time of major identity change (p. 696). The change, according to Smith and Denton (2005), is from Christianity to MTD, but the reality is, MTD is labeled as Christianity. The problem is that MTD masquerading as Christianity became meaningless because it was no longer helping students wrestle with the real questions of life. Thus, is seen the current trend noted and researched by many, including Kinnaman (2011), of millions of adults leaving the church as they exit their teens (p. 19).

Contributing Problems in the Home and Church

The following sections highlight the biggest problems faced by the home and church when it comes to faith formation happening in the home. These problems most likely account for the current system where faith formation is the responsibility of the church. They are not highlighted to cast blame, but to be able to better identify solutions.

Home Problem 1: Lack of Parental Experience in Matters of Faith

As was briefly discussed in the previous section, many adolescents are not attending church, yet still claiming membership until their late teens and early twenties, when they leave the church altogether. They are receiving their faith formation at home, which has led to MTD. Dean (2010) stated, “The religiosity of American teenagers must be read primarily as a reflection of their parents’ religious devotion (or lack thereof)” (p. 3). She later referred to it as a lackadaisical faith and stated that the onus of the apathy

rests with parents. This seems like a harsh assessment when one considers the conversations parents are having regarding their children's faith formation. Barnhill (2004) shared that parents are intimidated by the Bible and do not know how to help their kids (p. 4). Amidei (2013) attributed this to a shortcoming in the parents' own depth of religious education and faith formation (p. 11). Caldwell (2013) added that they are simply "not comfortable or at home with . . . the Bible" (p. 2). Beagles (2012) asserted that parents need to be disciplined and equipped (p. 9).

For many parents, it is the recognition of these shortcomings that deters them from even trying. Barna (2005) found that most parents do not believe they are doing a good job with the spiritual development of their children (p. 35). As Venne (2007) noted, parents felt more unsure about their beliefs and turned over responsibility of faith development to professionals (p. 27). Baucham (2007) noted that parents want their children to succeed and feel faith formation can best be handled by the church (p. 95). Dean (2011), despite her harsh criticism of the parents' role, acknowledged the inadequacy felt by parents that led them to turn over spiritual instruction to the church staff (p. 117).

The church is not only unsupportive, but at times, downright combative toward parents. Ken Hemphill (2005), a strategist for the Southern Baptist Convention, said, "The greatest need of our day is that we instill in the parents and leaders of our teenagers a passion for the kingdom of God" (p. 15). He later stated that the greatest threat to the kingdom is for children to have the same level of commitment as their parents. Another church-published document by Merhaut (2013a) stated that even with all the good things happening at church, the reality is "that faith practices in the home are far from what they

could be” (p. 35). For a group of people already struggling with their own faith walk, these attacks do nothing but add fuel to the fire of doubt, uncertainty, and apathy.

However, Smith and Denton (2005) found that parents were the most important influence on their adolescents in regards to their religious and spiritual lives. This should be a signal to church leaders that they need to stop attacking and start equipping parents with the tools they need.

Home Problem 2: Parental Lack of Engagement With Children

As discussed earlier, adolescence is a tumultuous time for young people, especially today when this uncertainty is essentially expected by society at large. Earlier, the significant amount of time that adolescents spend on their own was discussed. While recent history has shown an increase in the number of hours parents spend with their children, Root and Dean (2011) noted that this still means parents spend 40% less time with their children than a generation ago (p. 72). Of note is the fact that faith is sometimes more easily attained if parents are not involved. Case (2011) cited research (Smith & Snell, 2009) showing that faith development apart from parents creates a new experience (p. 45). Often, as noted by Snailum (2012), this new experience is created in a peer context (p. 4), and Parker (2010) said this is due to adolescents seeking guidance from peers that is missing in the home (p. 60). Case noted that parental involvement could feel like an arranged marriage by parents trying to predetermine their child’s life. He continued with the realization that being born again happens more easily with new people in a new environment, but this newfound faith often fails to be sustained (Case, 2011, p. 45).

This flash-in-the-pan experience is sometimes more than most parents have experienced when they try their hand at faith formation. They relegate faith formation to the church (Parker, 2010, p. 6) because they have evidence of it at least working on the church side. Some students may never have parents who engage them in conversations of faith because the parents themselves are not believers. This often happens when students start attending a church due to their peers' influence. While churches should always have a system to help students who are being dropped off at church, Melheim (2012) boldly states that parents are being let off the hook and the youth worker doing the parents' job "is just plain stupid" (p. 22).

The reality is, "most parents miss out on the opportunity to talk about faith with their kids" (Powell & Clark, 2011, p. 117). Parker (2010) found that the "lack of communication with the family unit is a major contributor to students' inability to express the elementary ideals of their faith" (p. 56). Powell and Clark (2011) also noted that Christian parents avoid the challenging subjects with children, which are often the topics the students need most help with navigating (p. 118). This results in what Case (2011) likened to the handing down of old clothes that do not fit (p. 26). While it has been seen that parents play a major part in the faith formation of their children and many are not stepping up, the church has been incredibly complicit in preventing this from happening. It is to the church's role that the attention of this work will now turn.

Church Problem 1: Program-Focused Faith Formation

It can be easy to blame parents for their absence from the faith formation of children when one does not consider the role the church played in discouraging families from doing just that. Merhaut (2007b) asserted it is naïve to think parents will take the

lead in faith formation “when churches have for so long usurped their authority in that role” (p. 8). Doug Fields (1998), who wrote what many consider the how-to book for youth ministry, *Purpose-Driven Youth Ministry*, even acknowledged his own shortcomings in effective family ministry (pp. 251–252). This came from a youth pastor at one of the most prominent and largest Christian churches in North America, Saddleback Church. His tossing up of the hands seemed to signal that it was a topic too challenging and unrewarding to tackle. Adding to the complexity is the fact that most youth workers saw parents as the enemy. Fields (1998) cautioned youth workers against continuing this mentality (p. 252). Additionally, many youth workers did not recognize the need to disciple the parents who would then disciple students at home (Holmen, 2010, p. 40). When those conversations were approached, Holmen wrote that parents “often dug in their heels and said, ‘That’s what we pay you to do’” (p. 40). Youth workers, faced with opposition from parents, were further handicapped by a lack of resources to deal with ministering to the family. As Yaconelli (2006) recounted his early years as a youth minister, he stated that the expectation from parents was clear: “I was to find a way to get these kids involved in the church and form them in the Christian faith” (p. 49).

Kinnaman (2011) commented that it is much easier to put on events for large groups of kids than it is to mentor each student in a mature walk with God (p. 125). And that is where the majority of youth ministry has been for decades. Melheim (2012) noted that the biggest mistake churches made was trying to be program directors for kids instead of ministry encouragers to parents (p. 23). At the time, though, it was thought to be the best way to minister to young people, and the church held little back. Churches invested unprecedented amounts of resources toward young people (Ketcham, 2012, p.

1), and Root and Dean (2011) added that the youth workers themselves became more educated and specialized in the process (p. 64).

These programs had a strong entertainment focus, according to Root and Dean (2011), and Merhaut (2007b) found that when faced with all the other options available, many families skipped church programs for more entertaining options (p. 2). Larger churches, able to put on a better “show,” kept students for more of their high school years. Parsley (2012) posited that “the desire to be relevant has all too often led to an approach that favors style over substance” (p. 40). Melheim (2012), in a reference to scripture, noted that students have been physically present but their hearts and minds were far from God (p. 23). Programs are often measured with quantitative measures, so large numbers of physically present students mean success (Kinnaman, 2011, p. 208). Research found that when leaving high school, many left the church because these programs were not fostering sustainable or long-lasting faith (Ketcham, 2012, p. 2).

The theology present in the programs was wanting, which many feel has caused the mass exodus from the church. As was discussed earlier, MTD is becoming a more prevalent approach to God. While parents were blamed earlier, the fact is churches are not devoid of this thinking. Proponents of the prosperity gospel and those who practice what could be termed “cheap grace” take away the need for any type of sacrifice for the kingdom. As Dean (2010) pointed out, “as long as God demands little, teens are free to invest little; everyone is happy” (p. 177). The other extreme is what Powell and Clark (2011) refer to as the gospel of sin management (pp. 31–32). The gospel is boiled down to a series of right and wrong behaviors that individuals must try to either do or not do.

Kinnaman and Lyons (2007) pointed out that “spirituality that is merely focused on ‘dos and don’ts’ rings hollow” (p. 126).

Church Problem 2: Lack of Intergenerational Engagement

As more and more individuals leave the faith and the church in their late teens and early twenties, many feel that youth ministry in general has run its course. Scott Brown (2011), director of the National Center for Family-Integrated Churches, wrote that age segregation is harming young people and labeled modern youth ministry a “50 year failed experiment” (p. 135). Ken Walker (2011) noted that it was endorsed by R. C. Sproul, among others, to give credence to the failing of youth ministry (p. 15). The idea is that young people need to assimilate into the life of the church. But the reality, as noted by Fields (1998), is that “neither parents nor students want a totally integrated parent-teen youth ministry,” as youth ministry allows for “an autonomous church experience away from their parents,” particularly for middle school and high school students. As noted earlier, Fields’s book was the youth ministry manual for workers in the decade following. Due to pushback from parents and students, churches abandoned the concept of intergenerational experiences.

Commenting on the mass exodus of individuals from the church, Ketcham (2012) noted that churches face an integration problem, not a retention problem (p. 20). This is leading many, including Bradbury (2013), to “reevaluate the wisdom of holding separate worship services for youth” (p. 4). Johnston and Griffin (2012), current youth ministry leaders at Saddleback Church, realized that this “segregated approach to church isn’t the healthiest of models” (p. 1). In the little intergenerational interaction that is found, most students, according to Kinnaman (2011), find little appetite for dialogue and interaction,

leaving many young people to feel that they cannot discuss life's most pressing questions and doubts (p. 192).

Case (2011) noted that religion and its practices fit in the category of culture, which is why many young people seek to change it and many old people resist the change (p. 11). Case earlier made the point that the older generation, by denouncing the current culture as evil, maintains its outdated culture. He pointed out this does not mean this outdated culture is spiritual, just irrelevant, and when it is paired with God, Case concluded, you end up with “a God disconnected from the world” (p. 4). This war on culture adds to the divide already present between young people and older generations.

Kinnaman (2011) noted that those born in the 1982-2002 time period “have access to more knowledge than any other generation in human history but lack discernment for how to wisely apply that knowledge to their lives and world” (p. 192). When these young people struggle, it is because the Christian community failed to provide them with necessary tools. What these young people need is the wisdom of older adults to come alongside and help them make sense of the current world (Kinnaman, 2011, p. 141). Sometimes a targeted approach can help focus the conversation on topics where students are struggling. But this specific outreach to young people cannot come at the cost of having students engaged with the church at large. This must be a two-pronged approach.

Section 2: Faith Formation in the Home

Section one covered how primary faith formation transitioned to happening in the church and the problems with that approach. This section looks to the future and proposes

faith formation in the home and how to achieve that goal. It looks at solutions for both homes and churches.

Solutions for Parents to Move Faith Formation from Church Back to Home

There generally are no foolproof plans to solve problems of this magnitude. That said, the literature consulted was consistently in agreement that the following two solutions would significantly help with transitioning primary faith formation from the church to the home. The solutions for home are also dependent on the willingness of the church to facilitate this transition, making this a symbiotic endeavor for both parties.

Parent Solution 1: Deepen Their Own Faith

As discussed earlier, many parents are lacking knowledge in matters of faith. As Fairchild (2014) pointed out, “it is impossible to give away something you don’t have” (para. 7). Dean (2010) noted that highly devoted teens tend to have highly devoted parents. Parents engaging in their own formation will share that desire to learn with their children (Amidei, 2013, p. 32). In a study for *U.S. Catholic* magazine, O’Connell-Cahill (2007b) found that the 249 parent respondents consistently reported their own faith growing stronger as a result of raising kids in the faith (p. 12). Adolescents seeing their parents live a Christian lifestyle are, according to Schwartz (2006), more likely to “express a stronger belief in God . . . and participation in spiritual acts” (p. 11).

Holmen (2010) backed this with his assertion that “the home has always been intended by God to be the primary place where faith is lived, discussed and nurtured” (p. 30). Parsley (2012) also felt that “families are perfectly designed for discipleship” (p. 26). This does not mean that parents should cater to the whims of their children, but they

should allow them a space to be vocal in the spiritual experience. He noted that families do chores and have responsibilities, but consumers feel they are owed something, and cautioned families to avoid the trap of parents becoming gophers or content providers for their kids (Parsley, 2012, p. 37).

Merhaut (2007b) recounted an old Portuguese saying, “An ounce of mother is worth a pound of clergy” (p. 1). He continued with the assertion that there is no more powerful influence on faith formation than parents. Smith and Denton (2005) confirmed this with their research: if one wants to get a teen more involved and serious about their faith, the parents need to do the same (p. 267).

Parent Solution 2: Converse More

The editor of *National Catholic Reporter*, Rita Larivee (2008), in an opening for an issue focused on children’s faith formation, shared there is no simple answer for how to pass on faith to children. In an informal summary of the stories contained in that issue, she shared wisdom her mother had shared with her: “Always keep the lines of communication open and keep talking with your children” (Larivee, 2008, p. 2). Research is backing up her mother’s advice.

Conversations with children can be tough, and many parents struggle and teens resist when these conversations are initiated. Dollahite and Thatcher (2008) felt that based on the idea of adolescent autonomy prevalent in culture, parents would do well to employ a conversational style (p. 29). Powell and Clark (2011) noted that many times children feel like they are being interviewed, keeping them from engaging in the process (pp. 125–126). Allen (2012) noted that “doing errands, driving to the next activity,

completing chores and household projects together, and eating meals as a family provide opportunities for ordinary discussion and insight” (p. 201).

Despite the conversational approach, the potential exists for things to go really well or really poorly. Dollahite and Thatcher (2008) noted, “The potential exists for strong positive or negative emotion in both parent and child, for the parent-child relationship to be strengthened or weakened” (p. 1). Worth noting is that adolescents reported frustration when their parents talked too much, and parents acknowledged they had the tendency to talk too much, particularly about matters of faith. Joiner (2009) noted, “One of the most powerful things a parent can do is to learn to communicate in a style that values the relationship” (p. 59). Younts (2011) wrote an entire chapter aimed at getting parents to be better listeners (pp. 36-47). While not a cure-all, perhaps a conversational approach, with a mindset to slightly scale back parental talking, will help mitigate some of the frustrations.

Another piece that makes parents’ engagement in the faith conversation challenging is what was shared from Case’s (2011) work: parents see results when they are not involved (p. 45). But, as was noted, these results are often not long lasting. The idea is that the pastor/youth worker has a greater impact and converses about a wider variety of topics with children than they do with their parents. The reality, according to Gillespie, Donahue, Gane, and Boyatt (2004), is that students are not going to pastors or teachers with issues. The research shows that students are more willing to bring issues to their parents than to their pastors or teachers. And, 57% of these students interviewed “never or rarely” spoke to pastors about faith development (Gillespie et al., 2004, p. 264).

Research indicates parents have greater access to topics, including spiritual development, with their children than do pastors. Hopefully the reader has seen how parents building their own faith and conversing with children about that faith will in turn help their children's faith grow. But unless the church changes its approach, parents and pastors will be working against each other. The focus of the church is where this paper will now turn.

Solutions for the Church to Move Faith Formation From the Church to the Home

As has been seen, it can be a challenge to make parents the primary spiritual influence in the lives of their children. In fact, Amidei (2013) wondered if it is even worth it, citing a lack of actual study or evaluation for approaches that partner parents and churches (p. 12). Anthony (2012) noted that many pastors and parents give this lip service, but the problem is "how this actually works in our current culture and society" (p. 38). While the lack of research is problematic, the little research that is available speaks to positive outcomes for children's faith development when parents have a prominent role. Should this matter to churches? One would hope churches would be concerned about faith formation for their congregants, but if faith formation should happen at home, do churches just go about their business? Merhaut (2007b) boldly claimed, "Institutional Christianity will decline into insignificance if congregations do not find ways to work from the family back to the institute, rather than from the institution into the family" (p. 2) If he is correct in his assessment, churches must address the issue of a lack of resources available to families to assist in the faith formation of their children. Thankfully, recent trends point to family involvement (Venne, 2007, p. 3).

Family Makeup

Before continuing, the issue of defining a family was addressed in much of the literature. The family of today looks much different than the family of the previous decades. Families present in church might be comprised of a mother and father, same-sex parents, a mother or father and stepparent, a single mother, a single father, grandparents, or other family members like aunts/uncles raising the children. According to Kinnaman and Lyons (2007), a third of children born in the United States at that time were born to unmarried mothers (compared to 1 out of 20 in 1960) and in metropolitan areas it was estimated at two-thirds. One quarter of people born between 1965 and 1980 had experienced a divorce (Kinnaman & Lyons, 2007, p. 127). Parsley (2012) claimed this stunted the growth of this group (p. 116) and even contributed to a fear of commitment to a church family, because if church family was anything like real family, it would meet its demise (p. 53).

The good news is that family makeup challenges can be overcome. Gillespie et al. (2004) noted that how parents relate to children is more significant than the number of parents in the home (p. 256). This is similar to what Levine (2006) found, in that spending time with children in and of itself is not beneficial, but “time that is spent in healthy and satisfying interaction” is (pp. 215–216). Also, according to Dillen and Pollefeyt (2005), children of divorced parents are given more freedom to explore their own religious attitudes, possibly cementing them in faith at an earlier age (p. 21). Additionally, Lander and Issler (2010) noted that individuals from insecure backgrounds have success through involvement in the religious community as compensation (p. 3).

Merhaut (2007a) pointed out that church leaders are called to offer support to people regardless of family makeup (p. 8).

Church Solution 1: Provide Relational Support for Parents

As was discussed earlier, churches tend to rely on programs. But more important for young people, according to Parker (2010), are primary (parental) nurturing relationships to influence spiritual development (p. 30). Additionally important to young people, as they are learning biblical narratives, is how those narratives play out in daily relationships (Caldwell, 2013, p. 2). Throughout their work, Holmen and Merhaut have called for partnership between churches and parents, but when the emphasis becomes a program, it loses both parents and children. Merhaut (2007a), citing a study by the Search Institute and the YMCA, found that parents do not want programs but informal support from their congregations. While this finding must be acknowledged, perspective and caution should keep pastors from running from anything labeled “program.”

Merhaut (2007b) recounted the success of a parent partnership program at the Susan B. Anthony Elementary School in Sacramento, California. The school reduced annual suspensions from 140 students to 5 students over 1 year by creating a program essentially designed to foster relationship between parents and teachers. It not only reduced suspensions, but increased test scores as well. The program got teachers into the homes of the students, engaging with parents, and making them part of the educational process (Merhaut, 2007b, p. 1). While the parallels are not exactly the same, this example shows how the educational experience of students is improved when parents and teachers are working together. Based on the previous discussions, religious education would seem to fit this concept as well. But what must be noted is what the program called for:

building relationship between teachers and parents. The programs the authors are advocating for are ones that build relationship, not ones that make students passive consumers.

O’Connell-Cahill (2007a) wrote, “In the work of handing on the faith to our children, if we are lucky, our assistants are legion” (p. 4). Powell and Clark (2011) encouraged churches to create a 5:1 ratio of adult-to-student interaction by finding five people willing to be an influence in the life of each young person (pp. 89–90). A recent study (Desrosiers, Kelly, & Miller, 2011, p. 45) noted that peers have a significant contribution to the formation of religious identity. In addition to finding adults who are willing to journey with churches should create opportunities for the young people to engage each other in faith conversations. As discussed earlier, students are eager for deep, meaningful conversations. Churches can work to facilitate these relationships in their gatherings and encourage parents to do the same at home and include their children’s peers in the conversation.

Churches should also seek to equip parents with resources to foster conversation. If an age-based weekly gathering uses a curriculum that has a parent component, pass it along; if not, pass the entire lesson on to the parents (Joiner, 2010, p. 100). Powell and Clark (2011) also suggest using case studies as a way to dialogue about the complexities of the faith. Another option given by Holmen (2010) is to include questions about the sermon from that day so parents have something to discuss with the children on the ride home from church (p. 96).

Merhaut (2013a) posits “the future of any church passes by way of the family” (p. 29). If this is true, churches the world over should do all in their power to create healthy families.

Church Solution 2: Ministries That Facilitate Intergenerational Relationships

While the concept of age-segregated ministry has been looked upon in a rather unfavorable light up to this point, completely abandoning this model could potentially prove harmful. Root and Dean (2011) note students still require adults to help them “cast out the spirits of lesser gods that possess them” (p. 77). In larger churches, it can be easy for students to slip by unnoticed without some way to engage them. Steve Case’s book *Mission Lifeguard* (2013) is based entirely around the idea of seeking the students that have slipped by unnoticed. This can happen in a youth group setting as well as the church at large. Unfortunately, Bellamy, Sale, Min Qi, Springer, and Rath (2006) note there is little empirical evidence for what makes successful relationship building (p. 57). But Black (2008) has preliminary results indicating that relationships with non-parental adults contribute to ongoing participation (p. 64). Additionally, Smith and Denton (2005) found that young church attenders are more likely to have adults in their lives who give them encouragement and with whom they enjoy talking (p. 60). Creating opportunities for intergenerational relationship should be a primary task of youth group ministry.

As previously stated, churches tend to rely on programs, many times taking the form of a service. Ketcham (2012) points out that if adults provide a service for students, it trains them to become consumers: “The only role allotted youth is to be consumers of the services adults provide,” and when a better product comes out, the consumer leaves (p. 5). Powell and Clark (2011) note that student leaders tend to stick with their faith (p.

142). This does not mean one should create token positions for students. In research by Camino (2005), students wanted roles where they had meaningful parts and were respected by the adults (p. 75). Token positions simply will not suffice.

Caution must be exercised in the involvement of students in faith activities. Dean (2010) notes that “when churches focus on keeping young people active for Jesus, we may forget to teach them how to be present with Jesus” (p. 169). Lander and Issler (2010) add that these students must be engaged in relationships with mentors (p. 3). The prevailing thought is that, as a group desiring autonomy, students would not want to be under the thumb of an adult. However, Sullivan and Larson’s (2010) research found that successful intergenerational relationships revolved around a shared activity with clear hierarchical structure where students were in a subservient role (p. 117).

Whether it is cancelling weekend youth services, like Saddleback Church has done to encourage students to worship with their families and church at large (Johnston & Griffin, 2012), or planning retreats to boost engagement between age groups (Powell & Clark, 2011, p. 142), churches must work to boost intergenerational relationships if they intend to stop the massive glut of the young people departing.

Section 3: Baptism

Despite the significance of baptism to the overall project being undertaken, it has had little attention given to it. This is almost entirely due to the fact that little is written or undertaken regarding the parents’ role in the baptismal process. Additionally, many faiths practice baptism differently. In traditions where infant baptism is practiced, the parents’ role is supreme. Augustine of Hippo saw the parents as bestowing faith upon their child, and this viewpoint is still held (Bradshaw, 2006, p. 114). However, infant baptism

obviously does not deal with adolescents. The parents' role after infant baptism is faith formation through childhood, and culminates at confirmation in adolescence. Even through the confirmation process, parents generally do not play a primary part.

In traditions where believers' baptism is practiced, the individual is making the choice. Root and Dean (2011) assert that regardless of the baptism practiced, catechesis itself has been reduced to a method of assimilating children into the faith tradition and makes the process of confirmation or the believer's baptism an assent to knowledge as opposed to engagement in relationship with Jesus (p. 87). Kinnaman (2011) notes that even after confirmation, there is no meaningful expectation of a contribution by the recently confirmed to the growth of the community (p. 122). Alienated from mentors and trying to navigate the changing sea of life, these students wrestle to have their faith make sense. Case (2011) points out that when a commitment to Christ comes before one's identity is formed, or adolescence brings changes, these students need to learn how to be children of God with their new identity (p. 44). This reevaluation rarely happens.

The lack of reevaluation means a student is not rooted in their faith and, as a result, doubt enters the equation. Root and Dean (2011) point out that many feel doubt is a Trojan horse that will destroy one's faith and lead them away from God. They counter with the idea that doubt may not be a tumor but instead the organ of faith. The role of the confirmation leader then becomes to invite doubts to be shared, allowing opportunity for discussion and processing. The leader becomes a convincer and a co-doubter (Root & Dean, 2011, pp. 124, 194, 196). Oestreicher and Rubin (2009) share this viewpoint as well, encouraging parents and pastors to create an environment where doubt can happen without the student being judged; they point out that even Thomas, one of Jesus'

disciples, doubted (pp. 144–145). For a church seeking intergenerational interaction with adolescents, doubt is a readily accessible topic that would provide opportunities for dialogue and support.

Seventh-day Adventists practice believers' baptism. According to Case (2011), it is one of the few spiritual milestones for an adolescent (p. 45). In the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, baptism is only allowed if the candidate adheres to the specific beliefs of the denomination in addition to the basics of the Christian faith (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2010, pp. 44–46). Thus, when people choose to be baptized, they are also choosing admission into the Seventh-day Adventist Church, increasing the significance of the event. While this is not the official stance of the denomination, there are circles that equate baptism with salvation (Case, 2011, p. 43). This only serves to heighten the importance of the baptismal event, particularly for parents, and could be a potential reason why parents are not a part of the baptismal process.

As has been noted throughout this chapter, the Christian church at large took the responsibility for baptism away from parents, who, for the most part, seemed content with shifting that responsibility to the church. Until recently, the pastor's role as lead instructor in the baptismal process was mandated in the official working policies of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005, pp. 30-31). In 2010, the church released the 18th edition of the *Church Manual* and changed the wording to allow someone other than the pastor to complete the instruction (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2010, pp. 45-46). This mandate likely

had a bearing on the parents' role in the process, since until very recently, the church did not allow a parent to take the primary role of instruction.

Pastors, given the lead teaching role because of their vocation, were themselves flummoxed by the lack of resources available to instruct students. In conversations with a head elder for a small church in rural Wisconsin, a youth pastor at a large church in Lincoln, Nebraska, and a head pastor for a medium-sized church in central Texas, all expressed frustration with the materials they used. The small and large church used Troy Fitzgerald's (2002) ChristWise series for students who were 12-18 years old. Both commented that it was the best they had found, but expressed that it seemed dated. The third pastor used a young adult study and adapted it to work with high school students, as he was unhappy with the resources available for the 12-18 age bracket (personal communications, August 13, 2014; August 14, 2014; August 25, 2014).

Neither of the above sources have a parent component, nor do many on the shelves of the Adventist Book Center, one of the main distributors of Adventist materials. Steve Case (1996a, 1996b) wrote a baptismal guide that included a parent component; however, the pastor still functions as the lead instructor.

Summary

This literature review traced the change from adolescent faith formation happening in the home to happening in the church and explored some reasons as to why that happened and what keeps it there. This review also presented solutions for those seeking to move primary adolescent faith formation back to the home. Based on the current research, it seems there is no other place it should be happening. As was observed, this will not be an easy transition, but parents must reclaim their role as the

primary spiritual mentors, and churches must work to support them in this role, if all parties are truly interested in the spiritual maturity of adolescents.

CHAPTER 4

DESCRIPTION OF THE INITIATIVE

Introduction

Young and old are leaving churches in hordes. In an attempt to curb the losses, many churches have doubled down on the programming element in their churches. They elicit the best technology, the best presenters, the best bands, all in an effort to help show Christ to their young people. The research says it has not been effective. The previous chapters have shown a variety of reasons why this is so: lack of parental involvement, a mass production approach to discipleship, and an overall weakening of faith across all generations.

Challenges to Parent-Led Faith Formation

The following three sections highlight the biggest challenges a parent-led faith formation intervention would need to overcome. Attention in these areas would provide the best chance of success. This endeavor requires cooperation between home and church, with both parties needing to examine the culture of baptism in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination.

Parental Engagement in Spiritual Practices

Faith and spiritual practices are weak across the board. Currently, young people are often the purported abandoners of faith, but the younger generations are simply being

intentional about decisions their parents' generation has made. Many of their parents have a weak, almost nonexistent faith (Amidei, 2013; Barnhill, 2004; Dean, 2010). While they may still go to church, many are going through the motions. Younger generations are simply walking away and therefore cast as the problem. The faith of many parents is weak, and strengthening it was a central focus of this project.

The parents' faith is crucial because they are the primary spiritual influence on their children, as found by Smith and Denton (2005). Pastors have a role, but it is generally rated behind that of parents. Schwartz (2006) found that boosting parents' spiritual practices/faith would do the same for their children's faith.

Church Engagement

The church must focus on two big changes: allowing and facilitating a relational discipleship process led by parents and providing relational support for parents. As noted previously, until 2010, Seventh-day Adventist pastors were mandated by the *Church Manual* to be the only ones preparing people for baptism. It can be incredibly hard to change a culture in existence for decades. Churches must be honest about the chasm they have helped create, specifically in regard to spiritual matters.

Churches, particularly pastors, must empower parents to raise their children in the faith. This will do many things for the pastors. First, giving parents not just the authority, but the calling and the tools to live out that calling, will increase the spiritual practices of the entire faith community. This will lead to a more engaged church body. Second, it will give pastors an opportunity to work with any children who lack the parental support that is needed. Third, it will reallocate resources. In larger churches with a youth pastor on staff, it can be challenging to keep up with all the children, especially after baptism. If the

youth pastor is the primary contact in matters of faith, the pastor will be limited in their ability to disciple that child. Parents, however, have regular, daily engagement with their children and, with intention, can accomplish this much easier. In smaller churches, the pastor juggles a wide array of responsibilities, and discipleship can become challenging due to the sheer volume of work. As students get older, they have more autonomy and will sometimes get involved with a church community without their parents. These children need spiritual guidance and support. If the majority of the students are being cared for by their parents, the pastor is more able to care for this smaller group. Fourth, it will free the pastor to be more engaged in taking the message outside the walls of the church.

Reggie Joiner (2009) estimates that parents, on average, spend roughly 3,000 hours a year with their children. Churches spend, on average, around 40 hours a year. It is impossible for churches to have the same amount of contact parents have with their children. A better use of time for a pastor is to equip the parents to have the conversation with their child. This is especially crucial when considering Case (2011) and his assertion that as children grow, so must their understanding of spiritual matters. Regardless of church size, it would be impossible for a pastor to maintain that level of relationship with each parishioner. The church must ensure it equips parents, teaching them how to teach their children.

In addition, the church must provide relational support to encourage and empower parents along the way. This comes not only from the church or pastor, but from other church members. Merhaut (2007a) found parents were looking for informal support from

their church. Providing an opportunity for encouragement, insight, and feedback from the church and other parents should prove helpful.

Baptism

As previously noted, baptism is one of the few spiritual milestones in the life of an Adventist young person. For the vast majority of Christian and more specifically Adventist children, their parents are not a part of this process. How could the faith journey of families change if they were to take the baptism journey together? This project hoped to find an answer to that question.

Baptism is beset with philosophical problems in Adventism due to the importance placed on it. Baptism and denominational membership are synonymous in Adventism. There cannot be one without the other, unless someone comes from a different denomination in which baptism by immersion is practiced. In those situations, the baptism by immersion is valid even though the participant did not adhere to the 28 Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists. The problem comes with recognizing baptisms from other denominations as being part of the body of Christ, but not allowing baptism at an Adventist church to happen if the person will not become an Adventist. Said another way, if someone attends an Adventist church, that person has no part of the body of Christ unless he or she becomes a member of the denomination.

When the possibility of baptism without voting someone into membership is discussed, many use the argument, “You can’t be born without a family.” This insinuates that without being a member of the denomination, you don’t actually belong. This is troubling when applied to children. Does that mean that infants, toddlers, and

adolescents, who are not in a place to choose a believer's baptism, are somehow less connected to the Adventist community? It creates a divide that need not exist.

The mindset of attaining a certain amount of knowledge and adhering to “the truth” challenges the concept of discipleship and continual growth. If baptism is one in a series of steps toward a closer connection to Jesus, we should not place so much importance on any one step, but instead on the journey. Root and Dean (2011) assert that regardless of the baptism practiced, catechesis has been reduced to a method of assimilating children into the faith tradition and makes the process of confirmation or the believer's baptism an assent to knowledge as opposed to engagement in relationship with Jesus (p. 87). Generally, in the Adventist denomination, once a child is baptized, there is no plan for what happens post-baptism. The mindset seems to be that they now know everything they “need” to know.

The Plan

Supporting details follow, but at its essence, this project was about a parent-led baptismal process. The project called for three sessions of parents meeting with the facilitator and four Family Talks where parents met with their children. When the parents had completed these Family Talks, the children would be ready for baptism and next steps, particularly for discipleship, would be formulated.

Advertising

The baptismal preparation class was advertised to the church, including the three scheduled dates for the sessions. The sessions, each a week apart, were advertised in the church bulletin, the weekly email newsletter, the announcement loop before and after services on the main screens, announcements during the service, and emails to families

with children in the 8-18 age bracket. This provided next steps for those who had been considering baptism in addition to those who had already made that decision. The participants were not necessarily chosen, but instead communicated with the pastor that they had decided to be baptized or wanted to understand it better.

Pre-Session Parental Preparation

The parent undertaking the main teaching is a massive shift from how baptism is generally practiced in Adventism. Decisions for baptism are generally asked at a variety of venues. The majority of these venues do not have a place for parents.

Most Adventist schools have a Week of Prayer, a focused week of daily spiritual messages presented by a speaker or series of speakers, often culminating in a call for baptism. Baptismal classes are generally held in Adventist schools in Grades 5 and 6 and culminate with a call for baptism. Summer camp generally ends with a decision for baptism as well. A traditional evangelistic series always ends with a decision for baptism, and some weekly church services do the same. The last two, though, are not targeted specifically for young people. Some other areas exist, generally in some type of church program like Sabbath School, youth group, small group, etc., or a parachurch program like Pathfinders. Depending on whether it was a decision or a call, the follow-up for each of these happens with a pastor, teacher, or church leader. In the culture of Adventism, parents are not a part of the process.

This project sought to change this culture. It required buy-in from parents prior to the start of the sessions. After a family was on the list, a note was sent to the parents explaining that this was a parent-led program, the biblical precedent for it, the statistics dealing with family engagement and faith retention, and the responsibility of the parent

(Appendix E). This was intended to inspire and encourage the parents to take the active role needed for the faith development of their child. However, the reality was that parent buy-in might not happen solely from an email explanation, and this was a possible challenge moving forward.

The Sessions

The challenge was to ensure ample time to train and equip parents while keeping in mind their calendars were already full. Some parents might have never really engaged with their children in spiritual matters, or not done it in years. They would require encouragement and instruction. But according to Walt Mueller (2016), founder of the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding, “parents are hungry for guidance and direction” (p. 15). Despite the desire for guidance, an exhaustive approach had to be balanced for two reasons: exploration and time.

Parents needed to spend time exploring the material on their own. The purpose of the parent conversations with their children was not knowledge transmission, but relationship with Jesus and with the child. The parents needed to explore their own thoughts and feelings on the subject and determine how to best explain them to their children. The facilitator could provide tips, but age, gender, race, and school, among many other things, would change the conversation from child to child. The sessions were intended to provide the tools the parents needed, but the parents had to take time to process and internalize their own thoughts.

The other challenge was time. It was difficult to find dates that would work for everyone in a group setting. Having three sessions was not a magic number, but it did allow for the sessions to be completed in a month. The sessions did not necessarily need

to be on consecutive weeks if there happened to be a holiday or church function, but having it done within four weeks was a priority.

Session 1

The first session was designed for parents, children, and the facilitator to look at what baptism is according to the Bible and tradition in Israelite culture and Christianity. As has been seen from the research, parents are not having conversations of faith with their children. To begin curbing this deficit, the opening activity was designed for children to gather separately from their parents and compile a series of questions to ask their parents about the parents' own baptism (Appendix G). If a parent had not been baptized, there would be an opportunity for discussion about why the parent had not yet made that decision. While the students created questions in a different room, the parents would take the spiritual practices assessment (Appendix B). The results were anonymous.

The children would formulate a list of questions, then return to the room and rejoin their parents and facilitator. The facilitator would invite them to gather in family groups so the children could ask their questions. After the families went through the compiled questions, the facilitator would ask the family groups to share things they learned with the big group.

From the outset, the project sought to foster communication on spiritual matters between parent and child. The other opportunity afforded in Session 1 was to encourage intergenerational interaction. As other parents shared pieces of their faith stories, it would give all the children an opportunity to hear other adults articulate their faith journeys. Powell and Clark (2011) see this as integral in the faith formation of young people.

Once the families had a chance to share, the facilitator would review the history of baptism in Judaism and what it meant in a time after the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, ending with the concept of discipleship, or a continued “Journey with Jesus.” The next steps for each family unit were to complete Family Talk sheets 1 and 2 (Appendix H).

At this point, the children would be dismissed and the parents and facilitator would meet to discuss the Family Talk sheets and how to cover them with their children. It was designed as an open forum where the facilitator would cover Family Talk 1, ask if there were any questions, move on to Family Talk 2, and again ask if there were any questions. Parents were asked to cover Family Talks 1 and 2 with their children before the next session, one week later. They were challenged to determine two different times when they would cover each sheet, and were also given resources for further reading to aid in the conversations with their children. The total time for the session was 90 minutes.

Session 2

This 60-minute session was designed for the facilitator and the parents. It centered entirely around equipping parents for conversations with their children. The first half of the session would be used to debrief what happened with each family unit. Regardless of whether they had success stories, horror stories, or some combination of the two, it put parents in the same room sharing their experiences with other parents. Those who had positive experiences could inspire others and perhaps provide tips/insight to make other parents’ sessions better. Those who had negative experiences would be in a room of parents who knew what it was like to fail and could garner support from the other parents.

The second half of the session was intended as a time to discuss Family Talks 3-4, similar to the first session on Family Talks 1-2. Of utmost importance for this project was Family Talk 4, which covered the discipleship or continuing growth element.

Session 3

This was the final formal session between the facilitator and the parents. It was 60 minutes in length. The first 20 minutes were designated for debriefing Family Talks 3-4. Again, this was an opportunity for parents to hear heartwarming stories, horror stories, or both. The last 40 minutes would focus on the next steps the families would take to continue growing. At this point, assuming the children had no questions, they would be ready for baptism. It was stressed, however, that baptism was simply one more step in the journey that would continue after the baptism.

The facilitator made a variety of resources available to the parents to help them continue the journey. The parents could either pick one and present it at their fourth Family Talk, or present the options to their children and take a cue from them on what tools to use for spiritual development. For children or parents who wanted to look more closely at the Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, this was an excellent opportunity to do so, especially if a child wanted to be a member of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination.

Family Talks

The Family Talks were truly what this project was about: facilitating conversation between parent and child. The parents would cover the material in the sessions with the facilitator, but also needed to spend time preparing before each talk. The Family Talk sheets centered around Bible passages that covered the theme for each talk. Each sheet listed several verses to make a biblical case for the subject and invited the child to either

fill in a blank, write a summary, or draw conclusions. The children would no doubt have heard about all of the topics discussed in the Family Talks, but exploring them through the lens of the Bible would connect the parent and child to the Bible and help to weed out potential misconceptions about the topics.

Family Talks 1-2

Family Talk 1 covered the Bible and its Gospel story. It served as the starting point for children to understand where we learn of Jesus and what he did for us. Family Talk 2 covered belief. The question could be raised, “Why does belief need to be covered at all?” Atheists believe the Bible exists, but do not believe what it says. Family Talk 2 was designed to help the families understand that believing what the Bible says and making Jesus the Lord of their lives would be necessary moving forward. If a child was not at this point, moving forward might not be the best option. In the event this happened, the parent could discuss next steps with the facilitator.

Family Talks 3-4

Family Talk 3 covered repentance. This Family Talk affirmed the idea that people will make mistakes even after getting baptized. The goal was to show children that a faith walk is a journey and not a destination. Family Talk 4 was pivotal. Spiritual growth is vitally needed, and research tells us it is often lacking. Family Talk 4 was vital to maintain ongoing communication between parents and children for months. This Family Talk made the case for continuing to grow closer to Jesus. The families could spend time deciding what tools the children would use to grow closer with Jesus during the next session with the pastor.

If a family decided to study the 28 Fundamental Beliefs and they did one a week, that would be seven months of spiritual conversations! Even if some families were weary of doing the 28, I would encourage them to do so simply because they were part of an Adventist community. If they were at odds with some of the orthodoxy or orthopraxy of the denomination or local church, having the conversation with their children would help the children understand this. Parker (2010) found that “lack of communication with the family unit is a major contributor to students’ inability to express the elementary ideals of their faith” (p. 56). If a parent wants to help facilitate faith, they need to have open conversations.

Follow-Up Assessment

At the conclusion of Session 3, the parents would complete the same assessment they took previously to see if the process led to an increase in spiritual practices.

Summary

This project could not solve all the problems of faith formation in young people. Powell and Clark (2011) state in their book *Sticky Faith*, “There is no Sticky Faith silver bullet. There is no simple list of steps you can take to give your kids a faith that lasts” (p. 27). Faith formation requires intentionality and relationship, and there is no program or series of steps that can be outlined to match every relationship. This project provided an outline, a starting point, for families to use, but was centered around the need for relationship in order to best achieve the full potential.

CHAPTER 5

NARRATIVE OF THE INTERVENTION IMPLEMENTATION

Many churches live and die by the vigor of their programs. The problem comes in how success is defined. Is a program successful if a large number of people attend? Or is it based on decisions made for Jesus? Many times, programs are deemed successful, but they do not help the church achieve its mission or vision. The intervention laid out in the previous chapter was a program, but a program designed to facilitate engagement between parent and child and to grow parent and child in their relationship with God. This is central to the mission and vision of FHC. The success of this project was based on whether the program led to an increase in spiritual practices in the home. This chapter details the journey, moving from theory to practice. It is broken down into sections for the three groups that participated and details the three sessions for each group.

Group 1

The first group consisted of three families, with four children in the group. The sessions occurred on consecutive Saturdays, starting August 5, 2017. The initial session with parents and children was held at Loch Haven Children's Academy, and the two subsequent meetings with parents were held in the office of the researcher at FHC. This is discussed in more detail in the next section. The youngest child was eight and the oldest was 14.

Session 1

One of the first challenges experienced was the meeting location. The FHC facility is heavily used, and due to an event, many of the rooms were taken. Therefore, the initial meeting happened at a daycare on an adjacent property. This proved a challenge, as none of the three families had previously been there. While the location was communicated clearly, it seemed to introduce an element of unfamiliarity. Many of the parents communicated that they already felt uncertain about this role of taking charge in their child's baptismal path and a new, unfamiliar location for each of them added to the uncertainty.

Another challenge was that two of the three families were quite late. The initial meeting was planned to start early enough for the students to attend their age-specific programming after the conclusion of the session. Waiting for the other families to arrive meant the session would spill into children's programming time, which caused some disappointment for all the students.

Once everyone arrived, they were asked to complete the forms and given the introduction to the time together. When the split between children and parents happened for the opening activity, it allowed the parents to voice their uncertainty about the coming process. The facilitator worked to alleviate their concerns. After doing so, the researcher handed out the Spiritual Assessment and left the room to allow for confidentiality. A parent was designated to collect the forms and inform the researcher they were finished.

The children worked on a list of questions to ask their parents about the parents' baptism and then came back to the room, but the parents did not know the questions or even the topic, only that they had questions they would need to answer. It was interesting

to observe the parents' uneasiness leading up to the reveal. Once the topic was announced, they appeared to be noticeably relieved. Considering the wide variety of topics possible, speaking about their own lives and experiences was welcome.

The children and parents went through the questions in family groups and then the big group was addressed. The children were asked what they learned. Several students learned portions of their parents' story they never knew or gained a deeper understanding of portions they had previously heard. The parents were asked if there was anything they wished they had been asked. One or two shared some pieces, and the whole group was encouraged to continue the conversation as things came to mind.

At this point, the group started going through the FHC Baptismal Primer (Appendix G). The primer is usually spread across two sessions, but in order to keep the total number of required sessions for parents to three, all of the primer was covered in the first session. The researcher, having led the primer on previous occasions, felt rushed trying to fit all the material into the time available. While the material from the primer stayed constant, the added forms and introduction, along with the late start, meant there was lots of material to fit into an already full time.

After completing the primer, the students went back with the designated supervisor and the researcher stayed with parents. The researcher encouraged the parents to be able to articulate their definitions of the gospel and faith prior to meeting with their children, as those two concepts were an integral part of Family Talks 1 and 2. As the researcher went through the debrief of the session and review of the Family Talks, the parents had no questions regarding the content. In the planning of this time, it was assumed there would be much more discussion. While it had no adverse effects on the

session, the researcher was concerned about when the Family Talks were implemented in the families. Previous research indicated that, statistically, the parents would feel uncertain about what they were doing and would potentially have many questions as they planned implementation.

Session 2

Because Session 2 was held only with the parents, space was not a problem. Session 2 happened during the children's and youth programming time at FHC, and the group met in the office of the researcher. Once again, punctuality remained elusive, but all three families were represented. The session was scheduled to start at 11:00 a.m., which was 15 minutes after children/youth programming started in the church. The session was scheduled for 30 minutes, which allowed parents to be able to pick up or meet their children at the conclusion of the programming.

After opening with prayer, the researcher went through the list of questions found in the Group Session material. The first question was very open-ended and simply asked, "How was your experience?" Because of the small size of the group, it was not put to any specific individual, but left for anyone in the group to respond. One parent shared how preparation for the Family Talks was done. A space was created in the home with comfy chairs, snacks, subdued lighting, and music. This became the backdrop for discussing the Family Talk sheets. The parent communicated to the child the desire to create a special atmosphere to discuss special content. In turn, the child communicated to friends what a cool experience it was. The other parents in the session communicated that they would look at doing something similar to help set the stage for the conversations.

Another family had younger children, and found the abstract concepts of the gospel and faith somewhat challenging to communicate. The parent communicated feeling uncertain about whether their children actually understood what was being said. The researcher probed for a brief synopsis of what was communicated. After this parent shared what was communicated, it was the other parents in the group, both with older children, who quickly encouraged this parent for a very clear explanation of those two topics.

All three families indicated that it took some time to get their children dialoguing. They all maintained that the children were not engaged in the process until the end of the second Family Talk. Each family employed a variety of tactics to get their children dialoguing, and all communicated they were successful. That said, they were still hoping for more communication.

This debrief session was another example of the researcher not being prepared for a limited amount of dialogue. The parents all communicated a decent amount of confidence when thinking about what had transpired. As discussion moved to Family Talks 3 and 4, the parents once again expressed confidence in leading out with the material as they looked to the upcoming conversations. The researcher was not prepared for this, again due in large part to the research cited in this work. The duration of the meeting was approximately 30 minutes.

Session 3

Once again, the group met in the office of the researcher at FHC. Unfortunately, only two of the three families were represented, due to illness in one of the families. It

commenced at 11:00 a.m. and ended early, around 11:20 a.m., not including the concluding assessment.

The researcher again took an informal approach to the questions found in the Group Sessions. The questions were posed and one of the two families would respond. Because the questions were the same ones from the previous session, the families actually answered some of the questions without the prompts, making it more of an organic conversation than working through a set of questions. Because of this, the initial questions were answered in a very short time, roughly 10 minutes.

The session ended with two questions, regarding a spiritual growth plan for the children and parents and whether or not the children wanted to become members at FHC. The parents were not entirely sure about what a spiritual growth plan looked like. The researcher, who was also functioning as a pastor to the families, encouraged them to use the spiritual disciplines of prayer, Bible study, worship, Sabbath, fasting, etc. as next steps for spiritual growth. The book *Habits of a Child's Heart*, by Valarie Hess (2004), is one that FHC recommends often to its congregation. The researcher encouraged the families to consider that book as an option for spiritual growth. It not only provides teaching on spiritual disciplines, but provides age-appropriate activities to help children of all ages put them into practice. No copies were available for the families to see.

The researcher encouraged contact from the families if they had any questions or comments or needed help moving forward with the next steps of spiritual growth and membership. The meeting was adjourned with prayer by the researcher. The families stayed in the office for a short time to peruse the resources made available to them.

Group 2

This group was initially slated to be four families, but ended up being five, with seven children in the group. This is discussed more in the next section. The sessions occurred on three consecutive Saturdays starting November 4, 2017. The initial session with parents and children was held on the third floor of FHC, and the two subsequent meetings with parents and the researcher happened in the office of the FHC Minister of Music. The youngest child was eight years old and the oldest was 14.

Session 1

The third floor of the church was open, which allowed ample of space for the families to sit at round tables in each family group. Several families were late, which created a challenge because the room was going to be in use for other programming, which meant the group had a hard deadline to vacate the room.

The biggest challenge in the first session was additional families showing up who had not registered to attend. One of the parents recruited two other families to be a part of the group, unbeknownst to the researcher. The reason for registering was to ensure that enough forms were available and that the parent letter (Appendix E) was read. The parent who recruited the other two families had forwarded the correspondence of the researcher via email to the families. The researcher was then left with a quandary of whether to allow the families to attend. After consulting with the two families and securing additional copies of all the forms needed to participate in the study, the researcher decided to let them participate.

While no reason remained for them not to participate, it did create some havoc at the beginning of the session to secure extra copies of all the paperwork and set up

additional tables for the families. This pushed the start time back even further. Adding to the late start time was a further delay waiting for a family who never arrived. The researcher was only informed they would be tardy, not absent.

After all the consent forms were completed, the students split to go with the designated supervisor while the researcher stayed with the parents to introduce the next element and have them complete the spiritual assessment. Once the spiritual assessment was handed out, the researcher left the room to promote confidentiality. A parent was designated to collect the forms in an envelope and inform the researcher they were done. This process took an exceptionally long time. When parents and children were reunited to go through the questions and the FHC Baptismal Primer, only 30 minutes remained when there should have been roughly 70 minutes. While the primer could be completed in this time frame, it meant there was less interaction in the family groups and lots of information was being transmitted to the attendees without any breaks.

As with the previous group, it was learned that many parents had not communicated their own baptismal process or story to their children. It was evident from the feedback given by parents and children that it was a meaningful time. Once that portion was completed, the researcher started with the Baptismal Primer. It was completed in the necessary time, but by the end, many of the younger students were struggling to stay focused.

At the conclusion of the primer, the parents and children once again split. During this time, the designated supervisor met with the children to have them write down their questions about baptism and pray. The researcher stayed with the parents to cover Family Talk sheets 1 and 2. No significant questions were raised, and the researcher

communicated that the families would be contacted with the location of the next meeting. The families were also encouraged to reach out to the researcher if any questions arose.

Session 2

One of the families who had planned to attend did not attend Session 1. In communicating with the family, it was decided they would not attend the remaining two sessions, as the bulk of activities for the children were in Session 1. This meant the group would be, at the largest, the five families who attended Session 1.

Session 2 occurred in the office of the Minister of Music, as it would accommodate the size of the group. All of the families from the previous session returned and were on time. As with the previous group, the session was scheduled to start at 11:00 a.m. to accommodate the children's programming schedule at FHC.

The sessions worked from a list of questions found in the Group Sessions sheet (Appendix G). The size of Group 1 allowed for a slightly more informal experience. Group 2 was larger, and to allow each parent an opportunity to answer, the researcher decided to put the first question to a specific parent and have each parent or family unit around the circle answer in order.

The revelation during this time was a group of parents who were excited about what had happened. The difference in dialogue between this group and the previous group was pronounced. Every family had much to share from each question in the Group Session sheet.

Of note was how this group, similar to the last one, did not have many questions about how to teach the material found in the Family Talk sheets. As the group completed all the questions, the researcher created space for each family to share anything not talked

about in the discussion. When discussing the upcoming Family Talks 3 and 4, they were excited to have them. They were looking forward to using some of the methods that other parents had shared. They also communicated they felt more at ease after having already led out with two topics in their homes. After everyone shared, the researcher closed the session with prayer.

Session 3

All five families returned for the final session, and it started on time. The group met in the office of the Minister of Music at FHC. Like the previous session, it commenced at 11:00 a.m. and worked through the questions on the Group Sessions sheet.

Similar to the previous session, the researcher worked around the circle of families gathered, allowing each an opportunity to answer the questions. The tenor of the responses was similar to the previous session. Each family was excited about what had transpired. Many communicated employing additional approaches they had picked up in the discussion from the previous week and in the time they spent preparing on their own.

Session 3 ended with two questions that determined next steps. The first was determining a spiritual growth plan for the child and parent; the second was the parent determining if the child would become a church member and if so, what to do with the child's church membership. The second question was answered with more ease than the first. Of the seven children in the group, the parents indicated that five of them were interested in baptism. The researcher, in the dual role of pastor to the families, suggested that those interested in FHC membership go through the 28 Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs as a family. This would give the family an opportunity to continue the faith dialogue started with the Family Talk sheets.

The parents requested guidance on what resources to use for studying the Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, and those interested in resources were brought to the office of the researcher at the conclusion of the session to give them ideas about what was available.

The first question, “What is the plan for spiritual growth for you and your child?”, proved somewhat complex and nebulous for the parents to answer. The researcher, again serving in a dual role as a pastor, encouraged all the families to consider the spiritual disciplines of prayer, Bible study, worship, Sabbath, fasting, etc., as a way to grow their walk, and that of their children, with God and also encouraged them to examine *Habits of a Child’s Heart*. Several copies were made available for any families that were interested.

The researcher ended the meeting in prayer and then distributed the Spiritual Practices Assessment for the parents to complete. Another parent was elected to collect the assessments when finished and bring them to the researcher, who was waiting outside the office. Every single family came to the office of the researcher to peruse the resources mentioned to them earlier.

Group 3

This group consisted of four families with five children total. The sessions occurred on consecutive Saturdays starting February 10, 2018. The initial session was held on the third floor of FHC and the subsequent meetings were held in the office of the researcher. The youngest child was eight and the oldest was 12.

Session 1

The initial session for this group was held in room 308 of FHC. This room is used for a variety of programs, including youth programming on Saturday morning. This

meant there was a hard deadline to finish the program on time to allow for the next program to use the room. The room size allowed each family to have their own round table.

The session started on time, and as with previous sessions, began with an introduction and filling out the consent forms. After the forms were completed, the children went to another room to meet with the designated supervisor to compile the list of baptism questions. The researcher allowed parents to ask any questions they had about the process, and one parent asked for some clarification from the intro letter, specifically about the role the parents were going to play. The researcher gave a brief overview of the following sessions while also commenting that things would become clearer at the conclusion of the first session. The parents were given the Spiritual Assessment, and a parent was chosen to collect the forms and retrieve the researcher. The researcher left the room and entered the room where the children were meeting. The parent came to retrieve the researcher, and at that time the children were also done, so the whole group returned to the room with the parents.

The parents did not know what questions were being compiled, and as with previous groups, they were nervous about what they were going to answer. When the researcher explained that the questions focused on the parents' own baptismal experience, the parents visibly relaxed. After the children asked all the questions to their respective parents, the researcher addressed the whole group and went through the debrief questions from the FHC Baptismal Primer. As with previous groups, many children did not know elements of their parents' stories, and this time provided an opportunity for those stories to be told.

The researcher proceeded through the primer, and the group received it in a fashion similar to previous groups. The students left once again with the designated supervisor while the parents and researcher covered Family Talks 1 and 2. At this point, this group deviated significantly from the previous groups.

Groups 1 and 2 felt very confident in their role of taking the lead in Family Talks. Group 3 was no different, but was very vocal about it. They shared several stories of how they had been doing similar things already and thanked the researcher and the church for encouraging them to do it. They also asked many questions about how other families were going to approach it. The previous groups, especially outside of group sharing time, really only addressed the researcher. This group broke that dynamic and engaged other families in the group. It seemed to break the formality and make this process feel like something real and concrete instead of something that sounded good in theory.

Due to the programming scheduled to follow in the same room, the researcher had to call the group to a formal conclusion and invited them outside if they had additional questions or comments. One family met with the researcher afterwards to ask a few questions pertaining to when their child could be baptized. The researcher, also functioning as the family's pastor, communicated that the decision would be left up to the family after the conclusion of the Family Talks. This put them at ease, as they felt they needed an answer that day.

Session 2

As with the previous groups, the session was scheduled to start at 11:00 a.m. to accommodate the children's programming schedule at FHC. The group met in the office

of the researcher. All the parents were on time, but the room was slightly cramped with this larger group.

This group continued to be much more vocal than previous groups. The researcher was barely able to get through all of the questions in the allotted time because the parents were so excited about what had happened. The parents talked extensively about the methods they employed and gave support to the other parents and their methods. All the parents communicated that the material was straightforward, both to explain and for their children's comprehension. The researcher closed the session on time, but several parents lingered in the office to continue talking.

Session 3

As with the previous groups, the session was scheduled to start at 11:00 a.m. to accommodate the children's programming schedule at FHC. The group met in the office of the researcher. All the parents who attended were on time, but one parent was unable to make it due to sickness.

Group 3 continued their trend of being very vocal. Having been through the questions the previous week, when the researcher communicated that the questions would be the same, the group went through them almost without prompts from the researcher.

They all communicated that defining sin was a little tricky. While it stemmed from what some might consider to be a simple question, the conversation morphed into a deep theological discussion amongst the parents. They spoke at length about defining sin at its core and not relying on what they considered to be trite explanations. The passion, vigor, and thought exuded by these parents were incredibly evident.

The session closed with asking the parents to explore their spiritual growth plans for themselves and their children, along with choosing what they wanted to do with their child's church membership. The researcher, also functioning as pastor, made copies of *Habits of a Child's Heart* available for the families. The parents from this group spoke very strongly about the need to be engaged in the spiritual growth process with their children. They voiced appreciation for the books and vowed to go through the process with their children.

The group closed with prayer and the Spiritual Practices Assessment was given to the parents. A parent volunteered to collect the assessments and put them in a folder and then retrieve the researcher. The researcher left the room while the parents completed the assessment and waited for the parent to arrive.

Summary

On the whole, the implementation went fairly smoothly. All three groups were engaged in the process. There were no catastrophic or completely disruptive incidents. This process is not the end-all for spiritual development or for parental engagement. But, in light of how things progressed, it seems this may be a beneficial way for parents and church to partner together in the faith formation of young people.

CHAPTER 6

PROJECT EVALUATION AND LEARNINGS

This project hoped to provide an engagement opportunity for parents in the spiritual journey of their children. Baptismal preparation for members or attenders of FHC was chosen as the engagement opportunity. Involvement for the 12 families and 16 children was not mandatory, and each family was informed that should they decline to be involved, baptism was still possible. The project implementation had three components: meetings with pastor and parents, meetings with parents and children, and a meeting with pastor, parents, and children. Materials were provided to the families for their meetings, and the pastor worked from a curriculum utilized by FHC for baptismal preparation. At the beginning of the first meeting, the parents were given an assessment, with both quantitative and qualitative response categories, and the same assessment was repeated at the conclusion of the final meeting. The purpose of this project was to foster an environment of continued spiritual engagement between parents and children and determine if parents leading their children through the baptismal process would lead to an increase of spiritual practices in the home.

Description of the Evaluation

The evaluation of this project relied on data from the initial and final assessments and the ability of the project to increase parent-child engagement in spiritual matters. Special attention was given to (a) the number of participants who completed the program

and (b) the practicality and effectiveness of the project to be used exclusively for baptismal preparation at FHC.

One of the massive challenges that presented itself when it came to interpreting data was having the assessment conducted by the minister of the church the participants attended. Unfortunately, in Christian circles, individuals might present a façade to try and meet cultural expectations. The questions for the assessment dealt with spiritual walk, how often family worship happened, and what that experience was like. While the assessments were anonymous, the groups themselves were quite small, and the respondents may have been influenced by a fear of their answers being identified. Multiple attempts were made to help the participants understand how the information was going to be used, but this risk is worth noting.

The assessment had two sections: objective and subjective. Focus will first be given to the objective portion. The total number of choices available (all the different multiple-choice options) for the objective questions was 52. The initial assessment had 38 different responses and the final assessment had only 32. Of the 11 questions in the objective portion, six of them saw a reduction in the total number of unique responses, and two of the questions only had two choices available.

The results of the final assessment indicated a stronger faith walk (Question 1), higher satisfaction with family worship (Question 3), increased dialogue on spiritual topics outside of family worship (Question 4), and a perceived increase in Bible knowledge (Question 6), doctrinal knowledge (Question 7), and prayer life (Question 8). One of the drastic shifts was on the doctrinal knowledge question. Of the respondents on the initial assessment, 42% said their doctrinal knowledge was weak, compared to 10% in

the final assessment; 58% in the initial assessment said it was strong, compared to 90% in the final assessment.

Table 1

Parents' Doctrinal Knowledge

	Initial	Final
Unimportant	0 0%	0 0%
Struggling	0 0%	0 0%
Weak	5 42%	1 10%
Strong	7 58%	9 90%
TOTAL:	12	10

Regarding teaching their children biblical truth (Question 9), the responses indicated that after the program, parents were less nervous, excited to do it, and less dependent on help.

Table 2

Parents' Feelings About Teaching Children Biblical Truth

	Initial	Final
Won't Happen	0 0%	0 0%
Nervous	1 8%	0 0%
Scared	0 0%	0 0%
Willing to Try	4 33%	2 22%
Excited	3 25%	3 33%
Already done it, but I need help	3 25%	2 22%
Already done it, and I don't need help	1 8%	2 22%
RESPONSES:	12	9

Another pronounced shift in responses came with Question 5. In the initial assessment, 58% of the respondents indicated that conversations about faith happening outside of family worship were more likely to be initiated by the parent, and 25% said they were initiated by the child (several respondents circled both responses, which explains the discrepancies in the percentages not adding to 100%; these dual responses were not calculated in the overall percentage). In the final assessment, those numbers were basically reversed: 55% of the respondents said a faith conversation was initiated by the child, while only 9% said it was initiated by the parent (several respondents also circled both responses in this answer, and those responses are not included in the percentages).

Table 3

Initiators of Conversations About Faith Outside Family Worship

	Initial	Final
My child	3 25%	6 55%
Me	7 58%	1 9%
Both	2 17%	4 36%
RESPONSES:	12	11

Moving to the subjective portion of the assessment, respondents were much more verbose for the initial assessment, which had a word count, for all respondents, of roughly 850. The final assessment word count was roughly 380. Without follow-up, it is nearly impossible to determine reasons for the variance between the two, but it does seem rather significant.

Of the 12 responses to Question 11 on the initial assessment, 6 commented on the role of the church being secondary, while four indicated a primary role. The remaining responses were hard to classify in regards to their views. In the 10 responses to Question 11 on the final assessment, seven spoke of a church role that was secondary to home using words like “guides, provide resources” and “encourage and empower parents.” The three remaining responses were very general and it was hard to determine exactly where they fell. They responded “very important,” “teaching foundational stories,” and “opening mind to learn and question.”

Consistent through several of the subjective responses was the idea that the church should provide resources and help guide families in the spiritual nurturing of their children (Questions 12a, 12b, 13). Question 13 had 50% of the respondents on the initial and final assessments requesting materials/resources to be able to use for family worship.

Conclusions From the Data

The data analysis indicates parents were more engaged in the spiritual development of their children and had a positive outlook for the future as a result of the *Journey With Jesus* program. As was noted earlier, parents felt more positive about their own faith walk and being a primary spiritual influence for their children.

The data from Question 5 indicate that parental engagement in baptismal preparation increased the number of faith conversations initiated by the children. Again, this was the most pronounced shift in numbers for all the questions. The final assessment seemed to indicate greater clarity on the part of the parents regarding the role they played and their effectiveness in that role, as was evidenced by fewer overall responses (32) being selected in the final assessment than in the initial assessment (38).

What was expressed clearly in the subjective responses, on both the initial and final assessments, was a lack of quality resources. Without follow-up, it is impossible to know how these parents defined quality, or what resources they were aware of. There was, however, a perceived lack of access to, knowledge of, or actual resources that parents wanted to use.

While the period of measurement was relatively short at 3-4 weeks, parental engagement in the baptismal process increased the quality and quantity of spiritual experiences in the home. This is the most significant take-away from the entire endeavor.

Outcomes

This project sought to engage parents in the baptismal process in an attempt to increase spiritual practices in the home. To that end, it was successful. For the parents that participated, it changed their viewpoint on who had the authority to prepare someone for baptism, and it created special moments for families as they shared portions of their lives they never had previously.

Another outcome is that the children who participated became more interested in conversations dealing with faith and spiritual matters. If this curiosity is encouraged and

engaged, it will, based on the data, encourage continued conversations and deepen their spiritual journey over time.

Another outcome of this project is that it changed how I engaged as a pastor with my parishioners. These parents put themselves in an incredibly vulnerable place. I know of no other churches that put parents in the driver's seat for baptismal preparation for their children. Our culture has not conditioned them to do this. For years, many youth ministry books viewed parents as hostile, or at least an obstacle to navigate. I found people who were scared and nervous, but genuinely committed to making this work. To see that determination in light of all the responsibilities they have was inspiring.

Conclusions and Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1 presented the problem: a lack of parental engagement in the baptismal process. The project aimed to foster, or potentially initiate and foster, an environment of spiritual engagement between parent and child. It laid out a chapter-by-chapter exploration of what that would look like, including key terms that would be used throughout the document.

Chapter 2 explored Deuteronomy 6:4–9 and Psalm 78:4–8 to show God's original intent for the transmission of his instruction and word from one generation to the next: parental influence and instruction. In these passages, it is clear that God's intent is for parents to transmit this information to their children, through word and action, thereby raising another generation of people who follow God. Parents are called by God to be actively engaged in the spiritual instruction of their children, with the natural progression leading to baptism and continuing after it has happened.

Chapter 3 traced the change from adolescent faith formation happening in the home to happening in the church and explored some reasons as to why that happened and what keeps it there. It also presented solutions for those seeking to move primary adolescent faith formation back to the home. Based on the current research, it seems there is no other place it should be happening. As was commented, this will not be an easy transition. Despite the difficulty, parents must reclaim their role as the primary spiritual mentors, and churches must work to support them in this role, if all parties are truly interested in the spiritual growth and maturity of adolescents.

Chapter 4 gave a detailed examination of the project implementation. It recognized that the project would not solve all the problems of faith formation in young people. Faith formation requires intentionality and relationship, and there is no program or series of steps that can be outlined to match every relationship. This project provided a starting point for families, but was centered around the need for relationship in order to best achieve the full potential.

Chapter 5 described the three different project implementation groups and the sessions attended by each group. The implementation went smoothly, all the groups were engaged in the process, and the parents who participated were very receptive.

Final Thoughts

Data from other studies tell us that children who have been through this program will have a higher statistical probability of continuing their faith walk after high school and into adulthood. Even the data from this study show that parental engagement awakened a spiritual curiosity in the children. That alone makes me want to drop everything else I do and focus solely on this. We have functioned in a system that is not

optimal for some time. My hope is that this research can be used to help families grow in their faith walk, both individually and as a group.

Recommendations

Based on the research, project implementation, and evaluation, any church would be wise to consider the following recommendations. These proposed changes may not happen easily, but if the current culture wants different results, different methodologies must be employed. These recommendations also rely on multiple parties—church, home, and denomination—coming together to chart a different course.

Reform the Theology, Methodology, and Philosophy of Baptismal Preparation

For many years, baptismal preparation in the Seventh-day Adventist denomination has been the responsibility of pastors. As noted previously, this responsibility was mandated in the *Church Manual* until very recently. This methodology has had theological implications infused into it so the thinking in the culture is that only a pastor is qualified to do baptismal preparation. If we are serious about parents being a positive spiritual influence, we must give them an opportunity to be part of one of the few spiritual milestones in the life of a believer. There should be sermons from the pulpit on a yearly basis and an articulated and digitally accessible philosophy on why this is important. This would be beneficial for any Seventh-day Adventist church, and we must create this culture in our local churches.

Empower Parents

Having a great plan in place means nothing unless one can get people to buy into that plan. It will take more than just trumpeting parental involvement to actually get

parents involved. It will require one-on-one conversations with some parents, giving them encouragement that has been lacking for generations. Many parents did not have their own parents as spiritual mentors. Pastors must journey with parishioners to emotionally prepare them to lead this endeavor.

Parents in this study communicated their need for quality resources. In pastoral ministry, the list of responsibilities is long, varied, and never-ending. If the resources do not exist, is it the responsibility of the pastor to create them? Unfortunately, the resources given to Seventh-day Adventist churches to use for their young people are often quite lacking. Pastors need to pressure their conferences, to pressure the unions, to pressure the division to demand better. Until then, pastors should work to curate the best resources that are available, even if they do not come from the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. They must be resources geared toward a new paradigm of ministry to young people—one where parents lead the charge.

Have a Backup Strategy

Sometimes there will be parents who, for one reason or another, are not able to spiritually mentor their children. Sometimes this is due to the parents themselves not being Christians, flat-out refusing to participate, or other complex challenges. These situations should be the minority, but they will exist nonetheless, and it is important for churches to be prepared to provide the spiritual mentoring and personal relationships that will be needed. If children do not have spiritual mentors, the church communities they are connected to should work to find people who can stand in that gap.

Develop a Long-Term Plan

One of the limitations of this project was the short duration. While families were able to prepare for baptism and many children were baptized, parents wrestled with what to do next: growing that relationship. In order to see more growth, a 12-month plan would be necessary. It would need to be flexible so it could be tailored to the different needs of families, realistic and feasible so as not to overwhelm, and full of quality resources to equip the parents.

Detailed Assessment

Another shortcoming of this project was the short and less than conventional assessment. If the previous recommendations are undertaken, further assessments to track participants through their endeavors would be quite beneficial. Knowing what was effective would help churches continually update their curated resources to contain the best and most effective materials. Constant feedback from such assessments could help keep churches from becoming stagnant and stuck in a rut.

APPENDIX A

RESEARCH APPROVAL AND CONSENT

Andrews University Florida Hospital Church Parent Led Baptismal Process General Informed Consent Form

Title: Training parents to prepare their adolescents for baptism at Florida Hospital Church

Greg Creek is conducting a research study as part of a Parent Led Baptismal Project at Florida Hospital Church project, in partial fulfillment of his Doctorate in Ministry at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan. Your participation in this study is greatly appreciated.

The purpose of this study is to identify a correlation of family spiritual practices (prayer, Bible study, and nurturing of faith through conversations in families) and the parents' involvement in the baptismal process at Florida Hospital Church.

Please read the following details concerning this research study. By signing this document, you are agreeing to participate in a Parent Led Baptismal Process at Florida Hospital Church research study.

1. I understand there will be three sessions. The first session will be with the project researcher, Greg Creek, my child (or children) interested in baptism, other children also interested in baptism and their parents, and a background checked and trained individual to help with supervision of children, when needed. The first session will start with prayer. Then students and parents will separate, while

parents complete a survey and the children compile a list of questions. The project researcher, Greg Creek, will move between children and parents and the background checked and trained individual will supervise during this time. This will last approximately 10 minutes at which point the groups will come back together for the duration of the first session. The second and third session will be with the project researcher, Greg Creek, and only the parents.

2. I understand that I will be required to meet with my child (or children) outside of the sessions on four separate occasions to complete the Family Talk sheets.
3. I will be involved in group sessions that may explore topics that bring up discussions that are personal in nature. Each participant and researcher, Greg Creek, expects a code of confidentiality. The associated risk is no greater than a normal day of life.
4. I understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary. I am aware that there is no penalty or loss of benefit I'm entitled to if I decide to discontinue my participation in this study.
5. I understand that the confidentiality of each participant is important to the successfulness of this research study. To help with confidentiality, there will be no audio recordings or filming of any sessions. Researcher, Greg Creek, will be keeping written notes of each session, which will be transferred to his computer. I understand that my identity in this study will not be disclosed in any published document.
6. I understand that I can contact research Advisor Andy McDonald (andy@hospitalchurch.org) or Greg Creek (greg@hospitalchurch.org) for answers

to questions related to this study. I can also contact the Institutional Review Board at Andrews University at 269-471-6361 or irb@andrews.edu.

I have read this Informed Consent Form in its entirety. My questions concerning this study have been answered. I hereby give my voluntary consent to participate in this study.

Signature (Participant)

Date

Researcher Signature

Date

Andrews University

Florida Hospital Church Parent Led Baptismal Process Parent Informed Consent Form

Title: Training parents to prepare their adolescents for baptism at Florida Hospital Church

Greg Creek is conducting a research study as part of a Parent Led Baptismal Process at Florida Hospital Church project, in partial fulfillment of his Doctorate in Ministry at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan. Participation in this study is greatly appreciated.

The purpose of this study is to identify a correlation of family spiritual practices (prayer, Bible study, service, and nurturing of faith through conversations in families) and the parents' involvement in the baptismal process at Florida Hospital Church.

Please read the following details concerning this research study. By signing this document, you are agreeing to allow your child to participate in a Parent Led Baptismal Process at Florida Hospital Church research study.

1. I understand that my child will be expected to meet one time with the project researcher, Greg Creek, a background checked and screened individual for supervision, other children interested in baptism, and their parents.
2. I understand that my child will need to meet with me on four separate occasions to the complete the Family Talk sheets.
3. My child will be involved in a group session that may explore topics that bring up discussions that are personal in nature. Each participant and researcher, Greg Creek, expects a code of confidentiality.
4. I understand that my child's participation in this study is completely voluntary. I am aware that there is no penalty or loss of benefit he/she is entitled to if he/she decides to discontinue participation in this study. The associated risk is no greater than a normal day of life.
5. I understand that the confidentiality of each participant is important to the successfulness of this research study. To help with confidentiality there will be no audio or video recordings of any sessions. Researcher, Greg Creek, will be keeping written notes of each session, which will be transferred to his computer following each session. I understand that my child's identity in this study will not be disclosed in any published document.
6. I understand that I can contact research Advisor Andy McDonald (andy@hospitalchurch.org) or Greg Creek (greg@hospitalchurch.org) for answers

to questions related to this study. I can also contact the Institutional Review Board at Andrews University at 269-471-6361 or irb@andrews.edu.

I have read this Informed Consent Form in its entirety. My questions concerning this study have been answered. I hereby give my voluntary consent to participate in this study.

I am the parent/ legal guardian of (_____). I give permission to my child to participate in this research study.

Signature (Parent)

Date

Researcher Signature

Date

Andrews University

Florida Hospital Church Parent Led Baptismal Process Student Informed Consent Form

Title: Training parents to prepare their adolescents for baptism at Florida Hospital Church

Greg Creek is conducting a research study as part of a Parent Led Baptismal Process at Florida Hospital Church project, in partial fulfillment of his Doctorate in Ministry at

Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan. Participation in this study is greatly appreciated.

The purpose of this study is to identify a correlation of family spiritual practices (prayer, Bible study, service, and nurturing of faith through conversations in families) and the parents' involvement in the baptismal process at Florida Hospital Church.

Please read the following details concerning this research study. By signing this document, you are agreeing to participate in a Parent Led Baptismal Process at Florida Hospital Church research study.

1. I understand that I will be expected to meet one time with the project researcher, Greg Creek, a background checked and screened individual to help supervise, other children interested in baptism, and their parents.
2. I understand that I will have to meet four times with my parent/s outside of the group session to complete the Family Talk sheets.
3. I will be involved in group sessions and individual sessions that may explore topics that bring up discussions that are personal in nature. Each participant and researcher, Greg Creek, expects a code of confidentiality.
4. I understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary. I am aware that there is no penalty or loss of benefit I'm entitled to if I decide to discontinue my participation in this study. The associated risk is no greater than a normal day of life.
5. I understand that the confidentiality of each participant is important to the successfulness of this research study. To help with confidentiality there will be no audio recordings or filming of any sessions. Researcher, Greg Creek will be

keeping written notes of each session, which will be transferred to his computer following each session. I understand that my identity in this study will not be disclosed in any published document.

6. I understand that I can contact research Advisor Andy McDonald (andy@hospitalchurch.org) or Greg Creek (greg@hospitalchurch.org) for answers to questions related to this study. I can also contact the Institutional Review Board at Andrews University at 269-471-6361 or irb@andrews.edu.

I have read this Informed Consent Form in its entirety. My questions concerning this study have been answered. I hereby give my voluntary consent to participate in this study.

_____ Student Signature (Participant)	_____ Date
_____ Parent Signature	_____ Date
_____ Researcher Signature	_____ Date

Andrews University
Florida Hospital Church
Spiritual Practices Assessment Survey
Cover Letter

Title: Training parents to prepare their adolescents for baptism at Florida Hospital Church

Greg Creek is conducting a research study as part of a Parent Led Baptismal Process at Florida Hospital Church project, in partial fulfillment of his Doctorate in Ministry at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan. Participation in this study is greatly appreciated.

The purpose of this study is to identify a correlation of family spiritual practices (prayer, Bible study, service, and nurturing of faith through conversations in families) and the parents' involvement in the baptismal process at Florida Hospital Church. The purpose of this survey is to determine current spiritual practices in your family. Your participation in this survey will assist in creating a benchmark for future research.

By reading this letter and completing the accompanying survey you are consenting to participating in a research study as part of a Parent Led Baptismal Process at Florida Hospital Church project at Florida Hospital Church.

1. I understand that this survey is a one-time anonymous survey. It will take approximately ten minutes to complete.
2. I understand that my participation in this survey is completely voluntary.
3. I understand that my identity in this study will not be disclosed in any published documents.
4. I understand that I can contact research Advisor Andy McDonald (andy@hospitalchurch.org) or Greg Creek (greg@hospitalchurch.org) with any

questions regarding this survey or study. I can also contact the Institutional Review Board at Andrews University at (269) 471-6361 or irb@andrews.edu.

Thank you for your participation,
Greg Creek

APPENDIX B

SPIRITUAL PRACTICES ASSESSMENT

Spiritual Practices Assessment

This assessment is anonymous. **Please do not write your name on this form.**
From the following numbered list, circle one response from each that best describes your situation.

1. My spiritual walk is:
 - a. Solid. Of course, there are ups and downs, good days and bad; but overall, I feel connected to God and have no regrets.
 - b. Struggling. I'm lucky to pick up the Bible once a week. Conversation with God is infrequent and rarely happens outside of meal time.
 - c. Practically non-existent. I'm lucky to read the Bible once a month. I rarely pray.
 - d. Non-existent. I read the Bible twice a year. I never pray, with the exception of last-ditch requests to locate things or keep people safe.

2. Family worship happens at a scheduled time
 - a. Once a month.
 - b. Once a week.
 - c. Once a day.
 - d. Twice a day.
 - e. Once a year.
 - f. Doesn't happen.
 - g. Other.

3. Family worship is
 - a. A struggle.
 - b. A blessing.
 - c. Fun.
 - d. Exciting.
 - e. Boring.

- f. A chore.
4. Conversations about faith happen outside of family worship
 - a. Rarely.
 - b. All the time.
 - c. Never.
 - d. Occasionally.
 - e. Frequently.
 5. Conversations about faith that happen outside of family worship are more likely to
 - a. Be initiated by my child.
 - b. Be initiated by me.
 6. My Bible knowledge is
 - a. Weak.
 - b. Strong.
 - s. Struggling.
 - d. Unimportant.
 7. My doctrine knowledge is
 - a. Weak.
 - b. Strong.
 - c. Struggling.
 - c. Unimportant.
 8. My prayer life is
 - a. Weak.
 - b. Strong.
 - c. Struggling.
 - d. Unimportant.
 9. How do you feel about teaching your child a biblical truth?
 - a. Nervous.
 - b. Scared.
 - c. Won't happen.
 - d. Excited.
 - e. Willing to try.
 - f. Already done it, but I need help.
 - g. Already done it, and I don't need help.
 10. Community service is
 - a. Not part of my spiritual walk.
 - b. A large part of my spiritual walk.
 - c. Is not required for a spiritual walk.
 - d. Necessary for a spiritual walk.

11. Our family engages in community service
 - a. Once a month.
 - b. Once a year.
 - c. Once a week.
 - d. Once a day.
 - e. Once a quarter.

12. In regards to teaching children biblical truth, what role
 - a. Should the church play?

 - b. Does the church play?

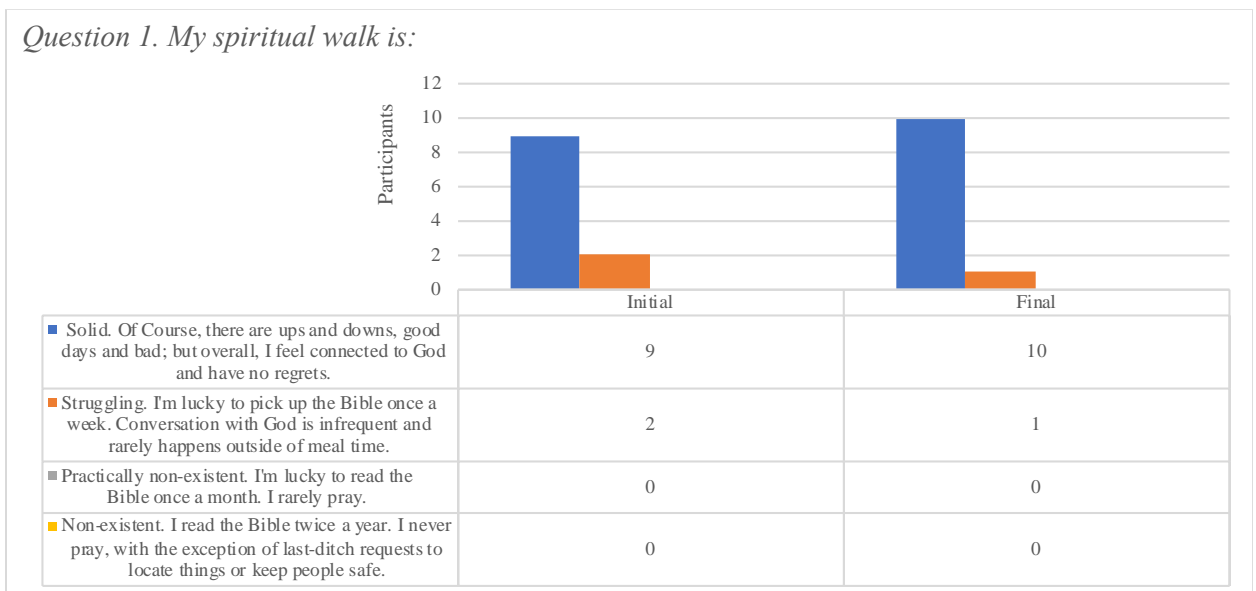
13. What would make family worship better?

14. What would strengthen your prayer life?

15. What would increase your time in the Bible?

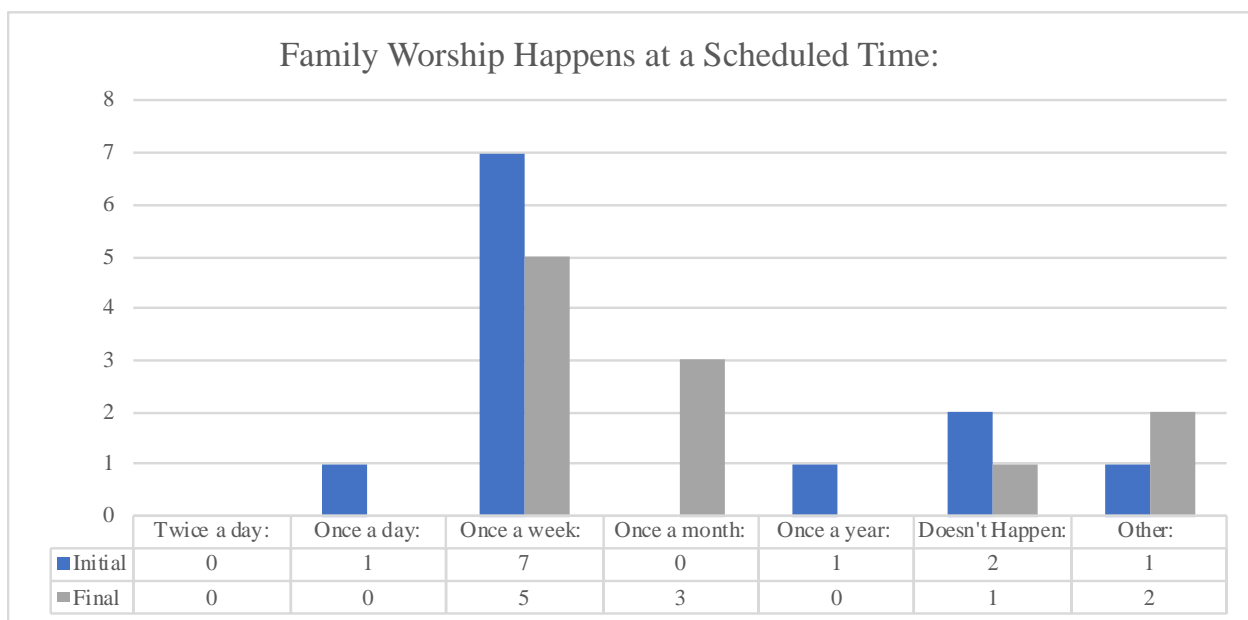
APPENDIX C

SPIRITUAL PRACTICES ASSESSMENT RESULTS



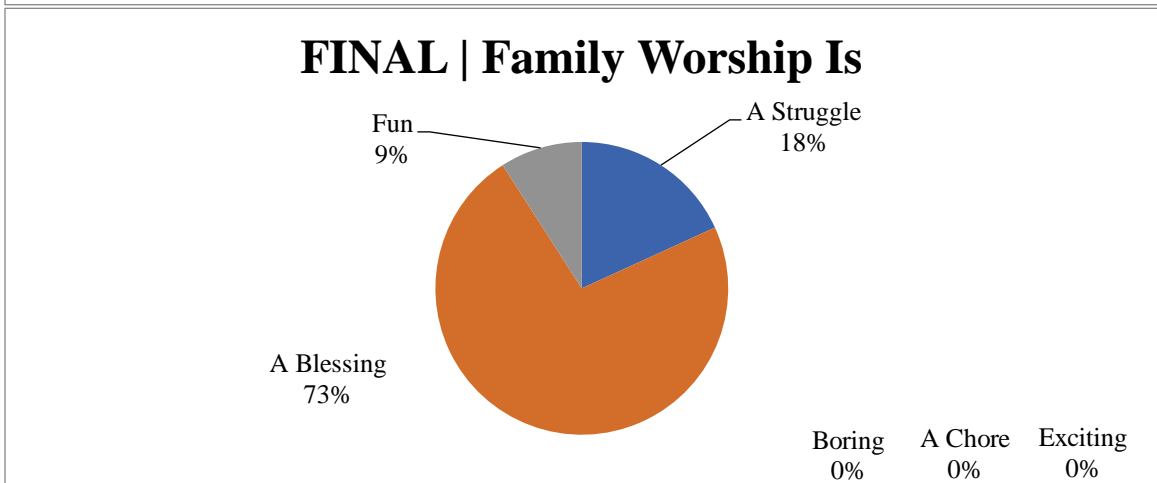
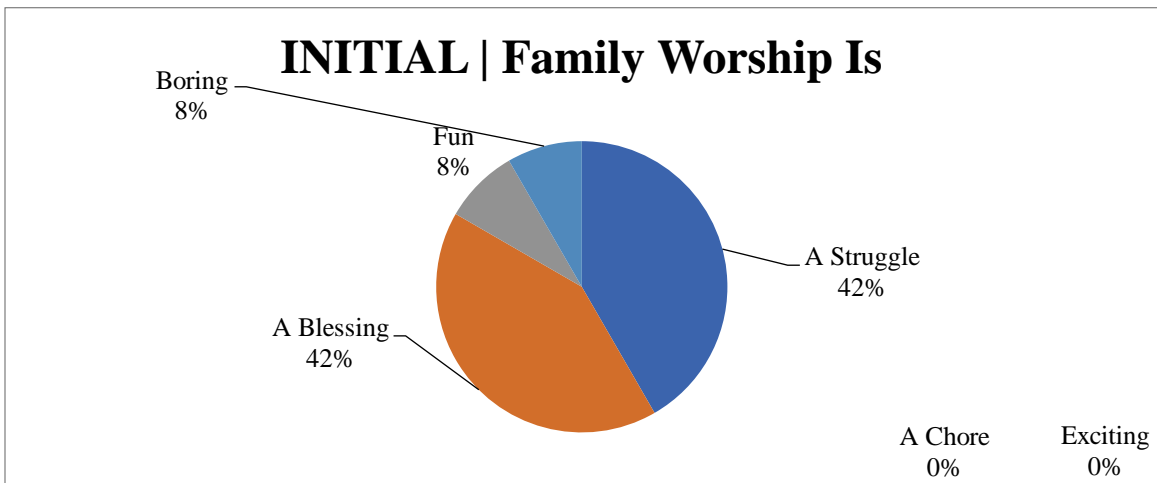
Question 2. Family worship happens at a scheduled time:

	Initial	Final
Once a day:	1 8%	0 0%
Twice a day:	0 0%	0 0%
Once a week:	7 58%	5 45%
Once a month:	0 0%	3 27%
Once a year:	1 8%	0 0%
Doesn't Happen:	2 17%	1 9%
Other:	1 8%	2 18%
RESPONSES:	12	11



Question 3. Family worship is:

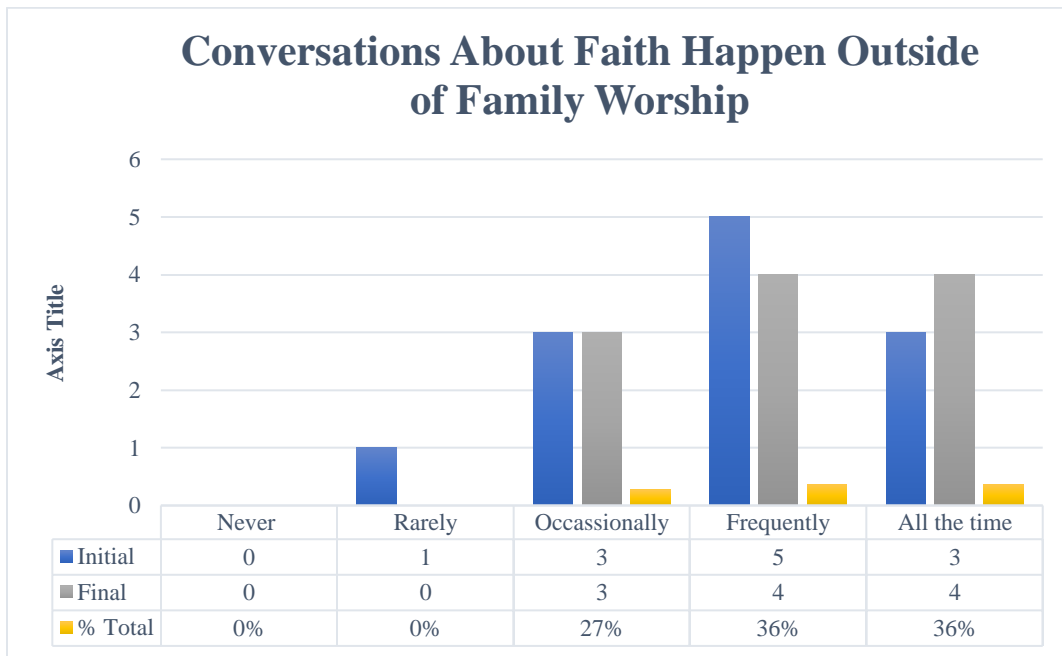
	Initial	Final
A Struggle	5 42%	2 18%
A Blessing	5 42%	8 73%
Fun	1 8%	1 9%
Exciting	0 0%	0 0%
Boring	1 8%	0 0%
A Chore	0 0%	0 0%
RESPONSES:	12	11



Question 4. Conversations about faith happen out of family worship:

	Initial	Final
Never	0 0%	0 0%
Rarely	1 8%	0 0%
Occasionally	3 25%	3 27%
Frequently	5 42%	4 36%
All the Time	3 25%	4 36%

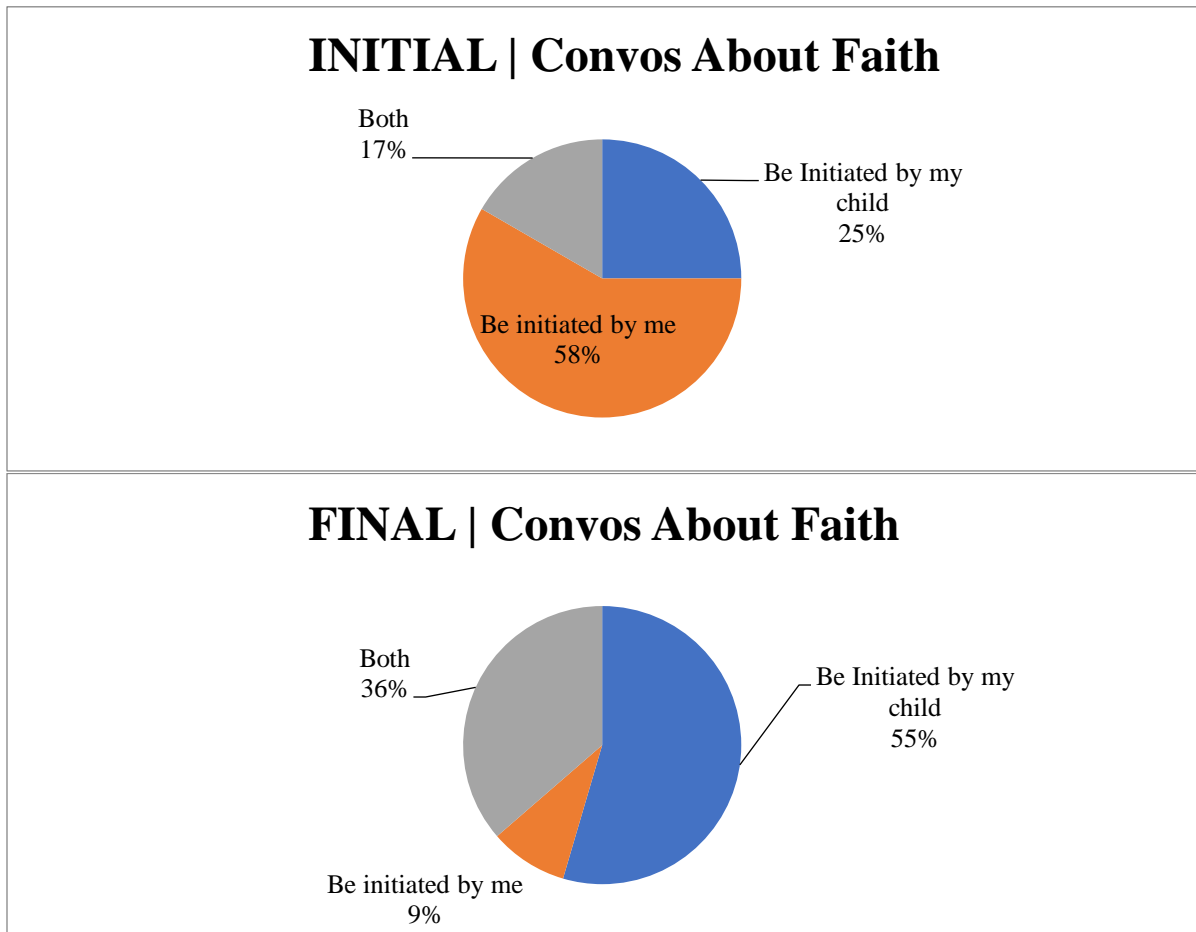
RESPONSES: 12 11



Question 5. Conversations about faith that happen outside of family worship are more likely to be initiated by:

	Initial	Final
My child	3 25%	6 55%
Me	7 58%	1 9%
Both*	2 17%	4 36%
RESPONSES:	12	11

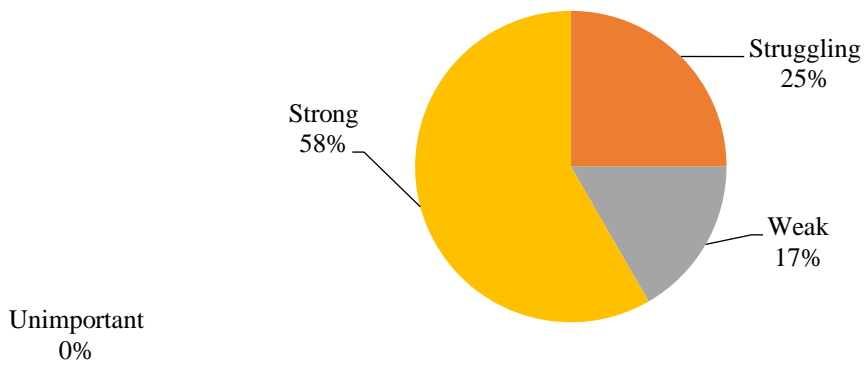
*Only two options were available but some respondents circled both.



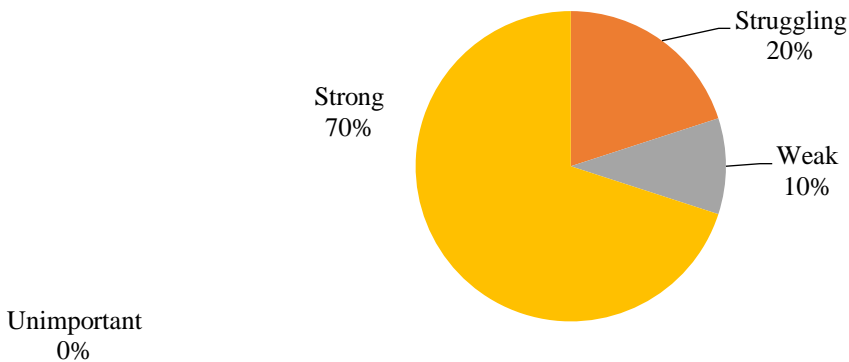
Question 6. My Bible knowledge is:

	Initial	Final
Unimportant	0 0%	0 0%
Struggling	3 25%	2 20%
Weak	2 17%	1 10%
Strong	7 58%	7 70%
RESPONSES:	12	10

INITIAL | My Bible Knowledge Is:



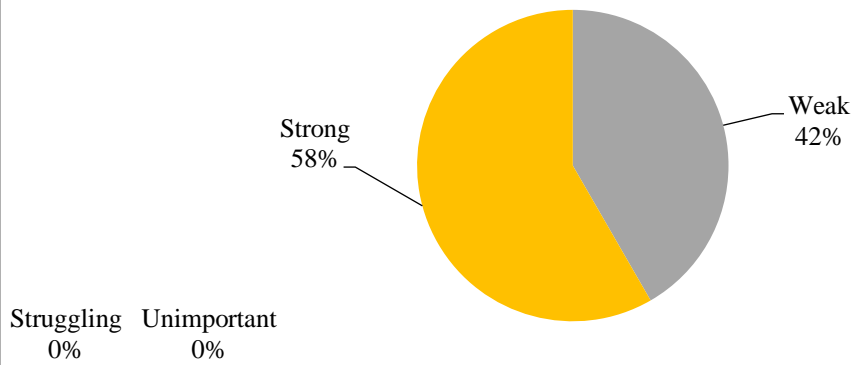
FINAL | My Bible Knowledge Is:



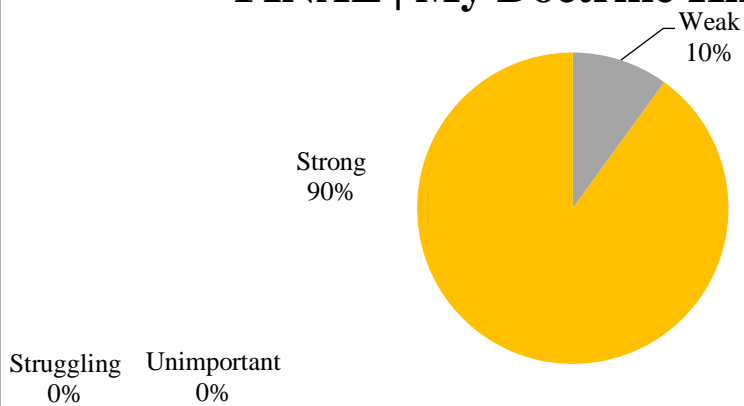
Question 7. My doctrine knowledge Is:

	Initial	Final
Unimportant	0 0%	0 0%
Struggling	0 0%	0 0%
Weak	5 42%	1 10%
Strong	7 58%	9 90%
TOTAL:	12	10

INITIAL | My Doctrine Knowledge Is:

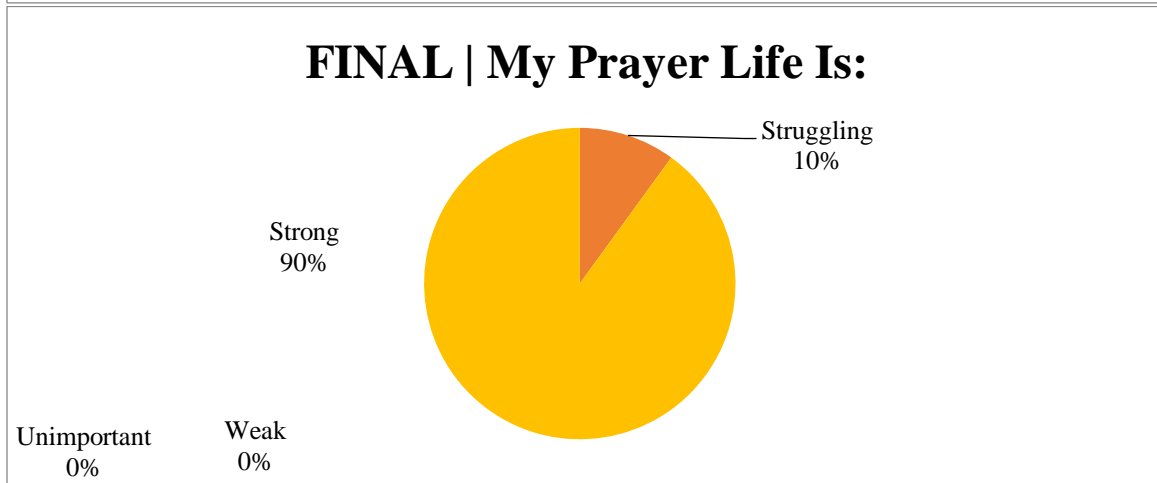
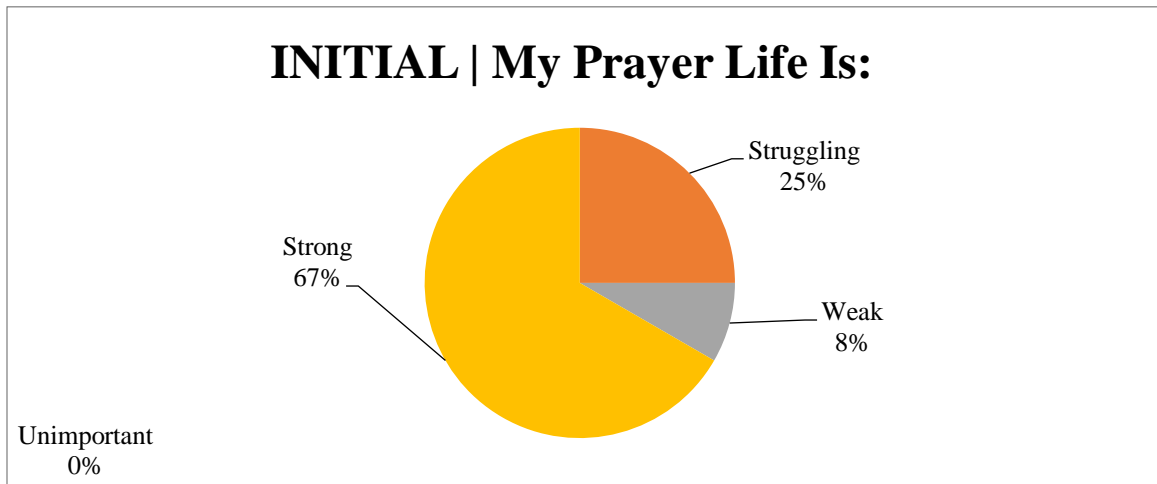


FINAL | My Doctrine Knowledge Is:



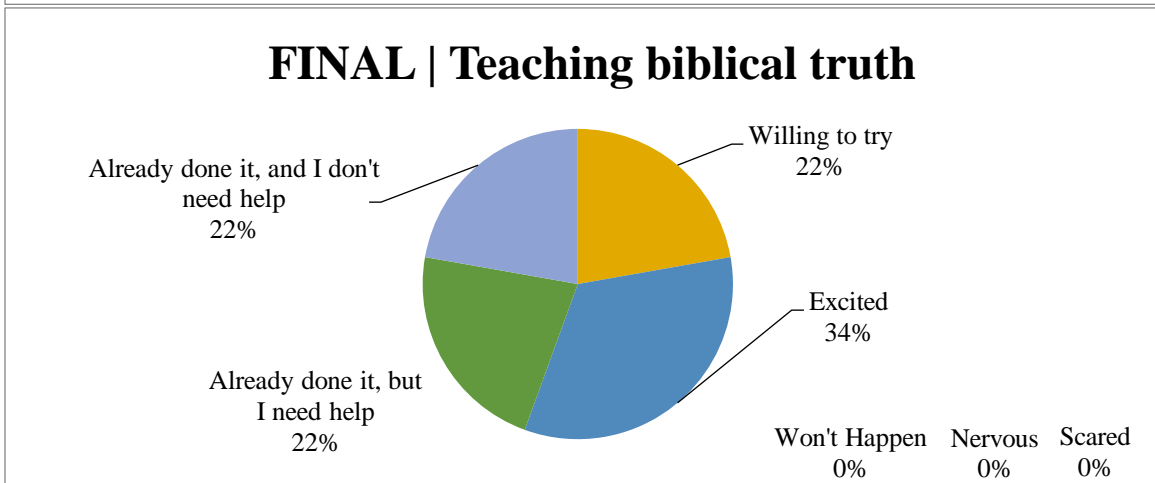
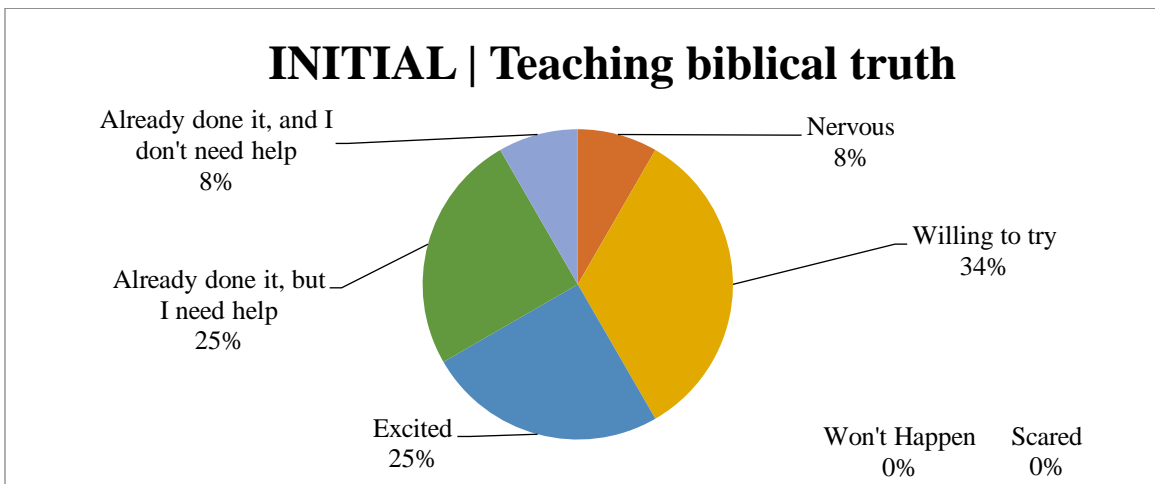
Question 8. My prayer life is:

	Initial	Final
Unimportant	0 0%	0 0%
Struggling	3 25%	1 10%
Weak	1 8%	0 0%
Strong	8 67%	9 90%
RESPONSES:	12	10



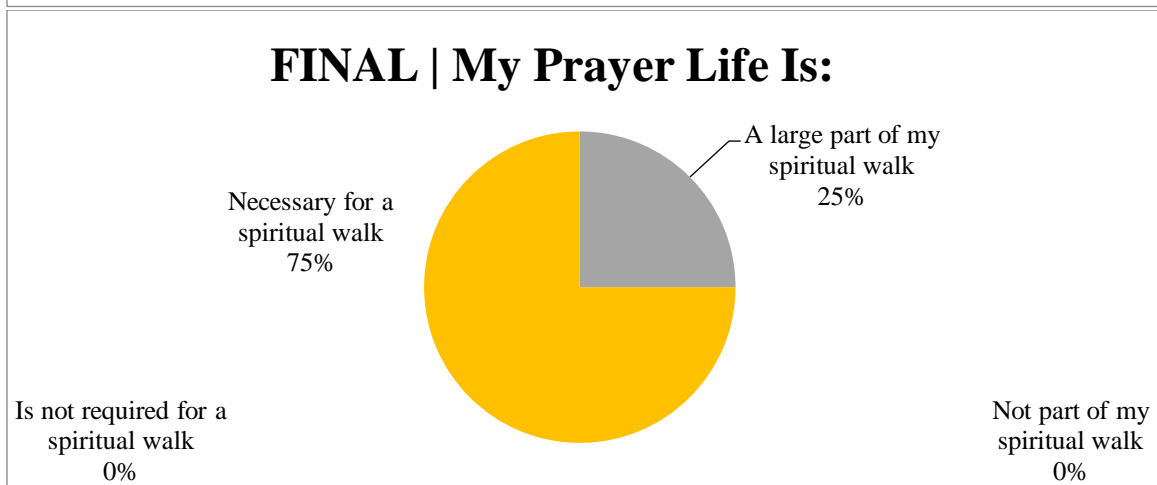
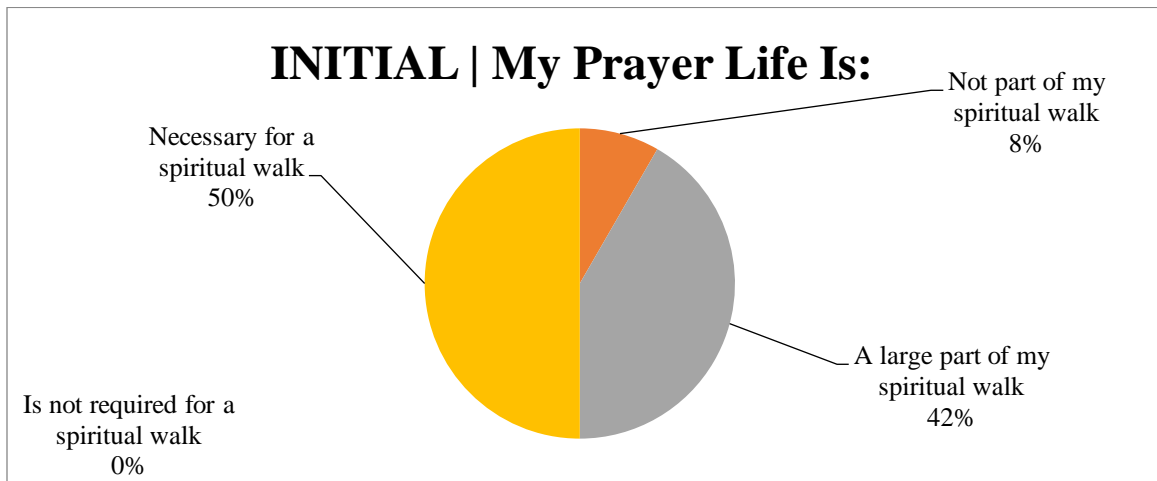
Question 9. How do you feel about teaching your child a biblical truth?

	Initial	Final
Won't Happen	0 0%	0 0%
Nervous	1 8%	0 0%
Scared	0 0%	0 0%
Willing to Try	4 33%	2 22%
Excited	3 25%	3 33%
Already done it, but I need help	3 25%	2 22%
Already done it, and I don't need help	1 8%	2 22%
RESPONSES:	12	9



Question 10. Community service is:

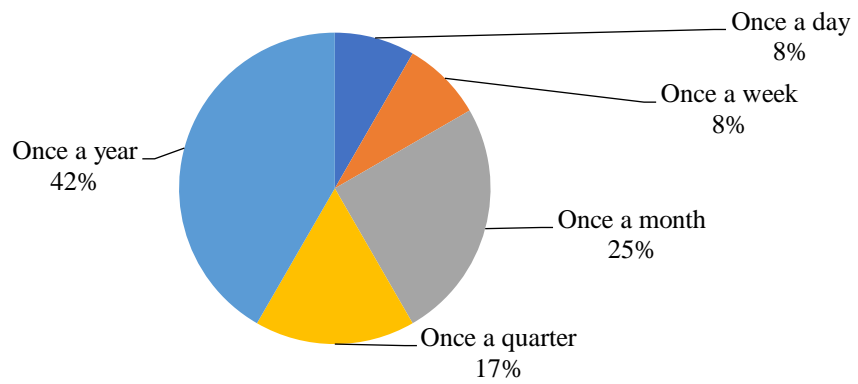
	Initial	Final
Not required for a spiritual walk	0 0%	0 0%
Not part of my spiritual walk	1 8%	0 0%
A large part of my spiritual walk	5 42%	2 25%
Necessary for a spiritual walk	6 50%	6 75%
RESPONSES:	12	8



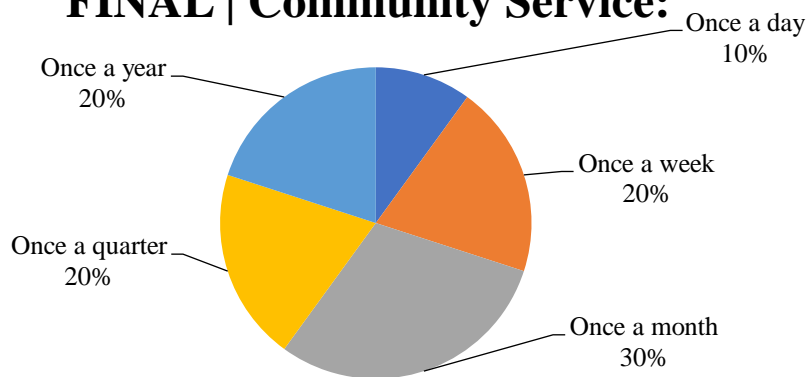
Question 11. Our family engages in community service:

	Initial	Final
Once a day	1 8%	1 10%
Once a week	1 8%	2 20%
Once a month	3 25%	3 30%
Once a quarter	2 17%	2 20%
Once a year	5 42%	2 20%
Total	12	10

INITIAL | Community Service:



FINAL | Community Service:



Question 12a. In regards to teaching children biblical truth, what role should the church play?

INITIAL INQUIRY #

RESPONSE

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| 1 | Providing opportunities to serve and connect with other Christians, engage in discussions that compliment what I'm already doing at home, demonstrate what Christianity can do when Christians come together to worship and serve |
| 2 | Support: possible how to; opportunities to youth to be involved; discussions among parents about raising kids |
| 3 | Teach <u>Biblical</u> rather than denominational truth—not always the same. |
| 4 | Provide helping materials; Provide a safe environment that fosters biblical truth |
| 5 | Reinforce bible knowledge and personal relationship with God |
| 6 | Important and Primary. I would like to do it but am lacking and rely on our children's grandfather to initiate teaching them. Therefore I also rely on the church. |
| 7 | Extremely important. The kids need teachers and quarterly information that can be follow at church by teachers and by parents at home; to have consistency. |
| 8 | Secondary to solidify what is being learned at home |
| 9 | Reconfirming the foundation learned at home |
| 10 | Build a community of friends that are like-minded in their search for God and love for Him. |
| 11 | Yes and be very close to the kids |
| 12 | Reinforce what was already taught at home and shed light on new ways to approach it. |

FINAL INQUIRY #	RESPONSE
1	Very important
2	Teaching foundational stories
3	Guides, provide resources
4	Community to practice faith
5	An important role but perhaps not primary
6	It should provide perspectives, challenges, and affirmation to what my family is/has already learned and on the journey
7	(No answer given)
8	Guiding/supportive
9	Be a guide
10	Sabbath school; encourage and empower parents; be a safe place for kids to ask questions
11	Opening mind to learn and question

Question 12b: In regards to teaching children biblical truth, what role does the church play?

INITIAL INQUIRY #	RESPONSE
1	I find that FHC plays an incredible role in my family's Christian lifestyle. FHC has made Christianity appealing and engaging.
2	A few opportunities; no how to for parents, especially nontraditional parents; no panel/small group discussions
3	Hospital church teach biblical truths. Other SDA churches teach denominational preference.
4	Not aware of any specific programs that addresses this issue
5	Yes
6	Yes. I feel my children engage and learn while involved in church activities.
7	For my son's age group; a pre-teen. I feel that the church is not providing enough.
8	Yes
9	Yes. It takes a village to raise a child and it's important to know not only is the family there but also the church. This will help them strengthen their bond with Christ.
10	It is doing a good job in my opinion.
11	Yes. They do often.
12	Help parents with tools to help children succeed in the spiritual journey.

FINAL INQUIRY #**RESPONSE**

1	Not as it should
2	Teaching foundational stories
3	Provide a safe environment to initiate talks
4	Yes
5	Until now it was primary with aid from other family members
6	It totally does. The social aspect of fellowship and worship is vital
7	(No answer given)
8	Yes
9	Provide tools to help guide our kids
10	Sabbath school lessons
11	Part of the circle

Question 13. What would make family worship better?

INITIAL INQUIRY #	RESPONSE
1	If there was better ideas in how to make it appealing to teens.
2	Ideas to make it fun for kids; ideas to help parents engage with kids
3	time and resources
4	Trials
5	Involving each member of family; addressing interests of each generation
6	We need dedicated time and “guide” for activities. We like to worship in nature and this is always feeling the squeeze of other activities
7	To get some lessons from pastors or examples on what to do.
8	If it were more fun
9	Consistency and finding a guide that all level of ages would enjoy
10	A stronger desire in me to <u>want</u> to do it
11	Be more positive about myself and encourage my kids to participate more.
12	More interesting and engaging material.

FINAL INQUIRY #**RESPONSE**

1	More materials for age appropriate
2	More age-appropriate resources (not only Adventist
3	Songs and interesting materials
4	Authentic participation everyone
5	Any visual aids/short essays or exercises like this series which is a means to starting more advanced discussions and asking of thought provoking questions
6	The ability to know how to make bible stories relevant
7	(No answer given)
8	We are doing well, thy miss their dad being a part
9	More resources
10	If I could sing
11	Time spent, questions

Question 14. What would strengthen your prayer life?

INITIAL INQUIRY #	RESPONSE
1	Perhaps having connected to other families with teens and a desire to go deeper in prayer life together.
2	? Not sure. I talk to God all the time
3	I don't know
4	Children's willingness to participate more
5	more time dedicated to prayer; honest conversation with God; Addressing actual situation
6	A concerted effort to make time to pray. Life gets in the way-but I see the importance especially in my teens.
7	Spending more time reading the Bible.
8	The ability to articulate my thoughts
9	Prayer without ceasing and understanding God is there through good and bad so leaning on him truly helps you through.
10	Accountability; knowledge about how to pray
11	Have a daily purpose and work on it
12	More unity as a family

FINAL INQUIRY #	RESPONSE
1	Daily devotion
2	I don't know
3	Time with God
4	Challenges and answered prayers
5	Regular times to promote a continuous dialogue to become and habit forming
6	To be surrounded by other young families on the same spiritual journey
7	(No answer given)
8	Seeing more things that I pray about manifest
9	Devoting more time to it
10	Making it more habitual
11	Find quiet time, read different resources

Question 15. What would increase your time in the Bible?

INITIAL INQUIRY #	RESPONSE
1	(No answer given)
2	Me making time to spend in the word. Tired from work, kids, always working to prepare for next day. When I have some free time wanting to lose myself in a TV show.
3	Guided study without skew to denominational slant.
4	A need for communion with God
5	Scheduled time; prioritizing
6	Being more familiar with it. It seems harder now because for some adults using electronics seems daunting to find things in it when I want to reference it. And the hard copy is cumbersome and "old fashioned." In truth, I rely a lot on the "Bible Story" books from my childhood to teach the kids and interest them. So easy to read and visuals pull me in.
7	Having a closer relationship with God, not the pastor, this way if I get personal calls or email encouraging me to do it, then I would do it.
8	If the bible were easier to understand
9	Scheduled time that isn't negotiable. Creating a habit the whole family can be involved with.
10	Intently reading every night or every other night with child.
11	Have a daily lesson to study
12	Disconnect from electronics

FINAL INQUIRY #**RESPONSE**

1	Separate special times through the week and be consistent with it
2	More time in the day
3	A structured plan
4	Practical use of Bible principles
5	Specific tasks to complete--goal oriented exercises to increase familiarity
6	(No answer given)
7	(No answer given)
8	Less time working
9	Devoting more time to it
10	Setting aside time; joining a Bible study
11	Ask

APPENDIX D

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The following was used for publication in any written forum (bulletin, weekly emails, monthly emails, website, text message, etc.):

Interested in baptism? Is your child interested in baptism? Pastor Greg will be starting baptismal preparation soon for those between the ages of 8-18! If interested in getting baptized or learning more about it, contact Pastor Greg using greg@hospitalchurch.org!

The following was a verbatim announcement spoken by various presenters as part of weekly services for Florida Hospital Church:

We will be having our baptismal preparation soon for those between the ages of 8-18. If interested in baptism or for more information, contact Pastor Greg (email on the screen) to find out more. The first session starts (date and time of first session). Be sure to contact him!

APPENDIX E

PARENT WELCOME LETTER

Dear Parent,

We live in a time of experts. We have incredible opportunities to get our children the best teachers, tutors, and coaches to help our children achieve their full potential. This is generally a great thing but sometimes the “experts” aren’t always what our children need.

Research done over the last several years is revealing that when it comes to matters of spirituality, our children need you, not someone trained in pastoral ministry. This came as a surprise to many pastors. What the research is also showing is that many of you feel ill equipped to handle matters of faith and tend to avoid those conversations with your children. The idea has long been that if parents get their kids to church and youth group everything should be alright. But that is not the case. Younger generations are leaving the church, and more importantly, their journey with Jesus, at a record pace.

This baptismal process, Journey With Jesus, is designed to put you back in the place God intended for you to be, the primary spiritual influence in the lives of your children. The truth is, you never left that post! Research shows that even with parents who are completely disconnected from spiritual conversations with their children, those children still consider mom and dad to be a stronger influence than the most engaged of pastors.

I want to take a moment to apologize to you. For a long time, Western Christianity told parents that the pastor should take care of spiritual nurture. We created events and didn’t invite you. We built walls between you and your children by saying you don’t understand. Instead of partnering with you, we pushed you to the outside. As a result, we have created generations of young people that are leaving the church. So what now?

Journey With Jesus is designed to facilitate conversation between parents and children through the context of baptism. This program is not a spiritual health silver bullet. But it does aim to resource parents to have conversations of spiritual matters. Journey With Jesus is a starting point to give parents the tools to continue the conversation by breaking down the walls of communication.

The status quo is unacceptable. Ordinarily the baptismal process involves the child meeting with the pastor, studying the Fundamental Beliefs, and then the pastor baptizes the child. Journey With Jesus puts the parent in the teaching seat. As a parent, you spend more time with your child than anyone else. Reggie Joiner from Think Orange has found that on average parents spend 3,000 hours a year with their child. The local

church spends about 40 hours a year. You have an awesome opportunity to do what God intended: constantly tell His story.

As God was giving instructions to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 6, he communicated that faith instruction should happen all the time in the context of the home: when you're walking, when you're sitting, when you're going to bed, when you're getting up! Those 3,000 hours a year will provide ample opportunity for those conversations!

Journey With Jesus is about recognizing the importance of the role that parents play and the church getting out of the way! The Journey With Jesus process seeks to give you the tools you're missing, or enhance the skills you already have to engage in conversations of faith with your children. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me using the below methods. I look forward as we embark on this Journey With Jesus together!

APPENDIX F

INTRODUCTION TO PARENTS

Thank you, families, for being a part of this. This is a serious departure from the way this has been done in the past. Today, is the beginning of a journey that we are so excited to take!

We recognize that this will require a little more from you. But we not only feel, but know from research, that your close involvement with your child through this process will deepen their faith in ways that far exceed the way it's been previously done. We can't do this without you. We ask for your support, which you've given by being here. We ask for your feedback as we go on this journey. We ask for your patience as we explore a ministry opportunity that, as far as we know, has never been done.

The Christian walk is a journey, because, well, you're walking! It starts with a knowledge of Christ and what He's done for us. It moves to a decision to follow Him. Baptism is the public declaration of that decision. For Adventists, the journey continues as we learn what it means to be a part of this faith tradition.

We are asking you to be a part of this study on baptism with your child. The next two weeks, parents, students and Greg will discuss together about baptism and what it means to make that decision. After that, we are asking you to continue the journey with your children by discussing with them what it means to be Adventist in ***your*** family. Adventist families have different ways of living their faith. Our pastoral team often discusses certain elements of Adventism and have different views. They're not wrong, they're how we interpret things. Your family has a way of interpreting things as well. We want you to have those discussions with your children about why you practice your faith the way you do. We don't want you to feel alone on this journey, we'll be there to help you. But we feel that these conversations need to happen in your family.

So, thank you for being here and for journeying with us. Let's pray together.

APPENDIX G

GROUP SESSION OUTLINES

Session 1

Overview: Session 1 the parents and children interested in baptism will start together in a room at Florida Hospital Church. We will open with prayer and an icebreaker that includes the group learning participants names and an attribute about themselves. After completing this, the researcher will separate the parents and children. The children will go with the designated supervisor to write questions to ask their parents about the parents baptism. Below is a list of sample questions the supervisor will use to help spur the children creativity.

- When were you baptized?
- Where were you baptized?
- Who baptized you?
- What did you learn during that time?
- What would you do the same?
- What would you do different?

During this time the researcher will have the parents take the Spiritual Practices Assessment. After starting the parents on the survey the researcher will leave so the parents can deposit the survey in an envelope to provide anonymity. The researcher will check in with the children compiling questions. When the researcher determines the children have exhausted their question list, the researcher will bring the children back to the parents. The children will then join their parents and sit in family groups. The children will then ask their parents the questions formulated in the other room. After the family groups have shared with researcher will address the entire room with the following questions. Due to the nature of a group discussion, other questions/comments may be presented by the group.

- Addressed to the children,
 - Did you learn anything new?
 - What stood out?
 - Did anything they say change your thoughts on baptism?
- Addressed to the parents
 - What did you wish they had asked?
 - What was it like telling your baptismal story to your kids who are interested in baptism?

At this point the researcher will walk through the Florida Hospital Church Baptism Primer found below.

- *Describe the spiritual journey that people take*
 - *The journey typically looks like:*
 - *Coming to a knowledge of God, Christ and his sacrifice*
 - *A desire to follow God*
 - *Baptism*
 - *Adventist membership*
 - *All of you are here because you have a knowledge of Christ and his sacrifice, you desire to follow him, and you want to make your decision to follow him publicly known through baptism.*
- *History of baptism in Judaism*
 - *What significance is there to baptism or water in Bible stories?*
 - *Have families think of as many OT stories about water and God's people*
 - *Noah Genesis 6-11*
 - *Moses and the Red Sea Exodus 14*
 - *Gideon Judges 7*
 - *Explanation from commentary*
 - *When Jews were being baptized by John in Jesus time, it was a recognition that their blood line would not save them.*
- *Meaning of baptism*
 - *What does baptism look like now after Christ's death and resurrection?*
 - *Ways that baptism is symbolic—Romans 6:3-7*
 - *Symbol of Christ's death and resurrection*
 - *Symbol of being dead to sin and alive to God Rom 6:3-4*
 - *Symbol of covenant relationship*
 - *Symbol of consecration to Christ's service*
 - *Symbol of entrance into the church Eph 4:5*
- *Qualifications for baptism*
 - *Faith Mark 16:16*
 - *Repentance Acts 2:38*
- *What baptism is and isn't*
 - *Is*
 - *Public declaration that says, "hey, I love Jesus and I want to be his friend forever"*
 - *Isn't*
 - *Assurance of Salvation*
 - *It doesn't cleanse your sins*
 - *A quick way to heaven*
- *Why be baptized?*
 - *For all the above reasons*
 - *Tell people what's up*
 - *Tell God what's up*

- *Jesus asked us to!*
 - *The Great Commission explanation*
 - *What do you think it means to be a disciple?*
- *A Disciple is someone who:*
 - **Submits to a teacher who teaches her how to follow Jesus*
 - *Learns Jesus' words*
 - *Learns Jesus' way of ministry*
 - *Imitates Jesus' life and character*
 - **Finds and teaches other disciples who also follow Jesus*
 - *We do the ones without the asterisk really well, but the first and last are the most difficult, if we ever even try.*
- *Eph 2:8-9*
- *Jesus has called us to do these things. But there is a prerequisite*
 - *John 6:28-29*
- *Spiritual Practices*
 - *We should treat spiritual practices like prayer, Bible study, etc. as tools we can use to get to know Jesus better. They don't save us, but they give us an opportunity to know Jesus better.*
 - *"A very helpful tool our church uses is Habits of a Child's Heart." (If parents don't already have a copy, distribute the book now)*

This is not about being perfect! This is about knowing Jesus!

At this point the groups will split again. The children will go with the designated supervisor to write questions they have about baptism. The supervisor will then take prayer requests and praises and pray with the group.

Parents will stay in the room and review Family Talk (FT) Sheets 1 (Discovering) and 2 (Believing) with the researcher using the below as a starting place for discussion.

- *Family Talk Sheet 1*
 - *As you read through FT 1, what stands out?*
 - *How do you define the gospel? Is it a definition your child will understand?*
 - *What do you need to talk with your child about this?*
 - *Any questions or comments?*
- *Family Talk Sheet 2*
 - *As you read through FT 2, what stands out?*
 - *What is faith? Is it a definition your child will understand?*
 - *Be prepared to share with your child a story from your life about a time you practiced faith.*
 - *Any questions or comments?*

Session 2

Overview: This session will be only with the parents. It will serve to debrief with parents how their discussions with their children went covering Family Talk Sheet 1 and 2, and to prepare for Family Talk Sheets 3 and 4. It will open with prayer and because it will be a dynamic group discussion, we will use the below as a starting point to debrief Family Talk Sheets 1 and 2. Other questions might be raised by the participants.

- How was your experience?
- Did your children understand the material?
- Did you struggle to explain anything?
- What successes did you see?
- Any other questions or comments?

We will then move to reviewing Family Talk Sheets 3 and 4 and because it will be a dynamic group discussion, we will use the below as a starting point.

- Family Talk Sheet 3
 - As you read through FT 3, what stands out?
 - How do you define sin?
 - What is repentance?
 - Idea in the Bible is that it literally means to do a U-turn!
 - Any questions or comments?
- Family Talk Sheet 4
 - As you read through FT 4, what stands out?
 - Who is the “neighbor” being talked about in the passage?
 - What other ways could you or your child spend time with God?
 - Any other questions or comments?

Session 3

Overview: This session will only be with the parents. It will serve to debrief Family Talk Sheets 3 and 4 and help parents develop a continued plan for spiritual growth and also determine church membership. It will open with prayer and because it will be a dynamic group discussion, we will use the below as a starting point to debrief Family Talk Sheets 3 and 4. Other questions might be raised by the participants.

- How was your experience?
- Did your children understand the material?
- Did you struggle to explain anything?
- What successes did you see?
- Any other questions or comments?

“What is your plan for spiritual growth for you and your child?”

“What is your plan for your child’s church membership?”

The answers to the above two questions will most likely differ for each family. Depending on their answers the researcher will work to help resource the families with their needs.

APPENDIX H

FAMILY TALK SHEETS

Family Talks

Discovering

Read 2 Timothy 3:15-17

1. Why is knowing Scripture good for you? (2 Timothy 3:15)

2. Who gave you the Bible? (2 Timothy 3:16) _____

3. What happens to you when you study the Bible? (2 Timothy 3:17)

How is the Bible described in these verses?

Hebrews 4:12 _____

Psalms 119:105 _____

Ephesians 6:14-17 _____

1. What is the Gospel? (Romans 1:16-17)

?

?

?

Christ-followers live by _____ (Romans 1:17)

?

2. According to the Scriptures, what are the most important things you should accept by faith? (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)

? ?

A. _____

?

?

B. _____

?

?

C. _____

?

?

3. Why was the good news about Jesus written in the Bible? (John 20:30-31)

?

?

?

Read the following Scriptures and fill in the promises that God makes to Christ-followers.

?

Acts 2:38-39 _____

?

?

John 3:16 _____

?

?

Acts 22:16 _____

?

?

Matthew 28:20 _____

?

?

2 Timothy 4:18 _____

?

?

Believing

1. What is faith? (Hebrews 11:1) _____

2. How do we obtain faith? (Romans 10:17) _____

3. Can I become a Christ-follower without faith?

Acts 16:31 _____

Mark 16:15-16 _____

Hebrews 11:6 _____

4. What must I believe to become a Christ-follower? (Matthew 16:16)

Jesus is _____

5. The Good News is . . . (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

Repenting

1. What is sin? (1 John 3:4) _____
2. Who has sinned? (Romans 3:23) _____
3. What does sin cost? (Romans 6:23) _____
4. What does it mean to repent?
(2 Corinthians 7:10) _____ brings repentance.

(Acts 3:19) Repent and _____
5. Is it absolutely necessary that I repent? (Acts 2:38) _____

Do a U-turn!

Read 1 John 1:8-10

6. When should I repent? (1 John 1:9) _____
 7. Will I sin again after I repent? (1 John 1:10) _____
 8. What are you saying about God if you claim that you never sin?
(1 John 1:10) _____
-

Growing

Read Matthew 22:34-40

1. What is the greatest commandment of all? (Matthew 22:37)

“ _____ the _____ your _____ with all
your _____ and with all your _____ and
with all your _____.”

2. And the second is like it: (Matthew 22:39)

“ _____ your _____ as _____.”

When we love someone, we spend time with them. Here are some ways you could spend time with God every day.

Reading the Bible

Praying

Talking to others about Him

Serving

Memorizing Bible verses

Worshipping with song

Appreciating His Creation

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