Liberty University School of Divinity

An Examination Of the Parental Role In the Discipleship Of Children

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by

Robert B. Jarman

Lynchburg, Virginia

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Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

Thesis Project Report Approval Sheet

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Dr. Dan L. Burrell, Ed.D
Associate Professor/Instructional Mentor

_____
Dr. David Babbitt, Ed.D
Adjunct Faculty

THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT REPORT ABSTRACT
Robert B. Jarman
Liberty University School of Divinity, 2024
Mentor: Dr. Dan L. Burrell

Parents have an enormous role in the lives of their children. They are responsible for all aspects of their children's development to prepare them to manage adulthood successfully. Parents invest much of their time in many important areas of the home, yet regarding discipleship, they will often pass on that responsibility to others or neglect it altogether. The danger of a lack of discipleship in the home is that it can potentially contribute to the growing trend of young adults leaving the faith. This thesis project examines the Biblical mandate for parents discipling their children, the reasons for parents not discipling their children, the priority given to discipleship compared to other aspects of the home, and how the presence or lack of discipleship impacts a young adult's current spiritual life. Research was conducted through an anonymous online survey to understand the impact of discipleship in the home on a young adult's spiritual experience. The goal of this research is to help bring awareness to parents of their responsibility for discipling their children and to challenge the local church to come alongside parents in this responsibility.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Every four years, the world bears witness to the peak of human performance through the

Olympic Games. These games showcase the very best in athleticism and the results of years of

hard work. Although these amazing feats are on stage for two weeks, the journey begins many

years prior to the competition. According to a 2008 Forbes article, "In fact, while there are

exceptions, coaches and trainers say it's common for athletes to invest four to eight years training

in a sport before making an Olympic team."[1] Pursuing an opportunity to participate in the

Olympic Games begins with a sincere commitment to train and prepare to qualify for your sport.

Athletes that assume the Olympic training schedule know that their entire life focuses on

training. Quinn McDowell adds, "For elite athletes, the chance to compete in the world's greatest

athletic competition carries an enormous cost. This cost is exacted over decades of training,

sacrifice, and diligent preparation for a brief moment of competition that will occur many years

in the future. By the time most athletes get the chance to compete in the Summer Games, they

have invested between 10,000-15,000 hours in perfecting their craft."[2] For athletes to reach the

highest level of success, they must endure the years of training that prepares them for

competition. The purpose of this training is to condition the competitor's bodies and minds to

perform at near perfection. This training can best be described as a marathon, as it takes an

enormous amount of time and repetition. In addition, training for the Olympics must include the

feedback given by coaches and trainers. With an insurmountable task ahead, having a trainer or

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[1] "How to Train Like an Olympian," Forbes, last modified July 8, 2008,
https://www.forbes.com/2008/07/08/training-perfect-athlete-olympics08-forbeslife-
cx_avd_0708health.html#648eba6479c1.

[2] Quinn McDowell, "What It Takes To Be An Elite Athlete," *Athletes in Action*,
https://athletesinaction.org/articles/what-it-takes-to-be-an-elite-athlete/.

coach available allows athletes to navigate through the training process successfully. There is a steep price that athletes must pay to compete and win at the Olympic games.

Just as training is valuable for the athlete preparing for the Olympic games, training becomes necessary in the life of a Christian. At the point of conversion, the Christian begins a journey of spiritual growth and development into a mature follower of Jesus Christ. The vehicle in which this is carried out, according to Scripture, is the process of discipleship. Discipleship impacts people of all ages, especially during the formative years of adolescence. It is during this crucial time that teenagers assimilate the good (and sometimes bad) habits that will drive the rest of their lives. During this time, it is also an opportunity for parents to become involved in that process. Dennis and Barbara Rainey say that "Everyday life is full of opportune moments for teaching. Conversations about bullying, attitudes towards teachers or neighbors, people who are hard to like, siblings who constantly get in each other's stuff, and a thousand other realities present themselves daily."[3] The importance of discipleship begs for a closer examination into what the opportune moments of spiritual development mean for teenagers and what role parents have in facilitating them.

Ministry Context

Youth discipleship can be described as a ministry unto parents. Parents hold a unique position in the life of their children. The responsibility that parents have for their children cannot be understated. In fact, Paul David Tripp adds that "Parents have unique opportunities to instruct their children, opportunities no one else will have, because parents live with them."[4] The

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[3] Dennis Rainey and Barbara Rainey, *The Art of Parenting: Aiming Your Child's Heart Toward God* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2018), 119.

[4] Paul David Tripp, *Age of Opportunity: A Biblical Guide to Parenting Teens* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1997), 41.

proximity of parents to their children creates a starting point for a discussion on discipleship. The role of a parent in the well-being of their children suggests that this discipleship would include spiritual matters. The general concern for the well-being of their children leads parents to provide opportunities and resources to aid in their growth and success. George Barna describes the goal of parents as, "We want them to be happy, safe, comfortable, good citizens, educated, religious, and fulfilling their potential."[5] Christian Smith also describes the central job of parenting as "to prepare and equip their children not only to enjoy all that is good in life but also to successfully navigate, endure and overcome difficulties in their personal life journeys in the world."[6] This desire for the success of their children often leads to conflicting priorities. Usually backed with good intentions, parents devote their time and resources to preparing their children for future opportunities. Timothy Paul Jones notes that "parents in our community tended to push their children into high-stress combinations of college preparatory courses, extracurricular activities, and specialized sports programs."[7] Social trends shows that even their parenting style reflects this tension, as "a parent tends to stick to their guns too much or give in too quickly, praise or criticize their children too much, be overprotective or give too much freedom, and push their children too hard or not hard enough."[8]

With a desire to see their children succeed in areas of academics, sports, or other extra-curricular activities, Christian parents typically try not to neglect the spiritual development of

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[5] George Barna, *Revolutionary Parenting: What the Research Shows Really Works* (Carol Stream: Barna Books, 2007), 4.

[6] Christian Smith, Bridget Ritz, and Michael Rotolo, *Religious Parenting: Transmitting Faith and Values in Contemporary America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 118.

[7] Timothy Paul Jones, ed., *Perspectives on Family Ministry: Three Views* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2009), 147.

[8] Rachel Minkin and Juliana Menasce Horowitz, "Parenting in America Today," *Pew Research Center*, January 24, 2023, https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2023/01/24/parenting-in-america-today/.

their children. Parents will often connect their children to programs and ministries within the local church. They rely on Sunday School and youth groups to help disciple their children. At one extreme, some Christian parents may "assume that by bringing their children to church, the discipleship of their children will just happen automatically," while other Christian parents play a more active role in their spiritual development.[9] Youth ministry leaders encounter what Jonathan Mansur describes as a "Spectrum for Parent Involvement" that range from "Absent Parents to Equipped Parents."[10] Each parent brings with them a certain understanding of discipleship and their own expectations for discipling their children.

Indeed, parents will vary in their understanding of the discipleship process as well as what their role is in it. On the one hand, there are some Christian parents who believe that the youth leader is responsible for the discipleship of their children. "Seven in 10 parents whose teen regularly attends youth group say they have a 'major expectation' that their youth pastor is 'discipling teens' (72%)."[11] On the other hand, there are some Christian parents who do believe it is their responsibility to disciple their children, but do not follow through. Donald Whitney reports that "Eighty-five percent of parents with children under age 13 believe they have primary responsibility for teaching their children about religious beliefs and spiritual matters. However, a majority of parents don't spend any time during a typical week discussing religious matters or studying religious materials with their children."[12] It is common that Christian parents have the intention and even the desire to be involved in the discipleship of their children, but taking action

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[9] Chap Bettis, *The Disciple-Making Parent: A Comprehensive Guidebook for Raising Your Children to Love and Follow Jesus Christ* (Diamond Hill Publishing, 2016), 16.

[10] "4 Types of Parental Involvement in Student Ministry," The Gospel Coalition, last updated July 13, 2015, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/4-types-parental-involvement-student-ministry/.

[11] "Pastors and Parents Differ on Youth Ministry Goals," Barna, last updated March 22, 2017, https://www.barna.com/research/pastors-parents-differ-youth-ministry-goals/.

[12] Donald S. Whitney, *Family Worship* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), 13.

is more challenging than expected. At the onset, Christian parents show that they are concerned. According to research conducted by Barna, "when asked how concerned they are about their children's faith formation, nearly three-quarters of American parents said they were at least somewhat concerned."[13] Some of the lack of action may stem from not understanding the importance of discipling their children or knowing how to practically apply discipleship into their home life. In some cases, some Christian parents may struggle with discipling their children because they "are struggling with their own faith development."[14] Thus, most Christian parents may see the youth group as the best option to disciple their children.

As noted above, while some Christian parents believe that the responsibility of discipling their children falls on youth leaders, this idea may originate from their own lack of confidence in their ability to disciple their children. Voddie Baucham Jr. states that "So many parents think they don't have enough Bible knowledge to teach their children."[15] Many Christian parents buy into this idea and pass on the responsibility to "trained professionals." There may be Christian parents who simply are not confident enough, but still attempt to disciple their children. On the other hand, the lack of confidence may come from some Christian parents not being discipled themselves. Paul David Tripp adds, "There is another reason why parents fail to prepare their children well for the wisdom decisions they will face as they leave home. It is, sadly, that many parents simply do not have a fluid, functional, situationally applicable knowledge of Scripture

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[13] "How Concerned Are Christian Parents About Their Children's Faith Formation?" Barna, last updated March 30, 2022, https://www.barna.com/research/christian-parents-concerns/.

[14] "Parents Accept Responsibility for Their Child's Spiritual Development But Struggle with Effectiveness," Barna, last updated May 6, 2003, https://www.barna.com/research/parents-accept-responsibility-for-their-childs-spiritual-development-but-struggle-with-effectiveness/.

[15] Voddie Baucham Jr., *Family Driven Faith: Doing What It Takes To Raise Sons and Daughters Who Walk With God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), 95.

themselves."[16] Clearly, Christian parents have a myriad of reasons for why they do not disciple their children. Some of these reasons come from their own ability or lack thereof, while others are impacted by competing priorities.

The local church therefore has an incredible ministry opportunity to help parents disciple their children. A common strategy for youth ministries is to partner with parents to help facilitate discipleship at home. Youth leaders have devoted more attention to connecting with parents and equipping them with the tools to disciple their children. Christian parents need these tools and training so that "fathers and mothers can build discipleship into their children's daily lives."[17] Youth ministries partnering with parents helps parents understand the influence they have on their children. Michelle Anthony and Megan Marshman add that "Parents don't automatically know how to do it, so the church ministry is a resource equipping parents to do their job along the way."[18] Christian parents now have more intentional support from the local church for leading discipleship in the home. As with anything else, it is up to the parents to take advantage of these resources to incorporate discipleship in the home. With many pressures in life, parents are required to make the discipleship of their children a priority to make it a reality.

Most Christian parents are well intentioned and desire the best for their children. Due to the complexities of life, Christian parents are forced to retain support from others, sometimes in order to survive. Parents need to understand the importance of their role in discipleship and how they have been called to the task. Jim Burns and Mike DeVries make an important observation that, "Long after students stop attending youth groups, they are still connected to their

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[16] Tripp, *Age of Opportunity*, 130-131.

[17] Jones, *Perspectives on Family Ministry,* 126.

[18] Michelle Anthony and Megan Marshman, *7 Family Ministry Essentials: A Strategy for Culture Change in Children's and Student Ministries* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2015), 38.

families."[19] Therefore, building up parents (and families) will be paramount in establishing discipleship in the home.

Problem Presented

You will find growing youth ministries and programs for kids of all ages in many churches. It may appear that there are plenty of resources devoted to teenagers and their families. However, David Kinnaman identifies an important reality: "Teen church engagement remains robust, but many of the enthusiastic teens so common in North American churches are not growing up to be faithful young adult disciples of Christ."[20] While some can point to the type of programs that are being offered in churches, the more appropriate question is: what is happening outside of the church? Specifically, what is happening in the home? Kinnaman further comments on the "dropout problem" with an alarming "43 percent drop-off between the teen and early adult years in terms of church engagement."[21] Teenagers are stepping out into the real world without the tools or training to cultivate their personal faith. While church engagement is not the only indicator, it primes the discussion for why young adults are walking away from the faith.

Anyone would agree that an individual's personal faith does not develop on its own; rather, it takes an investment of time. If young adults are leaving the faith at alarming rates, what type of investment was made in their lives? Were they prepared to enter adulthood with the tools needed to personally grow in their faith? Since the home is where most teenagers spend most of their time, it is a good place to start. The problem this thesis project will address is that parents do not understand the importance of discipling their children, therefore are not discipling their

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[19] Jim Burns and Mike DeVries, *Partnering With Parents In Youth Ministry: The Practical Guide To Today's Family-Based Youth Ministry* (Gospel Light, 2003), 13.

[20] David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church...and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 15. Accessed October 15, 2021. ProQuest Ebook Central.

[21] Ibid., 16.

children at home. This project will analyze why parents are not discipling their children and what outcomes can be expected. Timothy Paul Jones said it well that "the overwhelming majority of Christian parents are not activity engaged in any sort of battle for their children's souls. When it comes to the process of discipling their progeny, most Christian parents—especially fathers—have abandoned the field."[22]

Purpose Statement

There is an important connection between parents and the spiritual development of their children. While the physical, social, and emotional development of their children are critical, the spiritual development will set them on a trajectory for either an authentic, thriving, personal faith, or one that begins to dissolve when the world overwhelms them. Paul David Tripp describes the crux of the entire issue: "All of this leads to the fact that lost people are a danger to themselves, and because they are, they are headed for destruction--although they probably don't know it. The danger that makes parenting both essential and difficult lives inside your child, not outside them."[23] Parents who can prepare their children for the danger that lies ahead will set them up for success.

Examining the parents' role in discipleship is an opportunity to identify the reasons why they do not disciple their children at home and what strategies can help establish a discipleship culture in the home. The problem of parents not discipling their children at home has serious implications. Voddie Baucham Jr. addresses the importance of multi-generational faithfulness when it pertains to discipleship in the home. He says, "Discipleship and multi-generational

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[22] Timothy Paul Jones, *Family Ministry Guide: How Your Church Can Equip Parents to Make Disciples* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2011), 301.

[23] Paul David Tripp, *Parenting: The 14 Gospel Principles That Can Radically Change Your Family* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), 105.

faithfulness begins and ends at home. At best, the church is to play a supporting role as it 'equips the saints for the work of ministry' (Eph 4:12, English Standard Version)."[24] When the importance of discipleship is not passed on to the next generation, families become lost. If the problem of parents not discipling their children can be understood more clearly, then the local church can engage families with more intention and address the reasons for not taking on the responsibility.

When parents disciple their children, the benefits can be felt for generations. Families can have the example of what LeRoy Elms describes as "The great hallmark of men and women of God through the ages has been their close walk and intimacy with Jesus Christ."[25] Parents who understand their role in discipling their children can help continue a legacy of faithfulness that will continue in with their children and their grandchildren. When parents understand the value of this legacy, they will look at their family priorities differently.

A tangible benefit of parents spiritually discipling their children would be a stirring up of their own faith. Spiritual discipleship becomes a journey that parents and their children take together. Parents begin to see the true nature of their role in discipleship. Ted Tripp makes this distinction by saying, "If authority best describes the parent's relationship to the child, the best description of the activity of the parent to the child is shepherding. The parent is the child's guide."[26] When parents recognize the impact of their role as a discipler, there is a potential for the relationship to change. In some situations, what was once strained can turn to new trust established. In other ways, relationships between parents and children can reach new depths. While the outcomes are never guaranteed, Cameron Lee shows the inevitable: "Parents must be

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[24] Baucham Jr., *Family Driven Faith*, 9.

[25] LeRoy Elms, *The Lost Art of Disciple Making* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 67

[26] Ted Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart* (Wapwallopen: Shepherd Press, 2005), 150.

taught that the discipleship relation is not optional. Children are the disciples of their parents, for better or worse. Parents teach by word or example through every interaction with their children, whether they do so intentionally or not."[27] The opportunity here is that parents can invest good into their relationship through discipleship. When parents are intentional with discipling their children, the benefit is that it plants the seed for the Holy Spirit to change hearts.

Another benefit that can be seen through this examination is a further awareness of the opportunity that the local church has in partnering with parents throughout this process. Parenting itself can be daunting at times, and having a strong support system can only benefit parents. The local church contains resources that parents need to disciple their children effectively. Parents can connect with other parents who have already navigated through the discipleship process with their children. At the same time, they can find other parents who are experiencing similar stages. The local church can create environments that facilitate community among families, specific training for parents, and a focus on equipping for family discipleship. The local church should engage in "equipping and supporting parents in making their home the center for their children's spiritual growth."[28] Only then will families be strengthened and equipped to engage the world for Jesus Christ.

Additionally, by addressing the reasons for why parents do not disciple their children, there will be an opportunity to set the course for parents to assume ownership for this responsibility. Identifying the problem upfront is a good first step toward addressing the problem. As parents act towards implementing discipleship in their home, the desired outcome is parents growing in their confidence. Parents who are more confident in discipling their children

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[27] Cameron Lee, "Parenting as Discipleship: A Contextual Motif for Christian Parent Education," *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 19, no. 3 (Fall 1991): 268–77.

[28] Jones, *Perspectives on Family Ministry,* 161.

will be more engaged in the process. As children eventually graduate from high school and step into the real world, parents will realize the impact their investment has made. Greg Ogden adds, "God's ideal is that children mature to the point where they and their parents empower each other. Mutuality marks the stage of maturity. Parents get to the point where they can learn from their children."[29]

Basic Assumptions

When exploring the value of parents discipling their children, basic assumptions can be made from experiences in ministry as well as information available on the topic. These basic assumptions serve as a starting point for understanding the importance of the parental role in the discipleship of the family. It can also be assumed that these presuppositions led the way to this thesis project. Nevertheless, it is important to understand these assumptions of why parents do not disciple their children and begin to develop a course of action.

At the onset, it can be assumed that parents generally believe that the responsibility of discipling their children falls on the youth pastor or trained professionals. It could be the perspective of many parents that (youth) pastors have both the training and the calling to shepherd their children and help develop them spiritually. Parents do not realize that discipling someone does not require formal training or a specific position. However, parents who feel unqualified will consult the help of others. Timothy Paul Jones adds, ""From the perspective of too many parents, schoolteachers are responsible to grow their children's minds, coaches are employed to train their bodies, and specialized ministers at church ought to develop their souls."[30] Parents may feel that they are unable to contribute to these areas, so they divert that

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[29] Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 108.

[30] Jones, *Perspectives on Family Ministry,* 23.

responsibility to someone else. Parents may have a certain idea of what is needed to disciple their children and may not understand what they can contribute to the process. For the purpose of this thesis project, understanding these perspectives will allow the researcher to determine ways to clarify the parent's role in the discipleship of their children and reinforce the importance of their part in this process.

Additionally, while some parents feel unqualified to disciple their children and even pass on the responsibility to trained professionals, this research assumes that some parents do not disciple their children because they do not believe it is a priority. George Barna makes a significant observation into the priorities that parents have for their children. He says, "Living in a culture that esteems achievement and speed, parents naturally want to hurry the development of their offspring."[31] It is important to recognize that most parents will set priorities for their children based on what can lead to success. Parents may inadvertently create expectations for areas such as academics, sports, and other pursuits that put spiritual matters towards the bottom of those priorities. Understanding how parents set these priorities may reveal what type of value that parents place on the discipleship of their children. In some cases, the priority of discipleship in the home may be seen by some parents as outside of their responsibility. It can be assumed that there are some situations where discipleship is not on the list of priorities. During this thesis project, it will be helpful to focus on the importance and value of parents discipling their children. Addressing the heart of this issue will help make the practical side of discipleship in the home easier to do.

When exploring a topic such as parents discipling their children, it can be easy to assume that there is a formula or twelve step solution to address the problem. This thesis project will

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[31] Barna, *Revolutionary Parenting*, 44.

launch with the idea that the Holy Spirit is responsible for changing hearts and nothing a parent

can do will guarantee a certain outcome. It can be assumed that parents who provide everything

to disciple their children will yield young adults who will continue to pursue God on their own.

Yet, the reality is that every family will experience a different outcome. Understanding this

reality during this thesis project will help create the proper expectations and perspective for

parents as they disciple their children. The proper approach would be how to focus the parent's

attention on God's power to transform, rather than on a specific method they can use to affect

change.

Definitions

Understanding what discipleship means will help provide the context for the results of the

disciple-making process. The concept of *discipleship* is foundational for understanding how it

applies to parents discipling their children. Bill Hull defined discipleship as more than a

momentary event, but rather the lifelong process of becoming a disciple.[32] Discipleship is also

considered to be the outcome of who a person is and not only what they do.[33] A true mark of a

disciple will be seen in the type of person they become. Parents can see the evidence of the

discipleship process in their child through what is produced in their child's life. It is critical to

understand that discipleship cannot be fully realized within the scope of this research project but

instead over the lifetime of the disciple.

While discipleship is defined as the process by which Christians become more like Jesus

Christ, it can be applied within the family context. When discipleship is implemented within the

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[32] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 34, Kindle.

[33] John Koessler, *True Discipleship: The Art of Following Jesus* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003), 12, Kindle.

home, it is understood differently. The term "family discipleship" will be used to describe the

discipleship routines that take place within a home. Matt Chandler and Adam Griffin define the

process as: "Put simply, family discipleship is leading your home by doing whatever you can

whenever you can to help your family become friends and followers of Jesus Christ."[34] Family

discipleship becomes the discipleship process that takes place between parents and their children.

At the same time, family discipleship refers to the routines that are established which help

children develop the character of a spiritually mature Christian.

Another term that will be used in this research project will be "parent" or "parents,"

which will be defined as anyone who is the legal guardian of the participant associated with this

research project, whether understood as traditional or non-traditional parents. Traditional parents

include a biological father and mother who are married. Non-traditional parents may include

grandparents, single parents (father or mother), adopted parents, or a legal guardian. The type of

parent involved may be an influencing factor in the discipleship process. It is important to

remember that there are a variety of familial structures that include non-traditional parents. Both

traditional and non-traditional parents have their unique influences on the discipleship of

children.

Additionally, a common term that has been used interchangeably with discipleship is

mentoring. It is important to clarify the difference between mentoring and discipling. While both

terms share similar meanings, the term *discipling* will be the focus of this discussion. Jim Burns

and Mike DeVries indicated that discipleship is a relationship that involves transferring what

God has given you to someone else who will then repeat the process; whereas mentoring may not

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[34] Matt Chandler and Adam Griffin, *Family Discipleship: Leading Your Home Through Time, Moments, and Milestones* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020), 30.

continue past the mentee.[35] The important difference here is that in the disciple-making process, the expectation is that the disciple will proceed to making disciples. This end goal of discipleship is the multiplication of disciples being made. Mentoring implies that the benefit remains with the mentee and is not necessarily passed on.

Finally, the term *discipleship engagement* will be used to describe the specific ways that a parent engages their children for the purposes of discipleship. There is no definitive method for parents to engage their children, but there are common practices that are universally accepted. Discipleship engagement can also be understood as the routine in which parents have established to engage their children with spiritual matters. Some examples may include mealtime prayers, family devotions, one-on-one conversations, etc. These practices can be specific to the family and the frequency is determined by what fits the family rhythms. George Barna adds, "One of the idiosyncrasies of these families is that they tend to delve into faith matters as a family unit."[36] In some ways, discipleship engagements can take place during normal family activities.

Limitations

To fully understand the impact that parents have when discipling their children, a significant amount of time is needed to explore all factors of a child's experience with family discipleship. It would be difficult to explore all aspects of a child's experience in a brief research project. Discipleship is not a short-term program, instead, it is a life-long endeavor. Ted Tripp describes the scope that parents should view the discipleship of their children, saying, "You must be a person of long-term vision. You must see your children's need for shepherding, not simply in terms of the here and now, but in terms of long-range vision."[37] With a long-term duration for

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[35] Burns and DeVries, *Partnering With Parents,* 59.

[36] Barna, *Revolutionary Parenting*, 31.

[37] Tripp, *Shepherding,* 182.

discipleship, this research would be limited in understanding the long-term effects of parents discipling their children. The experience that parents and children have with family discipleship is unique and effects cannot always be seen in the short-term. For some families, the impact of the presence or absence of family discipleship is seen later in life.

Limitations also include the extent of participation in the discipleship questionnaire. Since the participation in the discipleship questionnaire is voluntary, it is possible to lack enough data to draw any significant conclusions. Having a larger participant pool can allow the researcher to identify any trends of family discipleship that represent the general population.

This research can also be limited by the many factors of each participant's life experience and how they influence their discipleship experience. Factors such as the motivation of parents and the breakdown of the family unit (e.g., separation, divorce, single parent, etc.) can present complexities in understanding the impact of parents discipling their children. Events or circumstances within the family can influence the presence or absence of family discipleship in the home. It is possible for the researcher to be unaware of some of these factors and may lead to limited conclusions. Any conclusions derived from the research must be understood within the context of these potential life experience factors.

Therefore, the researcher will seek to understand the impact of parents discipling their children through the experience of children. The effects of parental involvement in discipleship can be seen in the preparedness of children becoming young adults. This research will be limited to the perspectives and experiences of young adults who did or did not experience regular discipleship in the home. Their perspective can provide significant insight into the impact of parents who disciple their children. With experiences being subjective, the impact of parents discipling their children can be understood differently from the parent's point of view. Exploring

the parent's point of view later can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the value of parents discipling their children. While focusing on the children's point of view can limit the research, there is still value in understanding the impact of parents discipling their children who are now young adults.

Delimitations

Parents have an important role in preparing their children for the future when they become young adults. The presence or absence of family discipleship in the home can have profound consequences on young adults when they begin making decisions on their own. Examining the experience that young adults had with family discipleship will be critical for understanding whether parents made discipleship a priority in the home. While it is not possible to completely exhaust the research into the parental role in discipleship, it will be beneficial to see how young adults perceived their parent's involvement and how it prepared them for the future.

To better understand the impact of parents discipling their children, the research of this thesis project will focus on the experience of Christian young adults who were born after 1999 but before 2005. This demographic will represent the most current young adults who recently graduated from high school through when they turn twenty-one years old. These young adults will represent the population who have become independent and have started to make their own decisions. This population will not be far removed from home and can recall the level of parental involvement in their discipleship.

This research project will understand the role of parents in discipleship through the experience and perspective of young adults, not their parents. The impact of parents discipling their children can be seen in the experience of young adults and the status of their current

personal faith. Exploring the participant's experience can answer questions such as, "Did the parental involvement in discipleship prepare the participant to be successful in growing in their personal faith?" "Did an absence of family discipleship hinder their ability to grow in their personal faith?" Surveying the experiences that young adults have had with their parents discipling or not discipling them can help uncover important insights into any inconsistencies. Focusing on the experience of young adults will provide examples of potential outcomes if parents disciple their children or not.

Other limiting factors of this research project includes factors that contributed to the presence or absence of family discipleship in the home. Each family has unique factors that affect the parent's ability to disciple their children. These factors can include socioeconomic status, church denomination, academic status, family schedule and family structure. For the purposes of this research study, the focus will be on whether parents practice family discipleship or not. If parents do practice family discipleship, the research will explore what steps parents take to disciple their children. Exploring these other contributing factors may push the research beyond its intended scope and add more complexities. Instead, this research project will look at the practice itself and if parents are implementing it into family life. Jonathan Williams provides an example of what this endeavor may look like:

> Family devotions are challenging. They're tough. They require time, commitment, consistency, and patience. It's opening the Bible instead of turning on the TV. It's praying for forgiveness with your children five minutes after yelling at them. It's leading your family at the end of an exhausting day. It's trying different ways of implementing devotions until you find what works for your family."[38]

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[38] Jonathan Williams, *Gospel Family: Cultivating Family Discipleship, Family Worship, & Family Missions* (Houston: Lucid Books, 2015), 72.

Thus, while there can be numerous factors that contributes to the presence or absence of family discipleship, simply looking at whether parents have established a discipleship routine and what that consists of will give much insight into how it prepares children for the future. Examining the intentionality behind family discipleship will show how much priority parents give for this responsibility. In this research, the participant's experience and the types of discipline routines that existed will be indicators of what parents did to prepare their children for their future spiritual life.

<div align="center">**Thesis Statement**</div>

Discipleship serves as the primary method in which any individual is transforming into the likeness of Jesus Christ. Discipleship is a life-long process and can take on many phases over the course of a person's life. One of the most critical phases is when children are in the home. Chap Bettis stated that parents have the most potential to observe and influence their child's spiritual growth.[39] The discipleship relationship that parents have with their children is significant and can help equip their children with what they need to continue their spiritual growth. This thesis project will show that parents who disciple their children on a regular basis will understand the benefit of regular discipleship interactions with their children. By exploring the children/young adult's perspective on their discipleship experience, the value of the parental role in family discipleship will be understood. When parents accept their discipleship role, the family dynamic will change, and parents will see the impact family discipleship has on the spiritual growth of their children.

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[39] Bettis, *The Disciple-Making Parent*, 15.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Parents discipling their children is not a new concept. It finds its basis in Scripture and is prominently discussed among ministry experts. Tad Thompson observes that "the disconnect between parents and children with respect to the discipleship process has become increasingly evident. The hard fact is that fathers and mothers are not taking on the responsibility to disciple their own children, and churches are doing very little, if anything, to challenge this reality."[1] There is a disconnect between parents believing that they have the responsibility to disciple their children and actually discipling their children. The current literature speaks to the impact of parents not discipling their children and the advocates for the involvement of parents.

Scripture offers a theological basis for parents discipling their children. Both Old and New Testament writers give good reasons why parents are the ideal candidate for the responsibility of discipleship. Scripture illustrates the significance of the relationship between children and their parents. Ephesians 6:1-3 shows the benefits that children receive from their relationship with their parents. The role of parents discipling their children can be seen in what is known as the *Shema* in the Old Testament. Deuteronomy 6:4-9 presents the command for parents to disciple their children. While the New Testament describes parents discipling their children in passages such as Ephesians 6:1-4. With such an emphasis on the relationship between a parent and their child in Scripture, it is evident that there is a benefit to this arrangement. A parent can offer something unique to a discipleship relationship that others cannot.

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[1] Tad Thompson, *Intentional Parenting: Family Discipleship by Design* (Adelphi: Cruciform Press, 2011), 7.

Literature Review

Literature that speaks on the topic of discipleship is vast and easily accessible. Many resources exist that describe the importance of discipleship, and curriculum is widely published to supply churches with practical means of discipling its people. This thesis project will synthesize literature that illuminates why discipleship is important in the family context.

The Parental Role in Discipleship

The parental role in discipleship has been neglected by parents for some time and often passed on to others who are considered "more qualified." Some might consider that "given the tremendous changes that have occurred in American culture, families, and religion over the past half-century, one might reasonably conclude that these institutions have less and less influence on the religious outcomes of today's youth."[2] Parents are seeking out what is best for their children, but not seeing the role they play.

Yet parents are deemed ultimately responsible for the important task of family discipleship. Phil and Diane Comer suggest that "God places responsibility for the spiritual development of children onto the shoulders of their mothers and fathers, and He tells them to do the teaching in the midst of real, in-the-moment life."[3] The relationship that already exists between parents and their children give evidence to who can make a difference. This responsibility goes beyond a simple assumption; it also has a Scriptural basis. Voddie Baucham Jr. adds that "While we all agree on the clear biblical mandate for parents to disciple their

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[2] Vern L. Bengtson, *Families and Faith: How Religion Is Passed Down Across Generations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 11.

[3] Phil Comer and Diana Comer, *Raising Passionate Jesus Followers: The Power of Intentional Parenting* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 753.

children, we're unclear as to what that entails."[4] The Old Testament shows "God's servant

Moses, after instructing God's people concerning the God's identity and the people's call to love

him and keep his Word, turned immediately to instruct the parents of the community regarding

their responsibility to their children."[5] It is understood that parents play an important role in their

children's life. The children's dependence on their parents for the necessities of life sets the stage

for their parental influence in other areas of their life. Paul David Tripp admonishes parents,

"Your work as a parent is a thing of extreme value because God has designed that you would be

a principal, consistent, and faithful tool in his hands for the purpose of creating God-

consciousness and God-submission in your children."[6] Not only is the task of discipling children

assigned to the parents, but there is also significance in that responsibility.

The literature also makes an important association between parenting and discipleship.

Family ministry experts such as Paul David Tripp and Ted Tripp suggest that discipleship should

be a natural part of parenting. Ted Tripp states, "If authority best describes the parent's

relationship to the child, the best description of the activity of the parent to the child is

shepherding. The parent is the child's guide."[7] When parents are bringing up their children,

discipleship is a natural part of that process. The very nature of parenting suggests that parents

are positioned for such a responsibility. Paul David Tripp simply states, "Parents have unique

opportunities to instruct their children, opportunities no one else will have, because parents live

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[4] Voddie Baucham Jr., *Family Shepherds: Calling and Equipping Men to Lead Their Homes* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), 17.

[5] Jon Nielson, "Family First in Youth Discipleship and Evangelism," *The Gospel Coalition*, August 11, 2011, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/family-first-in-youth-discipleship-and-evangelism/.

[6] Tripp, *14 Gospel Principles*, 30.

[7] Tripp, *Shepherding*, 150.

with them."[8] Timothy Paul Jones speaks to the number of opportunities parents have to interact with their children. He says, "In the home, parents have constant opportunities to train their children to obey God's commands."[9] The emphasis of the parental role in discipleship does not suggest that others cannot be involved, but the time and the position of parents have with their children sets the stage for discipleship opportunities. Doug Fields adds, "Parents are the primary influencers in students' lives."[10]

Still, while discipleship is closely associated with parenting, it is imperative to make the distinction that discipling children is a specific function of parenting. Cameron Lee suggests, "Parenting as discipleship emphasizes that parent-child interaction is a learning environment for both participants."[11] The regular interaction that a child has with their parents creates the opportunity for discipleship. Even further, "Successful parenting involves building a relationship in which children gain personal power and parents retain personal power throughout the process."[12] Discipleship does not happen automatically when parenting happens. It requires the parents to be intentional and initiate the discipleship interaction.

<div align="center">The Perspective of Teenagers</div>

Without question, teenagers face a myriad of challenges as they navigate through adolescence. Teenagers are constantly engaged in concerns about identity, peer pressure, and acceptance. The literature presents insight into why this is important and why parents and church

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[8] Tripp, *Age of Opportunity*, 41.

[9] Jones, *Perspectives on Family Ministry,* 63.

[10] Doug Fields, *Your First Two Years in Youth Ministry: A Personal and Practical Guide to Starting Right* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 105.

[11] Lee, "Parenting as Discipleship," 268–77.

[12] Jack O. Balswick, Judith K. Balswick, and Thomas V. Frederick, *The Family: A Christian Perspective on the Contemporary Home* (Grand Rapids; Baker Academic, 2021), 33.

leaders should be aware. Without understanding the context and need for discipleship, parents may find little reason to disciple their children. Certainly, parents desire the wellbeing of their children, but when it relates to the spiritual health of their children, there is some uncertainty as to how to address it. Issues with identity, peer pressure, and acceptance are related to the spiritual health of a teenager. Ted Tripp speaks on this idea when he says, "While this is a period of instability, anxiety, and vulnerability, it is also paradoxically a period when children are seeking to establish an independent persona. The teen wants to be his own person."[13] This period can cause tension within the teenagers' world and further the struggle they experience. During this time, "Children expect the freedom to set their personal boundaries as teenagers, and parents feel as if they have no right to discipline their children."[14] Teenagers are experiencing a transition from adolescence to adulthood. This period of transition is critical and the greatest opportunity for discipleship. Parents can make the connection between what their children are experiencing and their personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Kara Powell and Steven Argue describe this type of interaction as "Your young people are *learners*, *explorers*, or *focusers* who consequently need *teacher*, *guide*, or *resourcer* parenting."[15] During these stages, parents can implement discipleship according to what their children need at the moment.

The literature also comments on the fact that teenagers tend to be religious already, but at the same time, unsure of what they believe. There can be a wide range of parental involvement in spiritual matters, which can leave teenagers feeling lost in where they stand on their faith. Voddie Baucham states, "The National Study of Youth and Religion discovered that while U.S.

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[13] Tripp, *Shepherding*, 185.

[14] Brian Haynes, *Shift: What It Takes to Finally Reach Families Today* (Loveland: Group Publishing, 2009), 253.

[15] Kara Powell and Steven Argue, *Growing With: Every Parent's Guide to Helping Teenagers and Young Adults Thrive in Their Faith, Family, and Future* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2019), 41.

teens are very religious, their religion is largely ambiguous. This ambiguity is due in large part to the lack of time and attention devoted to spiritual matters compared to other activities."[16] Teenagers are aware of what takes priority in their lives and when not enough time is given to spiritual matters, they feel lost or less interested. Teenagers are vulnerable during this period and may experience anxiety. Parents taking on the role of discipling their children helps to mitigate these concerns and support teenagers as they navigate through this period.

Whether teenagers are aware or not, they are surrounded by a culture that pursues them from every side. While parents will engage their children regarding the content they consume and how they spend their time, teenagers are faced with endless choices. These choices on how to respond to the culture further adds to the need for discipleship. Mark DeVries states, "Our kids are growing up in a culture that keeps them trapped in immaturity, training them to react to what is sold, rather than think and act proactively."[17] Not only does the culture influence them cognitively, but teenagers are also taught to approach spiritual matters in the same way. Regular discipleship can address these issues and parents can engage their children. In the same way that culture influences their minds, teenagers are influenced through their experiences. Jim Burns and Mike DeVries adds, "Children today are growing up too soon by being forced to see and deal with reality (an exaggerated reality) prematurely."[18] Teenagers who are trapped in immaturity and forced to see and deal with reality too soon are faced with a crisis. As teenagers experience this reality daily, it is even more evident that the parents should address it with discipleship. Every teenager is faced with questions about their reality, especially those of "who

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[16] Baucham Jr., *Family Driven Faith*, 13.

[17] Mark DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 53. Accessed April 15, 2019. ProQuest Ebook Central.

[18] Burns and DeVries, *Partnering With Parents,* 33.

am I? where do I fit? what difference can I make?"[19] Helping their children respond to these

challenges through the lenses of their faith can make a difference in how they face reality when

they are on their own. If parents are not involved in the discipleship of their children, these

teenagers may look elsewhere for support and direction.

<div align="center">Lack of Understanding From Parents About Discipleship</div>

As ministry leaders research the reason for a lack of parental involvement in discipleship,

a common response is a lack of understanding about how parents should disciple their children.

Some parents may not understand the importance of discipleship, while others may believe the

responsibility belongs to someone else. A lack of understanding will greatly impact the level of

motivation parents have towards the discipleship of their children. It may cause them to focus

their attention on other priorities. Looking at the typical schedule for any family with children,

anyone can conclude that every minute is spoken for. Voddie Baucham explains this situation:

> Parents like the Joneses have usually spent very little time with their children. In many cases the children have spent the lion's share of their weekdays in daycare and then school, and a big part of their Sundays in nursery, then children's church, then youth ministry. Therefore, many parents simply don't know what their children's spiritual needs are, let alone how to deal with them. Family shepherding thrusts parents into an environment where they're forced to change. The result can be something I call Vacation Syndrome.[20]

With such a crowded schedule, it is understandable why parents rely on the local church to

handle all aspects of discipleship. Trying to fit in moments of discipleship within the daily

routines can be challenging and may leave parents overwhelmed. However, Jason Houser,

Bobby Harrington, and Chad Harrington suggest that "Parents need a realistic understanding of

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[19] Kara Powell and Brad M. Griffin, *3 Big Questions That Change Every Teenager: Making the Most of Your Conversations and Connections* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2021), 35.

[20] Baucham Jr., *Family Shepherds*, 45.

what it means to be a spiritual parent, where they count the costs and plan for the long haul if they want to be successful."[21] Parents must understand the value of their role in the discipleship of their children. Having the right perspective can help parents place the right priority on their family schedule.

While time constraints and busyness may be one reason why parents are not prepared for discipling their children, a lack of knowledge may be another. Paul David Tripp states, "There is another reason why parents fail to prepare their children well for the wisdom decisions they will face as they leave home. It is, sadly, that many parents simply do not have a fluid, functional, situationally applicable knowledge of Scripture themselves."[22] Parents find themselves lacking the experience of discipleship in their own lives. If discipleship was not modeled for them in their lives, there is a hesitancy in trying to facilitate it with someone else. Consequently, parents will look to the local church to address that need. In the best-case scenario, parents are seeking out resources and training to disciple their children. Yet Timothy Paul Jones recognizes that "there seems to be little consistent parent training that equips fathers and mothers to become the primary disciplers in their children's lives."[23] Depending on what resources are available to parents, this lack of training may also cause parents to be reluctant to disciple their children. Barna also supports this concern saying, "the data demonstrates that churches place little emphasis on training and equipping said parents."[24]

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[21] Jason Houser, Bobby Harrington, and Chad Harrington, *Dedicated: Training Your Children to Trust and Follow Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 21.

[22] Tripp, *Age of Opportunity*, 130-131.

[23] Jones, *Perspectives on Family Ministry,* 126.

[24] "Who is Responsible for Children's Faith Formation?" Barna, last updated March 19, 2019, https://www.barna.com/research/children-faith-formation/.

The lack of understanding from parents about discipleship is a starting point to address this issue. Unless parents are internally motivated to seek out help, it may not be a priority for them. Parents need to understand how to practically apply the concept of discipleship into a busy life. Jones suggests, "What are needed are not merely events putting parents and youth together but intentional training so fathers and mothers can build discipleship into their children's daily lives."[25] With such an understanding, parents can feel more confident in discipling their children. When parents are apprehensive about discipling their children, they will default to what they are familiar with, such as providing the necessities of life, academics, sports, etc.

<div align="center">Conflicting Priorities</div>

As stated earlier, parents are often inundated with a disproportionate schedule each week that consists of school, appointments, sports practices, recitals, church activities, and much more. Many of the scheduled activities are a result of the value being given to those activities. Attention is given to activities that will provide their children with opportunities in the future. Priority is given to activities that will give their children an edge in areas of academics and sports. While well-intentioned, conflicting priorities become a common reason why parents are not involved in the discipleship of their children. Jonathan Williams states, "Most families invest in the physical growth and health of their children, and yet most families neglect the spiritual growth and health of their children. We limit it to Sundays, as though nourishment given once a week is sufficient. Would we ever limit our family's meals or vitamins or baths or medicine to once a week?"[26] While Williams is not advocating that less attention be given to the physical

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[25] Barna, "Who Is Responsible."

[26] Williams, *Gospel Family*, 13.

growth and health of children, he reveals how much attention is given to the spiritual health of children.

One of the reasons why parents are not involved in the discipleship of their children can be how much value they place in other things, even if those things are not inherently bad. Most parents who are asked about their hopes and expectations for their children all respond similarly with good intentions. In his research, George Barna states, "What do we seek to provide for our children? We want them to be happy, safe, comfortable, good citizens, educated, religious, and fulfilling their potential."[27] The pressure to provide the opportunities that parents may not have had is immense. Even a necessity such as a good education may seem like a higher priority than spiritual discipleship. Yet J. C. Ryle addresses parenting in God's way by posing a question, "This is the thought that should be uppermost on your mind in all you do for your children. In every step you take for them – in every plan, scheme, and arrangement that concerns them – do not leave out that mighty question, 'How will this affect their souls?'"[28] If parents ask the question of how certain choices will affect their children's souls, this may provide the perspective needed to properly order their children's schedules. Tony Reinke adds, "the questions over teams and leagues and travel opportunities require a lot of humble wisdom and prayer—exposing our motives, evaluating the missional potential and reaffirming the family's love for the local church."[29]

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[27] Barna, *Revolutionary Parenting*, 4.

[28] J. C. Ryle, *The Duties of Parents: Parenting Your Children God's Way* (Abbotsford: Aneko Press, 2018), 11.

[29] Tony Reinke, "Spring Sports and Sunday Church: Five Suggestions for Parents," *Desiring God*, April 17, 2018, https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/spring-sports-and-sunday-church.

Ideal Environment for Discipleship

The literature widely discusses the role of parents in the discipleship of their children. At the same time, the discussion is followed up with where discipleship should take place. Most people recognize discipleship within a formal class you take in a local church. Discipleship is associated with a curriculum that is used to measure the spiritual growth of an individual. However, with the responsibility of the discipleship of children belonging to parents, the obvious place for discipleship to take place is the home.

Many sources point to the home as the ideal place for discipleship to happen. Timothy Paul Jones asks, "Who better able to discern the condition of their children's hearts and to know if true repentance has occurred than those who live with them every day?"[30] He suggests that discipleship can be best applied throughout the course of a daily routine with those who are most familiar. Tad Thompson adds, "To put it another way, discipleship is most effectively accomplished when the practice is integrated into the rhythm of everyday life. A consistent time of family worship, for example, is a great discipleship practice, but it is no substitute for a lifestyle of discipleship that encompasses the breakfast table, the car, bedtime, errands, and chores. There is not a single moment in life that cannot be used as an opportunity for instruction."[31] The familiarity of daily life in the home helps to make discipleship happen more organically. The uniqueness of the family unit allows for more intimate interactions. Andy Crouch states that "Family helps form us into persons who have acquired wisdom and courage."[32] Participation in a family changes everyone.

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[30] Jones, *Perspectives on Family Ministry,* 63.

[31] Thompson, *Intentional Parenting*, 59.

[32] Andy Crouch, *The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps For Putting Technology In Its Proper Place* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017), 27.

The home becomes the practical means for discipleship especially as relationships and bonds have been developed. Research shows that "most young adults say they turn to their parents for advice on their jobs, finances and physical health at least sometimes."[33] As relationships continue to deepen in the home, positive relationships can become the primer to discipleship interactions. Parents have an opportunity to take advantage of discipleship opportunities insofar as "parents rate their relationship with their young adult child positive: 41% describe it as excellent and another 36% say it's very good."[34] These are ideal conditions for discipleship.

Additionally, Voddie Baucham highlights the Scriptural basis for discipleship in the home. Discipleship in the home had significance and continued to be the center of family discipleship. The family unit was an important part of the culture during the writing of Scripture. Baucham references the Old Testament: "Moses saw the home as the principal delivery system for the transmittal of God's truth from generation to generation,"[35] and of the church he says, "In fact, the home is actually the proving ground for elders."[36]

Parents have an opportunity to incorporate discipleship in the natural flow of life. Daily life is where children will experience the opportunities to apply their faith. Paul David Tripp adds, "In the family, life is happening all around us, and it begs to be questioned, evaluated, interpreted, and discussed."[37] The home becomes an important place for children as they grow

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[33] Rachel Minkin, Kim Parker, Juliana Menasce Horowitz, and Carolina Aragao, "Parents, Young Adult Children and the Transition to Adulthood," *Pew Research Center*, January 25, 2024. https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2024/01/25/parents-young-adult-children-and-the-transition-to-adulthood/.

[34] Minkin, Parker, Horowitz, and Argao, "Parents."

[35] Baucham Jr., *Family Driven Faith*, 91.

[36] Baucham Jr., *Family Shepherds*, 36.

[37] Tripp, *Age of Opportunity*, 41-42.

up. There is a special connection to the home that cannot be replicated with anywhere else. Jim Burns and Mike DeVries state, "Long after students stop attending youth groups, they are still connected to their families."[38] It is important to consider the significance of the home in the process of discipleship. The home brings discipleship into a reality that helps children engage with their lives. Life in the home highlights the importance of what happens in the ordinary as well as the major events.

In addition to the home being the ideal environment for the discipleship of children, it is important to not overlook the role that the local church has in the discipleship process. While the home is the primary environment for discipleship, the local church or other ministries can help support the work of discipleship at home. Jared Kennedy states, "Children and students benefit from the combined influences of godly parents and discipleship ministries of their local church. If kids growing up in Christian homes need the larger church family, how much more is the church needed to reach out and model the gospel for children who do not have Christian parents."[39] The ideal environment for discipleship includes the local church serving as a support instead of the primary source of discipleship. The local church can equip and empower parents to carry out their role as primary discipler. Including people in the family of God is part of the design that Scripture indicates, "that all of God's covenant people are to play a part in discipling younger generations."[40] When parents and other Christians invest into children, they experience discipleship in a variety of ways.

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[38] Burns and DeVries, *Partnering With Parents,* 13.

[39] Jared Kennedy, *Keeping Your Children's Ministry on Mission* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2022), 425.

[40] Ken Hindman, Landry R. Holmes, and Jana Magruder, *Every Age, Every Stage: Teaching God's Truth at Home and Church* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2021), 10.

Young Adults Leaving the Church

One of the primary reasons for the discussion of parents discipling their children stems

from the growing trend of young adults leaving the church. The evidence of whether parents are

discipling their children at home is given when their children enter a stage of independence. This

stage represents a time when teenagers begin to make decisions on their own. They are

introduced to opportunities that force them to prioritize matters of education, social life, spiritual

matters, and other commitments. Some of these decisions represent a stark shift from what they

are accustomed to as teenagers. Chap Bettis adds, "In twenty-five separate surveys of more than

22,000 adults and 2000 teenagers, George Barna found that only 20 percent of the respondents

had maintained a level of spiritual activity consistent with their high school experience. In

another study, he found that 58 percent of young adults who attended church every week when

they were teens did not attend church at all by the time they were 29."[41] In the same way, Mark

DeVries references Barna's research: "Barna's research indicates that in spite of the fact that

more and more youth are participating in our programs, those teenagers are not growing up to be

adults who participate in church any more than they did almost thirty years ago."[42] Despite how

much is done to keep children in church when they are at home, when faced with life on their

own, they succumb to the pressures of culture. They realize that "today's society is especially

and insidiously faith repellent."[43] The literature presents numerous statistics on the percentage of

young adults that do not attend church after leaving home. In some cases, some are saying that

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[41] Bettis, *The Disciple-Making Parent,* 9.

[42] DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry*, 25.

[43] David Kinnaman and Mark Matlock, *Faith for Exiles: 5 Ways For a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2019), 78.

teenagers are leaving the church earlier than their twenties. Studies show that "about 40 percent are leaving the Church during elementary and middle school years! Most people assume the elementary and middle school is a fairly neutral environment where children toe the line and follow in the footsteps of their parents' spirituality…over half of these kids were lost before we got them into high school!"[44]

Importantly, it is necessary to continue to evaluate the reasons why young adults do not continue in church attendance. In 2017, Lifeway Research conducted an extensive study on why young adults drop out of church. The report stated, "Young adults who stopped attending church regularly between ages 18 and 22 for at least a year were asked what contributed to this decision. Virtually all of those who dropped out (96 percent) listed a change in their life situation as a reason for their dropping out."[45] The literature reveals that many young adults are not leaving from reacting to a negative experience in the church, but rather other areas of their life have become the priority. David Kinnaman describes this pivotal moment, "The problem is not that this generation has been less churched than children and teens before them; the problem is that much spiritual energy fades away during a crucial decade of life—the twenties."[46] It is during this stage of life that important decisions are made about how they will live their life.

Further, while the trend of young adults leaving the church continues to rise, it is important to observe that many do not return after a hiatus. Lifeway Research found "66% of young adults who attended a Protestant church regularly for at least a year in high school stopped attending at some point during their college-aged years. Among those who dropped out, only

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[44] Ken Ham, Britt Beemer, and Todd Hillard, *Already Gone: Why Your Kids Will Quit Church and What You Can Do to Stop It* (Green Forest: Master Books, 2009), 29.

[45] "Most Teenagers Drop Out of Church When They Become Young Adults," Lifeway Research, accessed April 5, 2022, https://research.lifeway.com/2019/01/15/most-teenagers-drop-out-of-church-as-young-adults/.

[46] Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 17.

31% have returned to regular attendance, while 29% do not attend at all."[47] Unfortunately, Kinnaman adds, "fewer than one out of ten young adults mention faith as their top priority."[48]

This critical moment between adolescence and adulthood is the heart of this thesis project. As teenagers enter adulthood with important decisions to make, why do they so often forsake their faith as a guide for those decisions? More importantly, is a lack of discipleship at home the catalyst for young adult disengagement from church? George Barna reports that "In fact, more than three out of every five parents believe that the younger generation is not ready to handle an increasingly complex and demanding future."[49] Parents should be alerted to the importance of discipleship in the home. While parents who disciple their children are not guaranteed a sustaining, thriving Christian life for their children, it is certain that a lack of discipleship can only further the trend.

Theological Foundation

In Scripture, there is a clear mandate given to parents to be the primary disciple-makers in the home. In fact, this expectation was woven into the culture, and family life was centered around discipleship. George Barna states, "The Bible speaks of three ways in which parents are involved in the shaping of their children's spirituality: facilitating understanding, developing character, and advancing their relationship with God."[50] The parents were influential in the spiritual development of their children. The Bible does not only focus on the task of parenting

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[47] Aaron Earls, "Many Americans Left Church Attendance in Their Childhood," *Lifeway Research*, January 25, 2023, https://research.lifeway.com/2023/01/25/many-americans-left-church-attendance-in-their-childhood/.

[48] David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 21.

[49] Barna, *Revolutionary Parenting*, 37.

[50] Ibid., 138.

but also expresses the significance of the role of disciple-maker. The family dynamics in the Old and New Testament provided the ideal environment for discipleship. Hence, the role of parents in the discipleship of children has a strong theological foundation in Scripture.

The concept of family discipleship can be seen as early as the Old Testament. Parents discipling their children was not a foreign concept, it was commonplace. Voddie Baucham Jr. adds, "Clearly the Old Testament offers a mandate to teach God's Law in the context of the home, though it in no way excludes the ministry of God's priests and prophets."[51] Much of what is discussed in the Old Testament on family discipleship is focused on the home. The family unit was central for the development of each family member.

Understanding the significance of the family unit will help bridge the concept between the Old and New Testament. While family dynamics evolve from the Old and New Testament, the responsibility of discipleship still falls on the parents. The role of the parent in discipleship is still front and center in New Testament culture. J.C. Ryle states, "And when I turn to the New Testament, children are mentioned as partaking in public gatherings and prayer as well as in the Old."[52] Children are seen participating in spiritual activities with their families. Both the Old and New Testament serve as a model for how parents can engage in discipleship with their children. While the methods of family discipleship may have changed since biblical times, the concept of discipleship taking place in the home should not be ignored. Scripture expresses the importance of parents discipling their children which goes beyond a mere suggestion. Parents discipling their children also highlights the biblical importance of the family institution.

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[51] Baucham Jr., *Family Shepherds*, 21.

[52] Ryle, *The Duties of Parents*, 21.

References to Family Discipleship in the Old Testament

The mandate for parents to disciple their children can first be seen in the Old Testament. There, the Mosaic law is introduced and instructs the people of Israel in how they should live. This law also specifies how the family unit should operate. This early biblical discussion on the family paves the way to understanding why parents should disciple their children in the home.

The Value of Parents to Children (Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 5:16)

The value of parents in the lives of children is clearly established at the time that God provides the law to the nation of Israel. As they escaped the bondage of slavery to start a new life, God's expectations are given to help define what is important for the family of God. Exodus 20:12 and Deuteronomy 5:16 discuss the value of honoring parents. Deuteronomy 5:16 (ESV) states that children should consider honoring their parents so "that it may go well with you." This command for children to honor their parents can also communicate to parents the responsibility they have in leading their children towards a positive future. Parents who see the value they bring to the spiritual formation of their children should have more reason to engage in the discipleship of their children. Paul David Tripp describes the value of parents, "Your church was not designed to replace you, but to assist and equip you for this essential work."[53] The role of a parent is essential in the well-being of children. The positive future that these passages describe comes from engaging in the discipleship process. God designed parents to bring essential value to the life of their children. The Old Testament continually places parents in an important position. The relationship between parents and their children becomes the basis for what discipleship should look like throughout the rest of Scripture. The emphasis on this relationship

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[53] Tripp, *14 Gospel Principles*, 30.

indicates why parents should take on this responsibility. Parents not only serve as guardians to their children but also as a spiritual guide.

Mandate for Parents to Disciple their Children (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 11:19)

One of the most cited passages for the role of parents in the discipleship of their children is Deuteronomy 6. In that passage, parents are given a clear mandate to invest in the spiritual formation of their children. The people of Israel are given the law to help define how they should live, and this law includes the parent's role in teaching their children. Deuteronomy 6 establishes the importance of making God's law a priority in this new life. The passage indicates that parents should take the laws and "teach them diligently to your children" (Deut 6:7, ESV). This command is not a one-time event but an activity that should be continuous. Teaching the law diligently requires effort and consistency. Since parents already have the responsibility of caring for their children, this activity becomes a natural part of their new life. The passage goes a step further with the extent they should teach their children. Parents should "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" (Deut 6:7, ESV). This instruction indicates that the process of teaching their children should encompass daily life. Teaching the law should be a part of the family's lifestyle.

The passage in Deuteronomy 6 also indicates a passing on of the faith as parents have experienced it. Denise Kjesbo and Lou Y. Cha indicate that "this power passage sets the frame of integrating the truths of faith into the everyday life of family. It calls for this to occur through a model of passing faith from one generation to the next in the comings and goings of life. It begins as the adult generation commits themselves to the faith first and foremost (commit

yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands)."[54] This description does not simply imply that parents are only teaching out of a designated role, but teaching from their own experience that they are passing along to their children.

The responsibility of parents teaching the law to their children was a precursor to the people of Israel becoming a people set apart for God. This process begins with children learning the law of God and growing up to become people who follow God. Teaching the law to their children required a full-time commitment from parents. Timothy Paul Jones added that "In the opening verses of Deuteronomy 6, God commanded the men of Israel through Moses to impress the Lord's commands on their children's hearts. They were to do this as they spent their lives together, day by day."[55] Parents were expected to teach the law throughout the entirety of each day. This concept can be translated into today's context as the family dynamics have opportunities for parents to teach the law.

Importantly, the continuous nature of discipleship suggests how parents should approach their children's spiritual formation. Tad Thompson notes an important concept when parents are teaching the law to their children, that "In Deuteronomy 6:7-9 Moses gets more specific, using the words talk, tie, bind, and write to help us understand how important repetition is to this parental task of discipleship."[56] This passage suggests that God's law should be infused into every part of life. Repetition always suggests something of great importance or value. It also suggests that the people need to pay attention. Deuteronomy 11:19 emphasizes how parents should make the teaching of the law as normal as everyday life. Ted Tripp adds, "The primary

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[54] Denise Kjesbo and Lou Y. Cha, "Family Ministry: Past, Present, Future," *Christian Education Journal: Research on Educational Ministry* 17, no. 3 (2020), 489.

[55] Jones, *Perspectives on Family Ministry,* 68.

[56] Thompson, *Intentional Parenting*, 58.

context for parental instruction is set forth in Deuteronomy 6. It is the ordinary context of daily living. Your children see the power of a life of faith as they see you living it. You do not need to be perfect; you simply need to be people of integrity who are living life in the rich, robust truth of the Word of God."[57] The teaching of the law was not intended to be simply a lecture from a parent to a child, but as Ted Tripp suggests, an opportunity for the child to see the impact of the law demonstrated through the lives of the parents. Parents not only have the responsibility to teach the law but to live it out.

Instructions and Teachings from Parents (Proverbs 1:8; 6:20; 22:6)

The Old Testament makes additional references to the role of parents in the discipleship of their children. The book of Proverbs shows a parent imparting wisdom to his children. This example in Scripture suggests the value of the content that parents use in the discipleship of their children. It shows that parents have influence over their children. In the parent-child relationship, the parent offers something to the child that is necessary for their development. In Proverbs, Solomon urges, "Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching," (Prov 1:8, ESV) and "keep your father's commandment" (Prov 6:20, ESV). Solomon is communicating an important principle for his children. He suggests that children should give attention to what their parents say because it has value. The value of what parents teach come from experience and wisdom they gain from following God themselves. These passages also indicate that both the father and mother provide something unique in discipleship. The father provides direction while the mother imparts knowledge. Paul David Tripp encourages parents to "Teach your children; the family is your classroom… In the family, life is happening all around

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[57] Tripp, *Shepherding*, 193.

us, and it begs to be questioned, evaluated, interpreted, and discussed."[58] Parents can impart

wisdom to their children in the context of family life. The value of their instruction given

benefits children in the day to day and the long-term. The wisdom that is communicated from

Solomon to his children suggests that this knowledge would help them in their daily life. It can

be assumed that Solomon communicated these instructions within the context of a normal day.

The author of Proverbs gives additional support to parents engaging in the discipleship of

their children. At one point he states, "Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is

old he will not depart from it" (Prov 22:6, ESV). Parents are told that if they train their children

in the proper way, their efforts will not be in vain. This passage suggests that children who are

trained will remember it as an adult. The wisdom that Solomon gives his son illustrates the

concept of discipleship. The process of discipleship is not a one-time event. As Solomon

suggests, it is a long-term commitment. Parents should persist in discipleship until their children

are adults. The desired outcome of any discipleship relationship is maturity and multiplication.

As parents train their children, they will remember what they have learned and then be able to

transfer that wisdom to another.

Impact on Future Generations (Joel 1:3; Psalm 78:5-8)

The Old Testament also references how family discipleship impacts future generations.

Brian Haynes states, "Passing on a legacy of biblical faith to the next generation has always been

a part of God's plan."[59] The hope of parents who disciple their children is that in turn their

children would disciple their children in the future. A reoccurring theme in the Old Testament is

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[58] Tripp, *Age of Opportunity*, 41-42.

[59] Haynes, *The Legacy Path: Discover Intentional Spiritual Parenting* (Nashville: Randall House Publications, 2011), 153.

the concept of generations. What families do and say has a lasting impact on the future generations of that family. The impact of the decisions made by King David offers just one example from scripture. His decisions led to long-term consequences that impacted his family for generations. The impact that David had on his future generations cannot be understated. The same can be said of the presence or absence of discipleship in a family. When parents disciple their children, they initiate a forward momentum for their children to do the same. Engaging in family discipleship sets the foundation for future generations to apply to their children. The prophet Joel describes the command to disciple and the impact it can have throughout multiple generations. He says, "Tell it to your children, and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation" (Joel 1:3, ESV). The understanding of parenting from the Old Testament parents conveys the principle that what parents do now will be a catalyst for what happens in future generations. If parents do not tell their children of God and His law (disciple their children), future generations are less likely to disciple their children.

Similarly, Andrew Murray speaks to parents about His salvation, "Parents, it is God's will that His salvation should be from generation to generation in your family too, that your children should hear from you and pass on to their children the praise of the Lord."[60] According to Murray, God's design was for salvation to be passed from one generation to another. Parents who disciple their children can help equip them to then disciple their children. Parents now can have a long-term spiritual impact on future generations.

The same implications are seen in Psalm 78:5-8. That passage states, "He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to teach to

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[60] Andrew Murray, *How To Raise Your Children For Christ* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1975), 127.

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 78:5-8, ESV). The theme of children telling their children who will then tell their children is repeated throughout the Old Testament. This notion further supports the importance of the family unit and how it is a vehicle for discipleship to happen. Parents who disciple their children can witness a process that can extend beyond generations. There is thus a spiritual significance to the role that parents have in preparing their children for what they will do when they are parents.

<div style="text-align:center">References to Family Discipleship in the New Testament</div>

The New Testament continues the discussion that parents should disciple their children in the home. The themes outlined in the Old Testament continue even with changes in the culture and practices. In the New Testament, the parent-child relationship continued to be central in the culture. Children would receive their training within the family unit. However, for some children, their training would expand towards centers of learning such as the synagogue. With Jesus' arrival in the New Testament, the concept of discipleship took on a deeper meaning. Richard N. Longenecker suggests there are patterns of discipleship in the New Testament, "In a word, it has to do with imitating Christ, who himself is the model or pattern of authentic living. Believers in Christ are to conduct their lives in conformity to the attitude and actions of Christ as depicted in the Christ-hymn of [Philippians] 2:6-11."[61] It is through Jesus' example that

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[61] Richard N. Longenecker, *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), 8.

discipleship would grow towards a larger scale. Discipleship would expand from families to the church. The Great Commission would begin the mobilization of followers to make disciples of all nations. Despite the introduction of the Great Commission, the practice of family discipleship was still very much a part of society. Parents would still focus on discipling their children while in the home. The parents still held the responsibility of the discipleship of their children.

Discipleship in the New Testament (Matthew 4:19-20; 9:9; 2 Timothy 1:5)

The New Testament provides insight into the importance of discipleship in the life of the believer. The culture still understood discipleship to take place in the home. Jesus introduced discipleship in a new way that appeared to be different from what was expected. Jesus would approach discipleship by asking common men to "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt 4:19, ESV). Jesus would thereby introduce discipleship outside of the family unit. Jesus suggests that following him would help equip his followers to make disciples on their own. The commitment was significant to the point that it involved sacrifice. Dallas Willard describes the commitment as "Family and occupations were deserted for long periods to go with Jesus as he walked from place to place announcing, showing, and explaining the here-and-now governance or action of God. Disciples had to be with him to learn how to do what he did."[62] Discipleship would be a vehicle for the Gospel to be spread to all nations. The discipleship that Jesus modeled would be an extension of what already existed in the culture in that day. The discipleship that happened in the family would then translate to what happens when children become adults.

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[62] Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Rediscovering Jesus' Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2006), 6.

Another common reference to discipleship in the New Testament is in the example given

by Timothy. The apostle Paul speaks of Timothy's experience of discipleship with his

grandmother Lois and mother Eunice. Paul says, "I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith

that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in

you" (2 Tim 1:5, ESV). Timothy is a product of parents (even grandparents) who disciple their

children. Paul deemed it important to speak of Timothy's spiritual heritage. Timothy's

experience proves the value of parents who disciple their children. Timothy comes to faith

through the faithfulness of his mother and grandmother. Chap Bettis adds, "Timothy's family

was not perfect; his father was an unbelieving Greek (Acts 16:1-3). Yet, in a passage that should

give hope to mothers and grandmothers everywhere, Paul praised the faith of Lois and Eunice."[63]

This example also speaks to how parents can disciple their children in unusual circumstances.

Despite the shape of Timothy's family unit, his mother and grandmother were still able to

disciple him. Consequently, Timothy was prepared by his mother and grandmother to later enter

ministry. This reference by Paul gives support for why parents should disciple their children. It

illustrates the impact that parents can have on their children and what their children can do in the

future.

The Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20)

As noted above, the Great Commission is the foundation for disciple-making process. A

discussion on discipleship would be incomplete without mentioning the Great Commission that

was given at the time of Jesus' ascension. The Great Commission was pivotal in taking

discipleship from a local concept to now a global concept. The scope of discipleship would

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[63] Bettis, *The Disciple-Making Parent,* 25.

extend into the four corners of the earth. Jesus commands his followers to, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt 28:19-20, ESV). The command to make disciples of all nations reflects what already took place in the home. Just as parents were commanded to teach their children, believers were to do the same of all nations. The Great Commission does not negate the responsibility of parents to disciple their children, but it expands that discipleship beyond what takes place in the home. The Great Commission suggests that discipleship should not stop after the child leaves home, but it should continue as children begin to make disciples when they are adults. The Great Commission mobilizes all followers to engage in discipleship.

The Role of Parents in Discipleship (Ephesians 6:1-4; Colossians 3:20)

Additionally, the New Testament addresses the practical role of parents in the discipleship of their children. As the apostle Paul writes to many of his churches, he addresses many practical issues that surface in the daily life of the believers. In particular, Paul establishes the importance of children obeying their parents. He says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother' (this is the first commandment with a promise), 'that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land'" (Eph 6:1-3, ESV). Paul references Deuteronomy 5:16 to bridge the Old and New Testament understanding of discipleship. In this case, Paul is addressing children and how they should relate to their parents. He indicates that children would benefit from their parent's instruction. The role of parents in discipleship is to guide their children towards what is right. Paul implies that proper discipleship of children can prepare them to become spiritually grounded adults. Paul's letter to the Ephesian church shows that family discipleship requires intentional participation between parent and child.

Paul also speaks specifically to the father's role in the discipleship of their children. He says, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph 6:4, ESV). The task is for fathers not to treat their children harshly but in a manner that would drive them towards faith. Fathers should instruct them in the ways of the Lord. His encouragement to "bring them up" indicates an ongoing process of applying discipline and offering instruction. Voddie Baucham Jr. adds, "A number of clear passages in the Old Testament point to a father's responsibility to disciple his children (e.g., Deut. 6:6-7; Psalm 78; Proverbs 4), and in other places the implications are so strong as to be unavoidable."[64] As early as the Old Testament, the role of the father is highlighted especially because of his role as the leader in the family.

Paul also addresses the relationship between children and parents in his letter to the Colossians. Simply, Paul states, "Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord" (Col 3:20, ESV). The proper relationship between the parent and child is seen again and now with an additional reason. Not only is it good for children to obey their parents, but it will also ultimately please the Lord. Just as parents are pleased when their children walk in obedience, so also is God. Paul indicates that children should obey in "everything." This passage implies that that children should obey their parents in every aspect of their life. Children's obedience is preceded by the instruction that parents give to them. This wisdom and instruction help to make children mature in practical living as well as mature in their faith. This admonishment to children further shows the importance of the role that parents have in the discipleship of their children. This discipleship relationship hinges on parents taking an active role in this process. It is impossible for children to understand obedience without parents giving

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[64] Baucham Jr., *Family Shepherds*, 20.

the proper instruction. Paul David Tripp describes the value of parents saying, "Your work as a parent is a thing of extreme value because God has designed that you would be a principal, consistent, and faithful tool in his hands for the purpose of creating God-consciousness and God-submission in your children."[65] The New Testament teaching on family discipleship further supports the need and value of parents discipling their children.

Theoretical Foundation

The call for parents to disciple their children has been an ongoing discussion among church leaders and parents. The influence that parents have on their children continues to support the reasons for parents to assume this responsibility. Research shows the outcome of a lack of discipleship in a young person's life, which in turn creates concern for the future of the church. Paul David Tripp adds, "All of this leads to the fact that lost people are a danger to themselves, and because they are, they are headed for destruction—although they probably don't know it."[66] Following high school, young adults often become enamored with a new sense of independence and misplaced priorities. Fostering an active faith becomes less important to young people as they transition into adulthood.

To address this growing trend, ministry leaders and experts suggest a variety of family ministry models that can help equip parents to disciple their children. Timothy Paul Jones and Randy Stinson state that "most contemporary models of family ministry can be traced clearly back to the Puritans. Among these heirs of the Reformation, there was a clear model for family

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[65] Tripp, *14 Gospel Principles*, 30.

[66] Ibid., 105.

discipleship that could be learned and transferred from one context to another."[67] This ministry evolved from being associated with the clergy to becoming a practice that is carried out in the home. The church developed a better understanding of the family and began shifting the focus to equipping parents for family discipleship. Families would begin to incorporate Bible reading, prayer, and worship into family life. These practices established the parents as facilitators of discipleship. The church began to recognize that "the definition of family out of which we operate shapes our programs and ministries. It privileges those recognized as families by providing attention to their issues and needs."[68] Out of this new understanding of the family, the concept of family ministry began to emerge into the local church. New family ministry models would be utilized to help parents navigate through the discipleship process.

The development of contemporary family ministry models has become the focus of family discipleship. There was an evident need for attention and resources to be given to families across all denominations. Timothy Paul Jones emphasizes the importance of working from a single definition of family ministry. He says that family ministry is "the process of intentionally and persistently realigning a congregation's proclamation and practices so that parents are acknowledged, trained, and held accountable as persons primarily responsible for the discipleship of their children."[69] This definition helps to provide a foundation for understanding the three contemporary family ministry models. The significance and effectiveness of these family ministry models continue to drive the discussion that parents should disciple their children.

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[67] Michael Anthony and Michelle Anthony, *A Theology for Family Ministries* (Nashville: B&H Academics, 2011), 160.

[68] Diana R. Garland, *Family Ministry: A Comprehensive Guide* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012), 51.

[69] Anthony and Anthony, *A Theology*, 173.

The first model that is commonly referenced in the discussion is the Family-Based model. Churches who adopt this family-ministry model attempt "To train members to perceive parents as crucial partners in children's Christian formation, family-based churches sponsor consistent intergenerational classes, activities, and events."[70] This family ministry model is not a radical departure from traditional ministry models but places the focus on bringing generations together. Brandon Shields states that churches should "simply refocus existing age-appropriate groupings to partner intentionally with families in the discipleship process."[71] The Family-Based ministry model works to intersect generations so that everyone participates in the discipleship process. Each family member is an active participant in discipleship. Many churches choose to adopt this family ministry model because it does not require a dramatic restructuring of existing ministries and reflects a balanced approach to family ministry. The Family-Based ministry model highlights the importance of the parental role and facilitates opportunities for family discipleship to occur. However, in addition to the facilitation of activities and opportunities for interaction, Paul Renfro suggests that "what are needed are not merely events putting parents and youth together but intentional training so fathers and mothers can build discipleship into their children's daily lives."[72]

The Family-Integrated Model represents a more significant change to the traditional approach to family ministry. Churches that use the Family-Integrated Model seek to bring all age groups together. The Family-Integrated Model suggests that "all or nearly all age-graded classes and events are eliminated. Generations learn and worship together, and parents bear primary responsibility for the spiritual formation of their children. Families participating in the Family-

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[70] Anthony and Anthony, *A Theology*, 173-174.

[71] Jones, *Perspectives on Family Ministry,* 87.

[72] Ibid., 106.

Integrated Model view their households as primary contexts for mutual discipleship and evangelism of unbelievers."[73] This family ministry model involves a complete integration of all age groups into one. The Family-Integrated Model suggests that all ministry is centered around the family unit. The church is viewed as a group of families instead of age-specific groups. Voddie Baucham Jr. describes the Family-Integrated church as one where "families worship together…and the integration of all ages in virtually all of its activities."[74] The goal of this ministry model is to assign complete responsibility of discipleship to the parents. Paul Renfro explained that the Family-Integrated ministry focuses on the comprehensive nature of ministry where families engage in all activities such as worship, learning, serve, and fellowship.[75] The Family-Integrated ministry model simplifies how family discipleship should happen and sets the context of church ministry around the family. With this ministry model, there is also an emphasis on the father's role in leading the family in discipleship. Churches that adopt the Family-Integrated Ministry model understand that "God gave fathers the responsibility to lead their homes to accomplish God's purpose."[76] The father's role can be traced from the Old Testament through the New Testament; therefore it is a familiar concept. Ideally, fathers would lead their families in discipleship and through that the family dynamic would be strengthened. Bryan Nelson would add that "families in family-integrated congregations view their households as contexts for mutual discipleship as well as evangelism of unbelievers."[77] The equipping would

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[73] Anthony and Anthony, *A Theology*, 174-175.

[74] Baucham Jr., *Family Driven Faith*, 194.

[75] Jones, *Perspectives on Family Ministry,* 56.

[76] Ibid., 62.

[77] Randy Stinson and Timothy Paul Jones, *Trained in the Fear of God: Family Ministry in Theological, Historical, and Practical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2011), 24.

take place at the church and the practical application would be seen in the context of the home. This ministry model encourages ministry to be initiated and facilitated by parents.

The third family ministry model is called the Family-Equipping Model. This ministry model offers an approach that resembles qualities of the Family-Based Model and the Family-Integrated Model. The Family-Equipping Model carries a balanced approach that recognizes the responsibility of parents to disciple their children. Churches that utilize this ministry model focus on equipping parents in carrying out their role as a discipler. In the Family-Equipping Model, "every practice at every level of ministry is reworked completely to champion the place of parents as primary disciple-makers in their children's lives."[78] The emphasis of this ministry model is the parents. Parents are encouraged, equipped, and held accountable for their role in the discipleship of their children. From the church's view, "the goal of equipping families is a church-wide emphasis, owned by all church ministries and leaders."[79] Not only are the programs in a family-equipping church impacted, but also the culture of a family-equipping church is marked by how parents can be active participants. Jay Strother adds that, "unlike family-based churches, family-equipping congregations do not believe it is enough merely to tweak or refocus existing youth or children's ministries."[80] With the emphasis on equipping families to practice discipleship at home, youth and children's ministries still exist and continue to partner with parents to support the discipleship of their children. The Family-Equipping Model seeks to change the overall mentality of ministry in the church. Every decision is made with parents and families in mind. Parents are approached with a long-term vision of their children's faith. Strother describes this as "engaging and equipping parents as their children's primary disciplers,

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[78] Anthony and Anthony, *A Theology,* 175.

[79] Stinson and Jones, *Trained in the Fear of God*, 256.

[80] Jones, *Perspectives on Family Ministry,* 120.

and the second was partnering with parents to develop a definite plan for their children's Christian formation."[81] Churches who have family-equipping ministries go beyond intergenerational activities and intentionally helps parents navigate the entire process. The Family-Equipping ministry model has been a widely used model for implementing family ministries in churches. The responsibility for discipleship does not solely rest on parents or the church. Instead, there is a partnership between the parents and the church. The church that adopts the Family-Equipping Model equips the parents to execute discipleship in their homes. This ministry model does not eliminate age-specific ministries, but re-orients them towards supporting parents in their roles as primary disciplers.

Much of the research on the parent's role in the discipleship of their children revolves around what ministry structure exists to encourage and equip parents. Traditionally, parents had outsourced the discipleship of their children to trained professionals. Strother adds, "Most parents in your church come from a generation that was raised on the segmented-programmatic model."[82] In modern ministry contexts, churches are now transitioning to a family ministry model that engages parents to take the helm of discipleship in the home. Ministry leaders are now evaluating which ministry model is most effective and aligns best with what Scripture teaches on the subject. The research that comes from these ministry models will provide the context for this thesis project. Understanding the environment where parents are engaged with family discipleship will lead to consider what practical application needs to be practiced. When a church utilizes a ministry model that effectively encourages and equips parents to disciple their children, the impact will be seen in generations to come. This thesis project seeks to continue the

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[81] Jones, *Perspectives on Family Ministry,* 121.

[82] Stinson and Jones, *Trained in the Fear of God*, 259.

discussion on the role of parents in the discipleship of their children and the spiritual

implications of these children when they become adults.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter will address the methodology of the research utilized to understand the importance of parents discipling their children. A detailed description of the design of the research survey will be outlined, including the implementation of the research survey. This chapter will address the problem statement: Parents do not understand the importance of discipling their children, therefore are not discipling their children at home. The research survey aims to uncover areas of concern with the discipleship experiences of young adults (ages 18-21). While a lack of family discipleship is not the sole cause for young adults stepping away from the faith, the research survey aims to show the importance and need for parents to become involved in the discipleship process. If parents understood the importance of discipling their children at home, they would be encouraged to act. It is possible to discover varying levels of involvement by parents throughout the research survey, therefore not assuming the extremes.

Furthermore, the research survey aims to show the impact of the lack of discipleship in the home from the young adult's perspective. When children leave home and experience independence, their choices reflect how well their parents equipped them. Parents who disciple their children will help prepare them to cultivate their faith when they are on their own. The research survey will give insight into what role discipleship in the home plays in preparing children to take ownership of their spiritual life. The participants' feedback in the research survey can help fuel further discussion on why parents should disciple their children in the home and how the church can equip parents to lead in the discipleship of their children.

Permissions and Recruitment

The research for this thesis project was completed by utilizing an electronic anonymous survey that aimed to highlight the experiences with discipleship at home from the participant's perspective. The 20-question electronic anonymous survey (including Consent Approval; see Appendix B) targets young Christian adults between the ages of 18-21 (see Appendix A: Family Discipleship Questionnaire). The research portion of this thesis project began with the researcher emailing the lead pastors/elders of churches within the Bedrock Network requesting permission to distribute the anonymous electronic survey to the young Christian adults in their church (see Appendix D: Church Inquiry Email). The Bedrock Network consists of churches that were planted out of Bedrock Church in Bedford, VA. Permission was granted by email from James Barnes, Leading Elder at Bedrock Lynchburg, and Philip Biles, Leading Elder at Bedrock Church in Bedford, VA. Following approval from the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct this research project, the researcher sent an initial recruitment email containing a summary of the research project, a description of the anonymity of their participation, and a link to the anonymous electronic survey to James Barnes and Philip Biles for them to distribute to the young Christian adults in each church (see Appendix C for IRB Letter of Approval; see Appendix E for Youth Group Email). At the same time, the researcher added recruitment posts to his Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter accounts to expand the reach to more potential participants (see Appendix F). Potential participants were recruited from young Christian adults in Bedrock church in the Bedrock Network and those who had viewed and responded to the social media recruitment posts.

The researcher published the electronic anonymous survey to be available from February 22, 2023 to May 6, 2023. During this time, 83 potential participants opened the electronic

anonymous survey link, and of the potential participants 58 chose to complete the survey. Completion of the electronic anonymous survey was completely voluntary, and participants were able to cease participation at any time.

Electronic Anonymous Survey Design

The electronic anonymous survey was created using Liberty University's Qualtrics survey software. The researcher completed the required online training and gained access to create the survey. The 20 survey questions were input into the Qualtrics survey software and then submitted to Dr. Laverne Smith, the School of Divinity Doctor of Ministry office administrator, for final approval. Once approval was granted from the School of Divinity Doctor of Ministry office administrator, the electronic anonymous survey was inserted into the recruitment email and social media posts to be distributed to young Christian adults between the ages of 18-21. The electronic anonymous survey was titled "Family Discipleship Questionnaire" and was distributed via electronic link. All recruitment methods (email and social media posts) included the same link and participants could not be identified, nor could personal identifiable information be collected from the electronic link.

The first page of the Family Discipleship Questionnaire contained a link to a required research consent document that was approved by the Liberty University IRB (see Appendix B). The research consent document provided all the necessary information for the potential participant to decide whether to participate in the research. The page included a Consent Form affirmation or denial statement:

> Thank you for your interest in participating in this research project on the common reasons why parents do not regularly disciple their children and what the expected outcomes are for the future spiritual life of their children. A consent document is provided below. The consent document contains additional information about my

research. After you have read the consent document, please click CONTINUE to proceed to the survey. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the survey.
Research consent document

By clicking on "continue," the participant could progress to respond to the actual questions of the survey.

The 20-question survey consists of 18 multiple choice questions and 2 rank order questions that focus on the participant's experience with discipleship at home. Questions 1, 2, and 4 established a basis of whether the participant identifies as a Christian and how they understand discipleship. Questions 3, 5, and 6 focused on the level of importance of discipleship between the participant and their parents. Questions 7, 8, and 9 provided insight into discipleship practices within the participant's home. Questions 10 through 15 transitions to the participant's current experience with their spiritual life. These questions were designed to show the results of the participant's experience with discipleship at home. Questions 16 through 20 were designed to highlight how both participants and their parents handled technology. These questions are used to contrast the level of priority given to technology and discipleship. In sum, the 20-question survey was designed to give a quantitative view of how the presence or lack of discipleship in the home affected young Christian adults when they are faced with their spiritual life on their own. Many of the multiple-choice responses will give insight into certain discipleship methods that Christian young adults experienced and if there is correlation between certain discipleship methods and a young Christian adult who was better equipped to handle their spiritual life on their own.

Research Questions

The questions in the Family Discipleship Questionnaire were designed to understand the impact of the presence or lack of discipleship practiced in the home. With the responsibility assigned to parents for the care of their children, the questions would highlight the actions taken for discipleship in the home and the participant's perspective of them. Analysis of the responses to these questions will support the problem statement and hopefully lead to substantial conclusions. As the problem of parents not discipling their children is better understood, the questions in the research survey are designed to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: Do young Christian adults have an accurate understanding of discipleship?

RQ2: What was most important in the home to parents and to teenagers?

RQ3: What elements of discipleship were practiced in the home and outside of the home?

RQ4: How has the presence or absence of discipleship in the home impacted the young Christian adults' current spiritual life?

RQ5: How does the priority given to discipleship compare to the priority given to another area of a teenager's life (i.e., technology use)?

Data Collection and Analysis

The electronic anonymous survey, "Family Discipleship Questionnaire," was distributed via electronic link and was active for 73 days, after which the survey was closed for any additional submissions. Out of 83 potential participants who opened the link, 58 survey responses were collected for analysis. The researcher must note that some survey responses were incomplete and were missing responses to certain questions. The researcher will still include these responses in the overall analysis because they still contribute to the purpose of the thesis project.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This chapter will present the findings from the anonymous electronic survey on the experiences that participants had with family discipleship in the home. The goal for this anonymous electronic survey was to provide insight into the general themes that inform the five research questions for this project. Based on the results of the research survey, the researcher can further support the need for parental involvement in the discipleship of their children. While the results of the research survey do not speak in specifics, the general themes can draw attention to important areas concerning family discipleship.

The results of each research survey question bring light to the product of each participant's home life. It must be mentioned that each participant has unique circumstances that impact their experience with discipleship in the home. There are factors that contribute to their specific experience and ultimately led to their current spiritual status. The researcher approaches these results with an understanding that only a deep dive into each unique experience can yield more specific results. For now, the results of this research survey can provide a basis for future research and initial recommendations. The results of this research survey can serve as a primer to explore future partnerships between parents and local churches.

More specifically, based on how the data informs the research questions, recommendations can be made for further equipping parents to take on their responsibility for the discipleship of their children. The results of the research survey can serve as examples of outcomes for the presence or absence of discipleship in the home. Children with little to no experience with discipleship in the home are likely to face challenges with their spiritual life as they become adults. The results further emphasize the importance of a discipleship culture within the home.

Current Spiritual Identification (Question 1)

To create a basis for the remainder of the research survey, the initial question helps to identify the current spiritual status of each participant. Out of 58 responses, 91% of participants identified as being spiritually committed. Their commitment shows that their spiritual life is important, and they are willing to engage with it, at varying levels.

Few participants (9%) indicated they were spiritually searching. While most participants indicated a level of spiritual commitment, the remaining responses from participants who are spiritually searching may yield valuable insight into why they are now spiritual searching. Their experiences may reflect a lack of consistent discipleship in the home. A closer look into their experiences may also reveal other factors that brought them to this current state. Table 4.1 shows that most participants are engaged in a pursuit of a personal relationship with God, while some participants are facing uncertainty in their spiritual life.
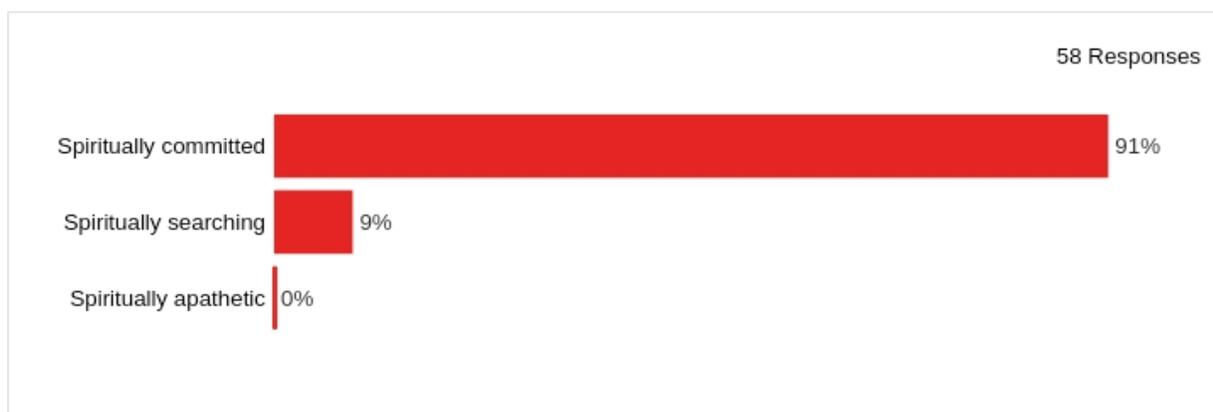
Table 4.1 Q1: Which of the following would you most identify with as a Christian?

While Table 4.1 shows a significant percentage of spiritually committed participants, there may be varying levels of experiences with discipleship in the home. 91% of participants are committed, but they may experience challenges stemming from their experience in the home.

The data from Table 4.1 only indicates that participants are still committed and have not disengaged from their faith.

Understanding of Discipleship (Questions 2-4)

Another important aspect of this research survey is to gauge the participant's understanding of discipleship. While there are various definitions and understandings of the discipleship process, a participant's understanding of discipleship can be a result of their experience with discipleship in the home. Also, their unique understanding of discipleship can influence how they respond to the remainder of the survey.

Thus, Questions 2-4 gave participants an opportunity to define discipleship and how they understand its basic components. Most participants (72%, 41 out of 57), as shown in Table 4.2, define discipleship as *the process of one believer investing in the development of healthy, growing believers who can then multiply themselves in others*. An important factor in the participant's understanding of discipleship is the type of expectation in each definition of discipleship. Most participants believe discipleship should extend beyond the current relationship. The other definitions are limited to benefits for the one being discipled.
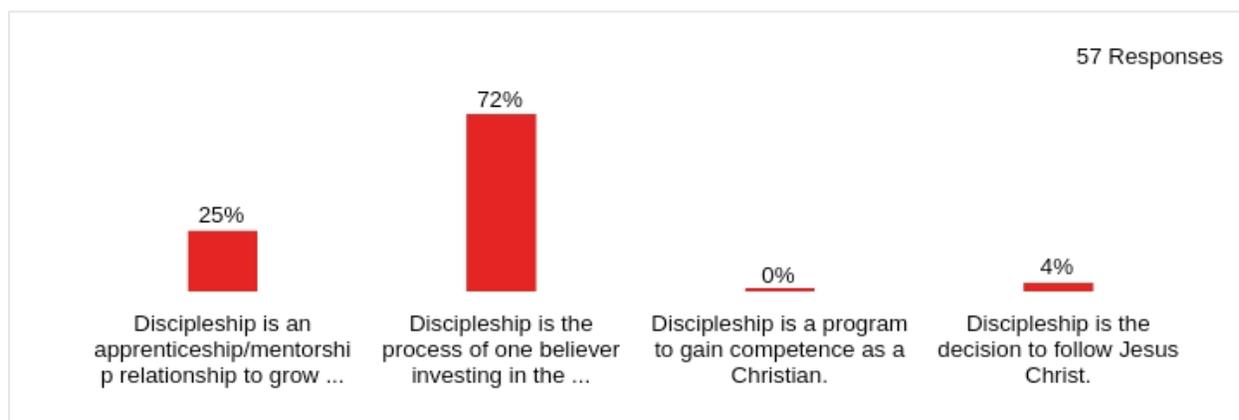
Table 4.2 Q2: Which of the following best fits your understanding of discipleship?

25% of participants view discipleship as an apprenticeship or mentorship relationship. The only difference between the majority-chosen definition and this one is that the discipleship process ends with the apprentice or mentee. Most participants agree that discipleship involves the development of the believer that can be reproduced in others. Based on the participant's experience, it understandable why some would see discipleship as a program or simply the decision to follow Jesus Christ.

Table 4.3 measures the participant's understanding of discipleship based on their preferred method of delivery. Question 3 asked participants to select their top 2 preferences. The research survey shows that 48 out of 57 participants prefer to experience discipleship through a spiritual mentor. 19 out of the 48 participants *only* selected a spiritual mentor as their preferred method. The result from this question slightly parallels the responses from Question 2.

Table 4.3 Q3: Based on your understanding of discipleship, what is your preferred method of delivery? (Select top 2)

The preference of a spiritual mentor aligns with the responses given for the participant's understanding of discipleship. 19 out of the 57 participants that listed a spiritual mentor as a preference also included *attending church* as a second preference. This selection indicates that participants wish to experience discipleship through multiple avenues. Discipleship can be applied in other environments. Few responses included *being active in a youth ministry* and

participation in parachurch opportunities as alternate preferences for the delivery of discipleship.

It is understandable that a *spiritual mentor* and *attending church* are the most preferred delivery of discipleship, as these are most recognized in the Christian experience. The other options are unique to each participant's circumstances. *Attendance at a Christian/home school* and *participation in parachurch opportunities* may not be options available to all participants. 9 out of 57 participants preferred other delivery methods of discipleship outside of a *spiritual mentor*.

Table 4.4 shows the top three key components of discipleship based on the participant's understanding of discipleship. 57 participants made 173 selections with 31% selections of *Mentoring*, 23% selections of *Practical training*, and 14% selections of *Small group*. The 173 selections from Question 4 represent a variety of combinations of what participants saw as key components of discipleship. Six participants responded with more or less than 3 key components for discipleship.
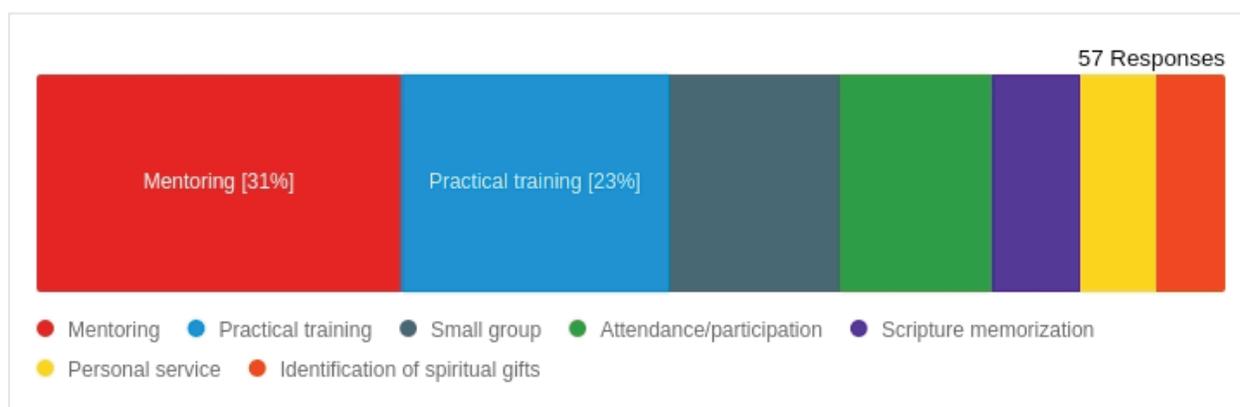

Table 4.4 Q4: Based on your understanding of discipleship, what are its most key components? (Select top 3)

The results of the selections indicate that discipleship must include some activity or engagement. *Mentoring* and *Small group* involve interaction with other people, while *Practical*

training involves the application of what was learned. All three top selections can work together to facilitate discipleship for any individual. It is important to consider that these are components, and all selections can be used in discipleship in the home.

Fifty-three participants agreed that discipleship must include a version of *mentoring* from a more experienced Christian to experience growth beyond only *Scripture memorization*, *Personal Service*, and *Identification of spiritual gifts*. Questions 2-4 reveal that most participants understand discipleship to include some form of investment from a mature Christian. Also, this mentoring-type relationship is one that exists beyond one interaction. It requires commitment and is long-term in nature. Participants recognize that discipleship must include a relationship component as primary.

Priorities in the Home (Questions 5 and 6)

The next category of questions focuses on what was considered to be important to both parents and the participants. These questions were designed to shed light into the possible differences between the perspectives of parents and their children. It is important to consider that the responses are what were perceived by the participant. However, their perception may provide valuable insight into what was given priority in the home and how the participants responded.

Question 5 gave participants an opportunity to rank what areas were most important to their parents. 57 participants ranked *Spiritual Matters* (19), *Technology/Gaming/Social Media* (15), and *Family/Art (Theater, Band, etc.)* (8) as most important to their parents. The next level of importance to parents were *Family* (17), *Art (Theater, Band, etc.)* (14), and *Technology/Gaming/Social Media* (10). These results indicate that parents were indeed concerned about spiritual matters but also focused on other aspects of family life.

Table 4.5 Q5: Based on your experience, rank in order (1 being least important and 7 being most important) what was most important to your parents?

It is interesting to see *Technology/Gaming/Social Media* being perceived as important to parents. It is possible this perception was observed by the amount of time spent on this area of family life. The same can be said about *Family* and *Art (Theater, Band, etc.)*. If participants see that parents give a significant amount of time to these areas, this is what parents must find most important. Based on the participants of this research survey, *Art (Theater, Band, etc.)* was most prevalent compared to other areas of family life (i.e., *Academics* or *Sports/Athletics*).

Conversely, what participants found least important to their parents is worth highlighting. Eighteen participants indicated that *Spiritual Matters* was least important to their parents. Instead, what was most important to the parents of these 18 participants were *Technology/Gaming/Social Media* (56%). Surprisingly, this area has remained at the forefront of family life, where previously areas such as *Academics* or *Sports/Athletics* may have been more common.

Question 6 redirects the focus to what was most important to the participant. Gaining this perspective is important as a comparison to what was perceived as important to parents.

Participant's values may provide a different dynamic to understanding the discipleship culture in the home. The results show that both *Spiritual Matters* (23) and *Technology/Gaming/Social Media* (10) were most important to the participants. Most areas such as *Academics* (23) and *Sports/Athletics* (16) held some importance to the participants, as is common for most teenagers.
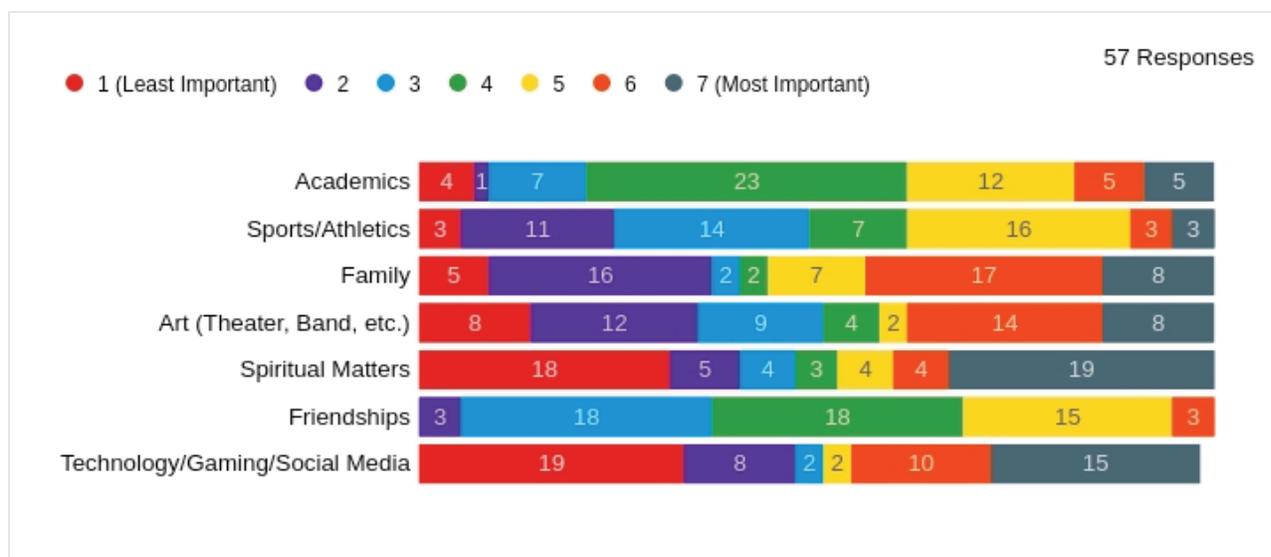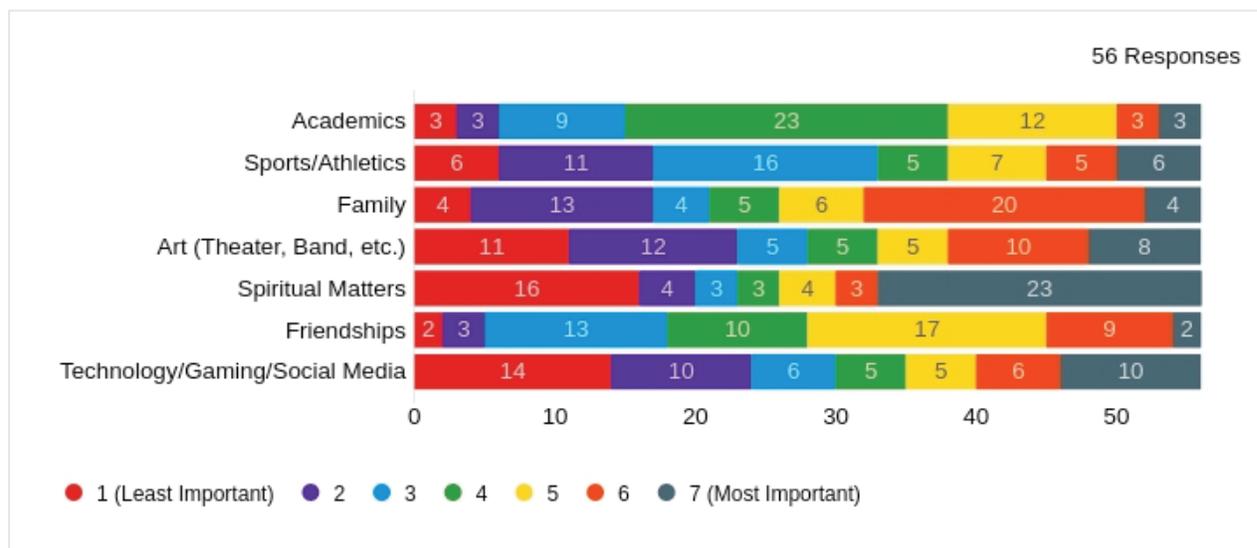

Table 4.6 Q6: Based on your experience, rank in order (1 being least important and 7 being most important) what was most important to you?

It is interesting to note that a significant number of participants also ranked *Spiritual Matters* (16) as least important. For the participants that ranked *Spiritual Matters* as least important, they indicated that *Academics* (2), *Art (Theater, Band, etc.)* (5), *Sports/Athletics* (4), and *Technology/Gaming/Social Media* (5) were most important to them. Participants who found these areas to be most important likely were encouraged to pursue these areas, as the results of Question 5 show a similar trend. Parents and participants that found these areas as most important usually found *Spiritual Matters* as least important. Surprisingly, there is almost an even split between those that considered *Spiritual Matters* as most important or least important. What parents and participants found most important likely will determine how much time and

priority is given to that area. Hence, what is important in the home will reveal what type of discipleship culture exists and what influences the children.

Discipleship Practiced Inside and Outside the Home (Question 7-9)

Discipleship interactions often entail spiritual conversations as a driver. While there is not a single format or template to follow to have spiritual conversations, the key aspect is intentionality. Question 7 asks participants to recall how often they experienced intentional spiritual conversations in the home. This question reveals which parents took steps towards discipling their children.
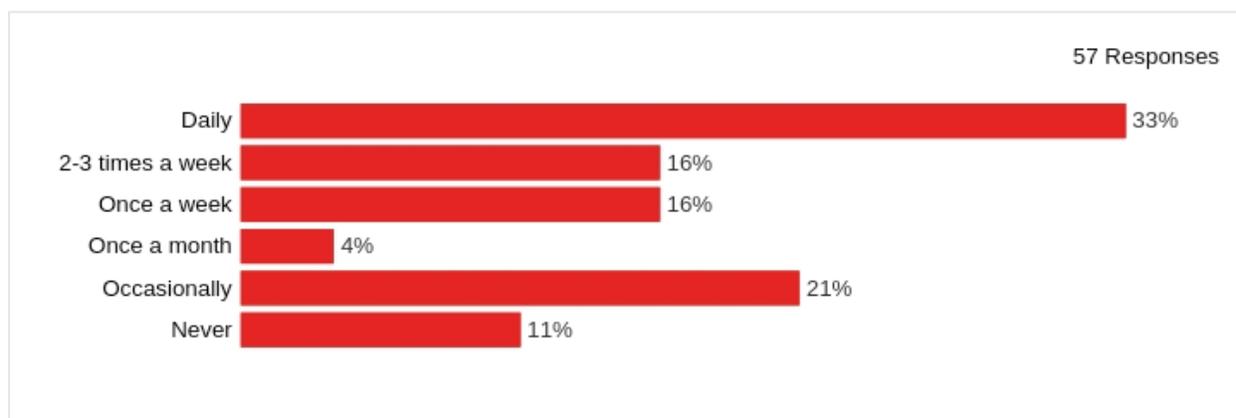
Table 4.7 Q7: How often did you experience intentional spiritual conversations in your home?

Out of fifty-seven participants, nineteen indicated that they experienced intentional spiritual conversations *daily*, while twelve revealed that they only experienced intentional spiritual conversations *occasionally*. Question 7 serves as a turning point for the research, revealing how parents apply what they believe. If parents find *Spiritual Matters* as most important, it is assumed that they would act on that value choice. Again, there could be deeper reasons that can explain why regular intentional spiritual conversations are not happening in most homes.

While 19 participants did experience intentional spiritual conversations daily, the rest of the participants experienced them less frequently. Six participants even indicated that they had *never* experienced intentional spiritual conversations. This is important to note, as half of those who selected *Never* also indicated that they thought they had parents who found *Spiritual Matters* as most important. Understanding the context of each home would reveal why the participant perceived this disjunction in the home.

Question 8 allowed participants to indicate which elements of discipleship were practiced in the home. The list of discipleship elements was not exhaustive, but instead are common types that are practiced in most discipleship relationships. These discipleship practices reveal intentionality and what steps parents are taking to disciple their children. Regular application of some of these practices can encourage spiritual growth and promote a discipleship culture in the home.

57 Responses

Prayer [14%]

● Attending Sunday Worship Service [16%] ● Prayer [14%] ● Spiritual conversations [10%]
● Home schooling/Christian school [10%] ● Bible reading [9%] ● Family "devotions" [9%]
● Required attendance at youth group [8%] ● Scripture memorization [7%] ● Reading a Christian book [7%]
● Sharing spiritual moments from the day [5%] ● Podcasts/Other Technology media [3%] ● None [1%]
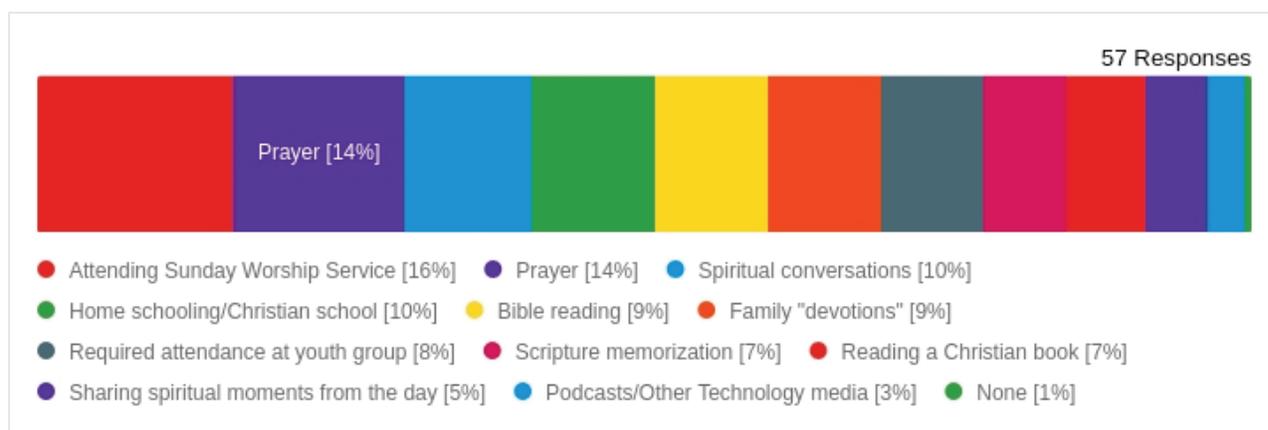
Table 4.8 Q8: What elements of discipleship were practiced in your home? (Select all that apply)

Participants responded, as seen in Table 4.8, with *Attending Sunday Worship Service* (16%) as the most practiced discipleship element in the home. This is followed by *Prayer* (14%) and *Spiritual conversations* and *Homeschooling/Christian school* (10%). These discipleship

elements appear to be the most common practices in the home. *Attending Sunday Worship Service* was expected to be the most common because most Christian homes typically have regular Sunday church attendance. Often, children are expected to attend a Sunday morning church service. 54 out of 57 participants selected *Attending Sunday Worship Service* as a discipleship element practiced in the home.

To gain a full picture of what types of spiritual activities contributed to the overall discipleship of the participants, Question 9 shows what spiritual activities the participants engaged in outside of the home. While these activities may not involve the parent and participant engaging in the activity together, it shows what other influences each participant had in their spiritual development. It is possible that some of these spiritual activities were expected by the parents, and some may be the choice of the participant. These spiritual activities may supplement what is happening at home. At the same time, it is possible that these spiritual activities have replaced what should be happening at home.

55 Responses

● Weekly youth group [18%]　● Serve in a ministry [17%]　● Bible study group [16%]　● Missions Trip [13%]
● Mentoring relationship [11%]　● Internet Searches and Websites [8%]　● Accountability relationship [7%]
● Parachurch organization (FCA, Young Life, etc.) [5%]　● Evangelism ministry [4%]

Table 4.9 Q9: What other spiritual activities did you participate in outside of the home? (Select all that apply)

The results show that *Weekly youth group* (18%), *Serve in a ministry* (17%), and *Bible study group* (16%) are the most common spiritual activities that participants engage in outside of

the home. These activities may not necessarily involve the parents, but they are allowed or encouraged by parents for practical application. Parents simply allowing their children to participate in these spiritual activities shows that they find them beneficial. These three spiritual activities also involve interactions with other communities.

It is important to note that 42 out of 55 participants listed *Weekly youth group* as their first spiritual activity practiced outside the home. This illustrates a common spiritual activity that is practiced in most Christian homes. If participants were not involved in an extracurricular activity such as sports, theater, or band, it is likely they attended a weekly youth group. This also supports the assumption that most parents expected their children to attend a weekly youth group unless there were other priorities.

Participants who selected *Serve in a ministry* and *Bible study group* align with what was hypothesized on how most Christian homes practice discipleship regularly. Parents are encouraging their children to serve in a ministry or attend a Bible study group. The decision to have their children engage in these spiritual activities often comes because of a sacrifice of other activities. The results show that participants engage in these spiritual activities just as much as a *Weekly youth group*. 38 out of 55 participants selected *Serve in a ministry*, while 37 out of 55 selected *Bible study group*. 22 out of 55 participants selected all three spiritual activities.

The practices inside and outside the home are critical to gain a sense of the discipleship culture in the home. The decisions that parents make to facilitate discipleship are reflected in their children's regularly scheduled activities. Low engagement in discipleship activities may reveal priorities are in other areas of home life.

Relationship with God: Then and Now (Questions 10 and 11)

The next section of questions begins to address the impact of the absence or presence of discipleship in the home. These questions illustrate what type of change occurred during their experience at home and in their current relationship with God. It is important to mention that participants who show a decline in their relationship state could be affected because of other reasons. The decline in their relationship state may not be reflective of the impact of the family discipleship they experienced. Also, a positive relationship state could be influenced by factors outside of the home. Still, a comparison of the participant's relationship with God (then vs. now) can be informative towards understanding the impact of parents discipling their children at home.

57 Responses

- Given priority and experienced significant growth [42%]
- Engaged it when I had time in my schedule [37%]
- Effective at publicly claiming to be a Christian, but privately lived a different lif...
- Showed no interest [4%]

Table 4.10 Q10: During the ages of 12-19, which of the following best described your relationship with God?

Question 10 focused on how the participant would have described their relationship with God during the ages of 12-19. This time frame would encompass their experience at home. 42% of participants indicated that their relationship with God was *given priority and experienced significant growth* while 37% of participants stated that they *engaged it when I had time in my schedule*. These results indicate that most participants fall into one of two groups. Their

relationship with God was given top priority vs. some priority. Participants who only gave some priority to their relationship with God most likely had competing priorities.

As an example, participants who selected *engaged it when I had time in my schedule* (21) also indicated that what was most important to them ranged from *Technology/Gaming/Social Media* (6) to *Sports/Athletics* (4), and *Art (Theater, Band, etc.)* (4). While these results do not confirm that all attention was given to these other areas, participants found their relationship with God was one of many competing priorities. What participants found important most likely would have taken priority.
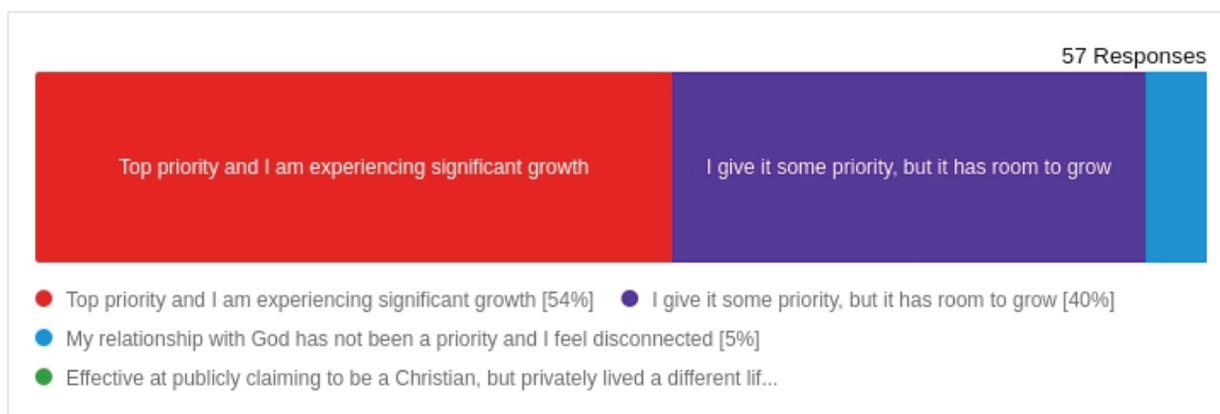
Table 4.11 Q11: Which of the following best describes your relationship with God now?

Question 11 shows a similar trend to the previous question as participants describe what their relationship with God looks like now. While there could be various reasons for the way participants describe their relationship with God now, it is insightful to see what type of change they experienced. Based on their responses, participants could have experienced growth or a decline in their relationships with God.

According to the survey results, 11 out of 57 participants show a decline in their relationship with God from the ages of 12-19 to the present. 8 out of 11 participants went from *Given priority and experienced significant growth* to *I give it some priority, but it has room to*

grow. This result would lead to the question of how do participants decline from giving priority and experiencing significant growth in their spiritual life, to only giving some priority and room to grow. Did something contribute to this downward trend? Again, there could be factors outside of discipleship that led to this outcome.

It is important to note the number of participants that experienced growth during this period. The survey results indicate that 38 out of 57 participants showed growth based on their description of their relationship with God. 11 out of 38 participants began with *Engaged it when I had time in my schedule* and arrived at *My relationship with God is my top priority and I am experiencing significant growth*. In the same way, this result poses the question of what contributed to this positive trend? Was there a greater contribution made by parents with discipleship?

Impact of Discipleship on Current Spiritual Life (Questions 12-15)

The next group of questions provides some insight into what the participant's spiritual life looks like now. Specifically, how has discipleship impacted participants' current spiritual life? Questions 12-15 move to identify more specific evidence of the elements of their current spiritual life. Questions 10 and 11 addressed the general state of their relationship with God, while Questions 12-15 will illustrate what has carried over from their experience with discipleship at home.

57 Responses

Yes [65%]   No [35%]

Table 4.12 Q12: Are you currently or have you participated in a discipleship relationship after graduating high school?

Question 12 shows how many participants engaged in a discipleship relationship after graduating from high school. This question would reveal that participants felt a discipleship relationship was important enough to continue even after leaving home. The results show that 65% of participants are currently in a discipleship relationship or have been in one since graduating from high school.

With a proper understanding of discipleship, participants would know that discipleship is reproductive and ongoing in nature. What participants experienced in discipleship at home would be carried forward – whether good or bad. It is also important to point out that 35% of participants have not had any discipleship relationship past high school. The percentage is significant enough to question why they have not pursued a discipleship relationship.

57 Responses

Prayer [15%]

● Prayer [15%] ● Attending a Sunday Worship Service [15%] ● Bible reading [14%]
● Spiritual conversations with others [13%] ● Daily "Quiet Time" [10%] ● Service opportunities [10%]
● Reading a Christian book [9%] ● Spiritual memorization [7%] ● Sharing spiritual moments from the day [7%]
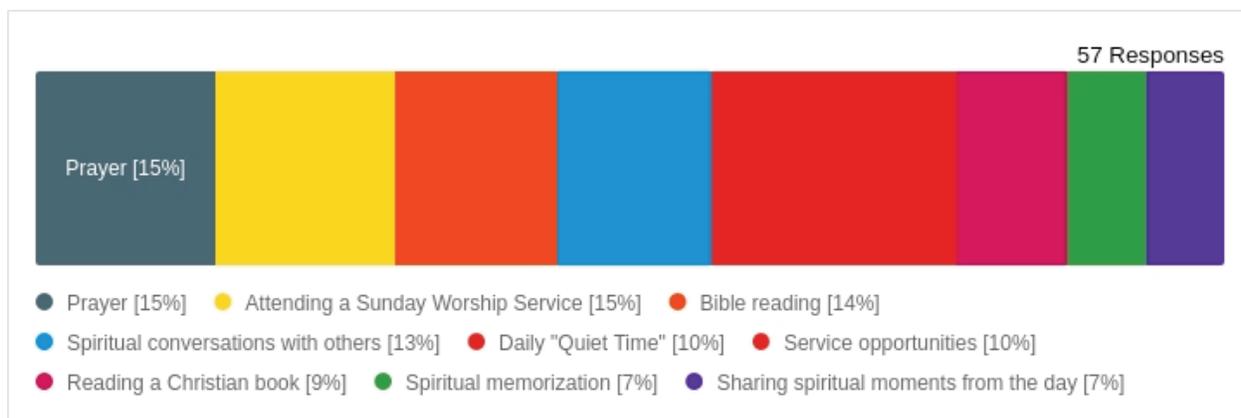
Table 4.13 Q13: Which of the following elements of discipleship have you adopted in your own spiritual life now? (Check all that apply)

Question 13 asks participants to list what elements of discipleship have been adopted into their own spiritual life. These are elements that the participant has intentionally applied to their current spiritual life. While these discipleship elements may not indicate they are in or have been in a discipleship relationship, it can show that these elements originated from earlier in their life. Their experience from home could have set them up to continue these practices when they leave home.

Out of 364 selections, participants indicated that *Prayer* (15%), *Attending a Sunday Worship Service* (15%), and *Bible Reading* (14%) were the most common discipleship elements practiced in their spiritual life now. These three practices tend to be the most-recognized elements in the Christian life. Question 8 showed that *Prayer* (16%) and *Attending a Sunday Worship Service* (14%) were practiced in the home. Participants most likely continued a practice that was ingrained into them since being home. It is possible that this is a result of regular discipleship in the home. Parents who encourage these discipleship elements will create habits that will continue into adulthood. Continuing spiritual disciplines are a positive sign of a growing faith in Jesus Christ.

Question 14 indicates the level of priority given to the participant's relationship with God. While similar to Question 11, this question focuses on the specific level of priority now that they are no longer in the home. The results show that 60% of participants have made their relationship with God *the top priority and engaging it daily*. Similar results are seen in the percentage of participants who are currently in or have been in a discipleship relationship. Daily engagement should result in engagement in the discipleship process whether discipling others or being discipled.

There are also similar trends seen in those participants who show *some priority when my schedule allows it* (35%). When compared to previous responses for their experiences during the ages of 12-19, 14 out of 20 participants showed the same level of priority given to their relationship with God. It appears that no significant change occurred as they left home. With similar responses in two different stages of life, these participants continue to have competing priorities and only make their relationship with God a priority if there is time and space.
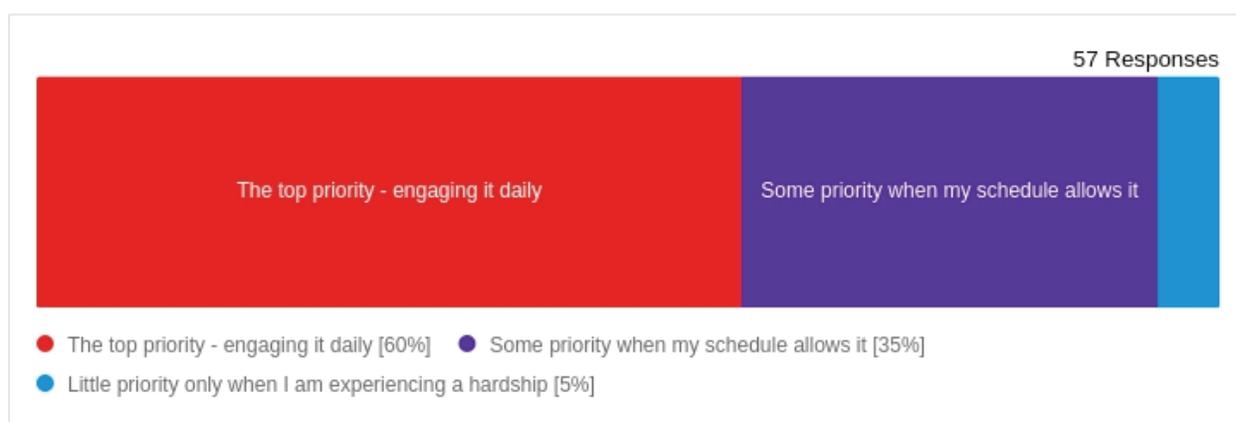
Table 4.14 Q14: Which of the following best describes the level of priority that you give to your relationship with God?

Question 15 serves as the culmination of all questions in the research survey. The aim of any parent who makes discipleship a priority in the home is to equip their children to engage their relationship with God on their own. The preparation stage is intended to equip participants to grow and multiply through future discipleship relationships. The results of Question 15 will be telling as participants will reveal what impact discipleship has had on their current spiritual life.
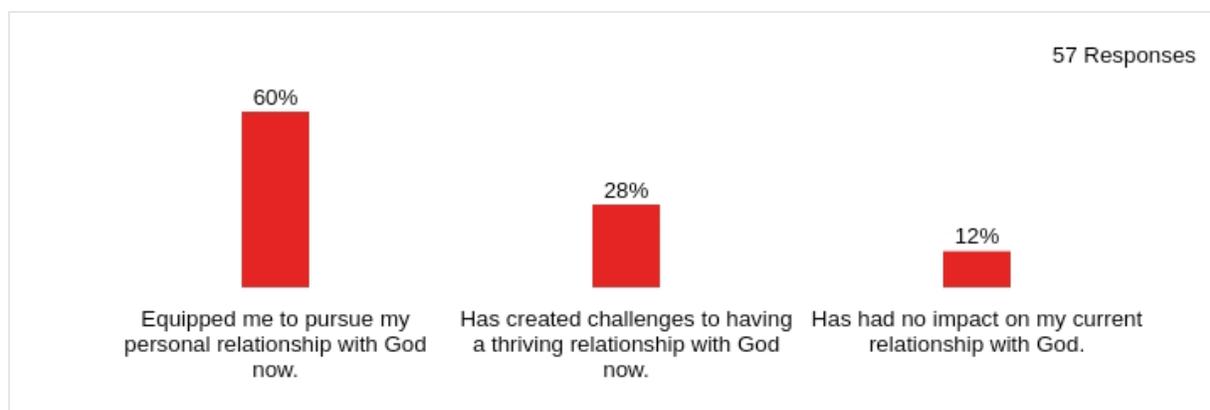
Table 4.15 Q15: Which of the following best describes the impact that the presence or absence of family discipleship has had on my current spiritual life?

According to the survey results, 60% of participants indicated that discipleship has *equipped me to pursue my personal relationship with God now*. Parents who made discipleship a priority in the home prepared their children to pursue their personal relationship with God. Their relationship to God no longer was the faith of their parents, but one they can show ownership.

Additionally, the results showed that out of the 34 participants (60%) who described the impact as *equipped me to pursue my personal relationship with God now*, 14 of those had parents who found *Spiritual Matters* as most important in the home. This shows that parents who give attention to spiritual matters have a greater chance of equipping their children to be successful in their spiritual life. The presence of discipleship in the home yields more positive results than the alternative.

It is important to note that of the 34 participants who felt that the presence of discipleship had equipped them to pursue their personal relationship with God, 24 participants had intentional spiritual conversations in the home between *Daily* and *2-3 times a week*. This result shows that when parents put spiritual matters at the forefront of their home, children are likely to be more confident when they face cultivating their relationship with God on their own.

Priority Level of Technology Use (Questions 16-20)

The experiences that participants have had with discipleship are a result of a discipleship culture that is set (or not set) in the home. As with any aspect of home life, the parents set the course for the direction the family will go. Certain expectations are established for how family members will operate within the family setting. Over the last three decades, the rise of technology has overtaken society and the home. Technology now encompasses every aspect of life and has even changed the dynamics of the home.

Recently, technology use has become a trending topic among parents and ministry leaders. Most parents are aware of the potential dangers of inappropriate uses of technology. Parents can choose to engage in conversation to help their children navigate through this phase of increasing personal responsibility and engagement with technology. It is undeniable that addressing the use of technology is necessary and critical for the future of all families. Without the proper engagement from parents, children can find themselves in harmful situations.

Therefore, this research survey included questions related to the use of technology in the home. While technology use has become normalized in the home, it can be insightful to compare the attention or priority given to technology use to discipleship in the home. Both topics are important and involve the well-being of children. Questions 16-20 will focus on when technology was introduced, how much time is spent on technology, and to what degree parents are engaged in monitoring technology use. The level of engagement from parents for technology use can be compared to their level of engagement with discipleship. If discipleship is as critical as technology use for the well-being of children, why is discipleship not given the same priority?

Question 16 allows participants to indicate what age they were first allowed to access technology (i.e., smartphone, gaming system, and social media accounts). This question

addressed technology in a broad sense, as different types of technology are experienced in different ways. Out of 57 responses, 25 participants indicated that they were first allowed access to technology between 13-17 years old.

It is not surprising that parents allow the first use of technology during teenage years, as this is the time most parents believe their children can handle more responsibilities. The use of technology can be an incentive for good behavior and displays of maturity. The survey results also show that not far behind the ages of 13-17, 37% of participants indicated that they were first allowed access between the ages of 8-12. It is important to note that the type of technology could play a factor in their response. There may be a difference between having access to a gaming system and using social media accounts. Regardless, the age at which children first have access to technology continues to be younger.

If the need to address technology use begins earlier each year, the same can be said for implementing discipleship practices in the home. Parents who do not engage in conversations on technology use and discipleship will see their children be educated by culture. These results tell us that many participants had their first access to technology at an early age and needed expectations for proper use. In the same way, discipleship must begin early and be consistent to help them grow in their spiritual life.
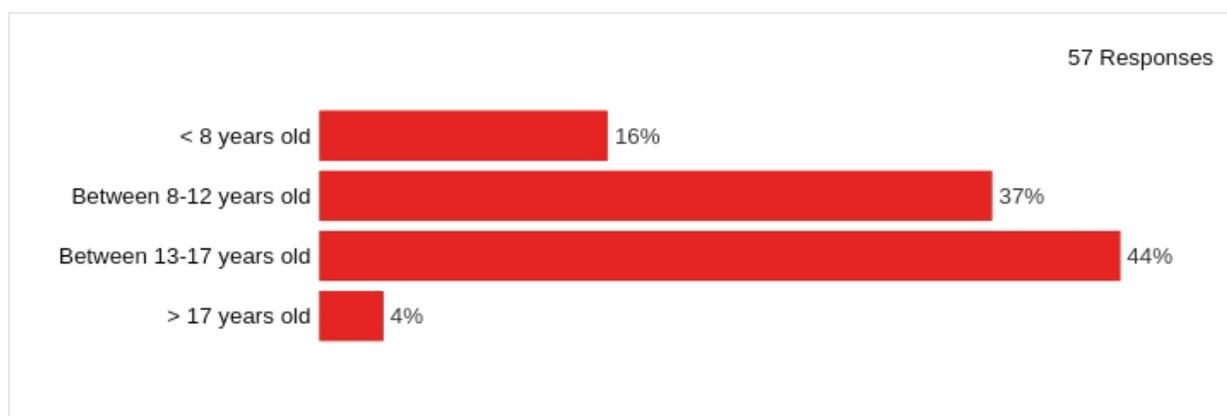
Table 4.16 Q16: At what age did you first have access to technology? (i.e., smartphone, gaming system, social media accounts)

Question 17 asked participants to indicate how much time was spent daily on technology while they were living at home. While this question focused on the participant's use, the results could reflect the overall culture in the home as it pertains to technology use. Out of 57 responses, 18 participants indicated 2-4 hours was spent daily and 18 participants indicated 4-6 hours was spent on technology.
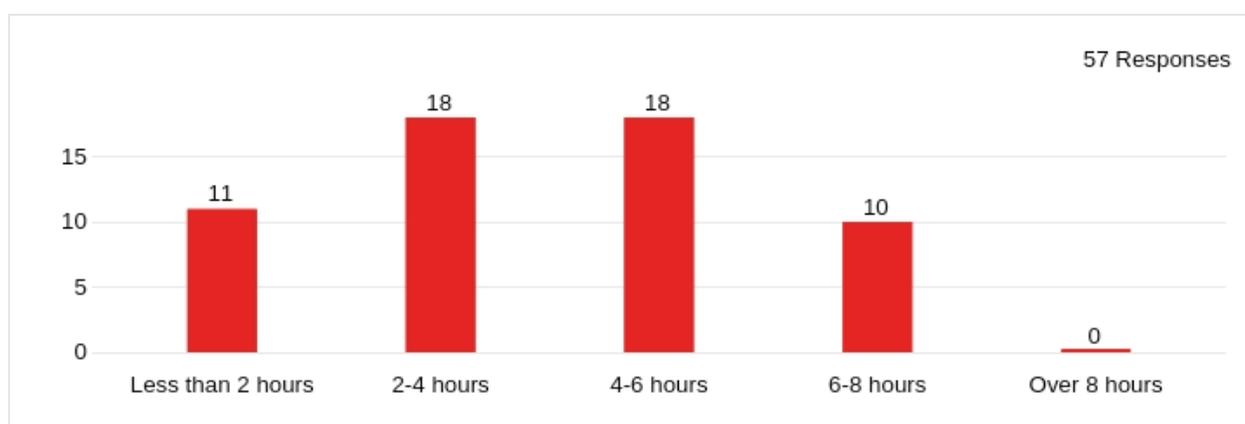
Table 4.17 Q17: Approximately, how much time daily was spent on technology (smartphones, game, streaming, social media) while living at home?

On a larger scale, a comparison of these results can provide insight into the growing problem of the time spent on daily technology use. The non-profit organization Common Sense Media conducted research in 2021 to examine the changes in screen media use among young people during the coronavirus pandemic. Following the research, they concluded that "Between 2019 and 2021, the total amount of screen media used each day went from 4:44 to 5:33 among tweens, and from 7:22 to 8:39 among teens."[1] While there was no indication of religious

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[1] Common Sense Media, *The Common Sense Census: Media Use by Tweens and Teens, 2021* (San Francisco: Common Sense, 2021), 3.

affiliation among the participants of the research, there is a stark difference between the 8.5 hours of daily screen time from Common Sense Media and the 2-6 hours of technology use in this research.

On another note, the Barna Group conducted research in 2018 on Christian parents' top struggles in terms of media and technology use among their kids. In this research, they discovered that "one-third of engaged Christian parents (34%) qualifies as media-stressed…Media-stressed parents are more likely to say their child uses 16 or more hours of entertainment per week."[2] It is important to note that Barna Group found that "Parents in this study are significantly below national averages reported elsewhere when it comes to the number of hours they say their children use media for entertainment."[3]

It is interesting to overlay these research results, as each tell a different story. The research conducted by Common Sense Media shows a significant (and growing) use of technology (40+ hours a week), while the Barna Research shows something less for Christian families (16 hours a week). It is possible that the demographic of Christian teenagers (and families) may be under-reporting the actual hours of technology use. The research does not indicate a factor that causes Christian teenagers to use technology less than non-Christian teenagers. The impact that media use has on Christian parents seems to show that their children's technology use is much higher than reported. The results of this research project seem to align with Barna Research, but may fit within the overall scope of the Common Sense Media research.

The time spent on the daily use of technology can reveal what type of priority was given in the home. Technology use continues to grow as more technology is implemented into

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[2] "One-Third of Engaged Christian Parents is 'Media-Stressed,'" Barna, accessed January 22, 2024, https://www.barna.com/research/church-help-navigate-digital-age/.

[3] Ibid.

everyday life. A significant use of technology hints at what is allowed in the home. Parents can set boundaries and limits to technology use. With how rapidly technology advances, it is safe to say that the time spent is more than what was indicated in the research survey. How families choose to spend their time will show what is important to them. Can the same amount of time be spent on discipleship?

Question 18 identifies what type of access to technology participants had while living at home. While the type of access to technology is important to know, the level of parental controls in place gave insight into parental engagement. Unrestricted access can be harmful and participants with no parental control can experience the consequences of improper use. The results show that out of 57 responses, 32 participants indicated that they had general access to technology with some parental controls in place. Over half of the participants experienced what is common in most households. With some parental controls in place, this can indicate that there is oversight while giving the participant some responsibility and independence while using technology. There can be varying degrees of control within this response, but generally, most participants had some parental control involved in their technology use.
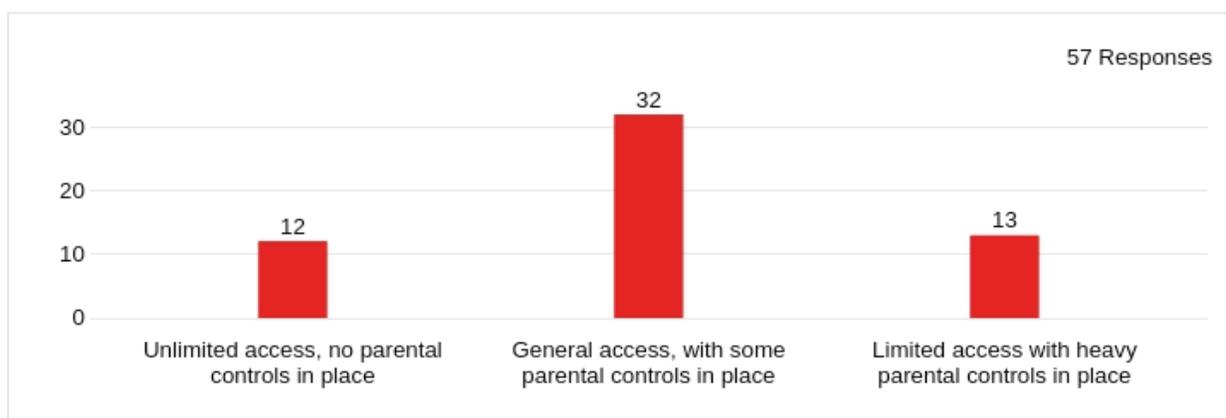
Table 4.18 Q18: What type of access to technology did you have while living at home?

Understanding that there were some parental controls in place, the next question would be, how consistently were the parental controls enforced? It is likely that parents found the enforcement of parental controls to be straightforward. If expectations were not met, the privilege of technology was lost. Can implementation of family discipleship be as straightforward? Can parents facilitate discipleship moments the same way they enforce the use of technology? Each responsibility carries a different dynamic, but at the heart of the issue, children need parents to engage in both.

Question 19 dives deeper into parental engagement on the use of technology. The actions that parents took when establishing parental controls and expectations will show the level of intentionality and engagement. Out of 57 responses, 34 participants indicated that their parents only outlined expectations and rules for using technology. This response aligns with previous responses on the perceived level of engagement from parents. At least, this response shows that parents were intentional to have some form of conversation with their children about technology use. Almost 60% of participants were given expectations. This result is positive, as it shows parents creating boundaries and limits to technology use. The results show that most families have a balanced approach to technology use.
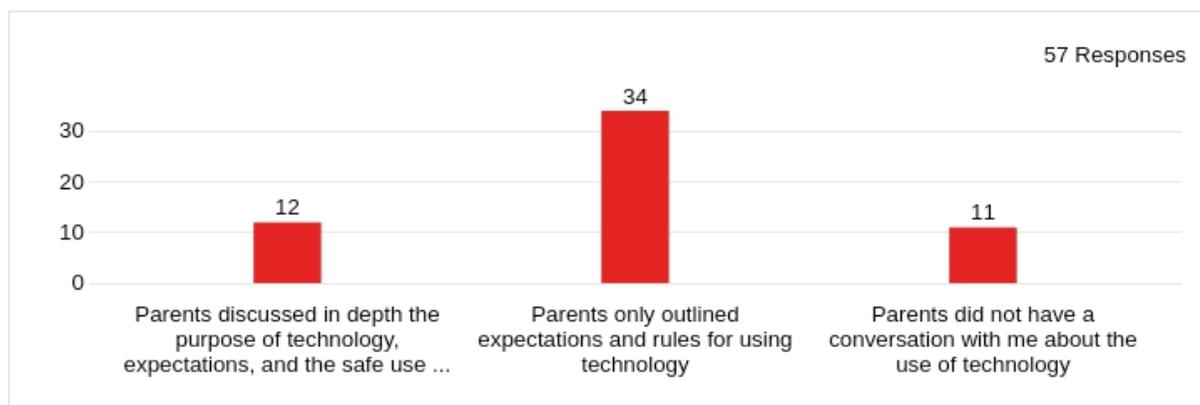
Table 4.19 Q19: What type of conversation did your parents have with you about technology?

The question that is a common thread throughout this discussion of technology use is how it correlates with the priority given to discipleship in the home. While the proper use of technology is important and parents need to engage in helping their children navigate through a healthy relationship with technology, the same intentionality should be given to discipleship. Parents can learn that these two topics work hand in hand. The topic of parenting and discipleship is not mutually exclusive. The level of parental engagement in all areas can impact their children's overall spiritual health. Having consistent engagement in both areas such as technology and discipleship will help set their children up for success in the future.

Question 20 speaks further into the involvement of parents in the participant's use of technology. Parental involvement can range from having full access to their technology to having no idea how their children used technology. The results may show the level of awareness parents had on how participants used technology. Again, participants' responses show how engaged parents were in actively knowing how their children used technology.

Out of 57 responses, 32 participants indicated that their parents were somewhat involved and were familiar with their use of technology. Over half of participants had parents who did not go to one extreme or the other. Parents being familiar with their children's use of technology show that they intentionally asked questions and had conversations to understand their use of technology. It is important to note that parents who were fully involved and had full access to all technology shows some intentionality.

Bar chart showing responses to the question with values: "Parents were fully involved and had full access to all my technology" = 15, "Parents were somewhat involved and were familiar with my use of technology" = 32, "Parents were not involved and had no idea how I used technology" = 10. 57 Responses.
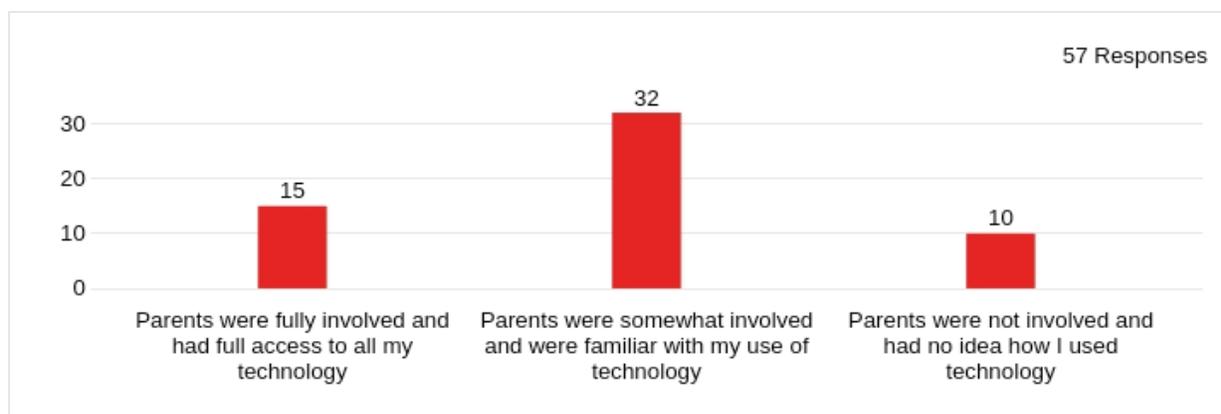
Table 4.20 Q20: How involved were your parents in your use of technology?

On the topic of technology use, over 80% of participants had some level of parental involvement. How does that compare to parental involvement in discipleship? 33% of participants indicated having daily intentional spiritual conversations. It is interesting to observe how different areas of home life can be approached even when both are considered to be critical for future success. The results show that parents who are involved will give their children a better chance at learning how to use technology responsibly.

The results of the Family Discipleship Questionnaire summarized that the participants were spiritually committed Christians who understood the meaning of discipleship. Generally, most participants experienced a positive culture of discipleship which included daily spiritual conversations and attendance at Sunday Worship services and weekly youth group.

Most participants gave priority to their relationship with God as a teenager and experienced significant growth. The priority that most participants gave to their relationship with God was carried over to their relationship with God today. The results also indicated that most participants adopted the same discipleship elements into their young adult life as they experienced at home. Most participants felt that their experience with family discipleship equipped them to pursue their relationship with God now.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Discipleship in the home has risen in the ranks of topics discussed in the local church. The impact that families have on the discipleship of children has clearly been emphasized and attention has been given to what parents can do to prepare their children for life as an adult. It has long been understood that the transition from adolescence to adulthood is a critical point that defines the rest of our lives.

It is also during this transition that young adults begin to contemplate what faith means to them. This is often a time of searching and exploring the various belief systems that are available to them. Christian Smith and Melina Denton describe these seekers as:

> People who have an interest in spiritual matters but who are not devoted to one particular historical faith or denomination and in fact may be hostile to traditional or organized religion per se. Such spiritual seekers are reported to be exploring the world's storehouse of faiths and spiritualities for a variety of meaning systems and practices with which to experiment in order to find some that work for them, that meet their needs.[1]

With this alarming trend becoming the norm, parents and church leaders are seeking answers to avoid what can become an apostasy. Adolescents who rested under the shelter of their Christian homes are now seen wandering, trying to find their identity and their place in this world.

With such a problem in mind, this chapter will discuss the themes and observations gathered from the anonymous research survey results and how these themes and observations speak to the problem statement in Chapter 1 as well as how these results answered the five research questions stated in Chapter 3. Final recommendations will be made for general next steps for parents to assume their role as primary disciple-makers in their homes.

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[1] Christian Smith and Melina Lundquist Denton. *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 73, ProQuest Ebook Central.

The problem statement presented in Chapter 1 states "that parents do not understand the importance of discipling their children, therefore are not discipling their children at home." The anonymous research survey was conducted to understand what was important in participants' home experience and what type of impact it had on their spiritual life after leaving home.

The results of the research survey serve as a reflection of decisions made by parents in their homes. These decisions are significant because parents oversee the culture and operation of the home. Christian Smith and Amy Adamczyk state that "the single most powerful casual influence on the religious lives of American teenagers and young adults is the religious lives of their parents. Not their peers, not the media, not their youth group leaders or clergy, not their religious schoolteachers."[2] The results clearly show that priorities made in the home (Table 4.5) will have lasting impacts on the habits and worldviews of young adults.

What is important to teenagers and young adults is influenced by the role that parents play in their lives. Parents who cultivate an environment where their children can be discipled will prepare them to engage in their spiritual life as an adult. Smith and Adamczyk adds that "the key location is the home, not religious congregations. And the key mechanisms of socialization are the formation of ordinary life practices and identities, not programs, preaching, or formal rites of passage."[3] It is these ordinary life practices and identities that set adolescents towards a specific trajectory. They can be even more established in their faith or wandering in a wilderness of uncertainty and purposeless. Thus, parents who value areas such as Technology/Gaming/Social Media as most important (Table 4.5) will communicate a priority

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[2] Christian Smith and Amy Adamczyk, *Handing Down the Faith: How Parents Pass Their Religion On To the Next Generation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2021), accessed October 4, 2023. ProQuest Ebook Central.

[3] Ibid., 70.

that will determine their future spiritual priorities. Conversely, parents who understand the importance of their discipleship role in the household will put greater priority on spiritual matters.

The results of this research survey speak to the purpose statement presented in Chapter 1. The presence or absence of discipleship in the established routines in the home can be a precursor to what established routines exist in adulthood. The results of this research survey help "identify the reasons why parents do not disciple their children at home and what strategies can help establish a discipleship culture in the home." The data seen in Tables 4.7 and 4.8 are good indicators of what is practiced in the home. The old adage of "practice making perfect" is even more true as it pertains to discipleship practices. When children experience the repetition of priorities and practices, much will be carried over to adulthood. 21% of participants who indicated that they experienced spiritual conversations in the home occasionally (Table 4.7) illustrates that there is a segment of teenagers who may not have enough repetition to feel prepared for adulthood.

Parents who have established a specific norm create a template for their children to follow when they step into adulthood. Practices that are repeated become normal, and with the emphasis placed on it, the practice becomes second nature. Smith and Adamczyk describe the inverse: "when families that attend religious services even weekly do not converse together about religious things in the time between, their children only hear religion talked about by mostly others 1 or 2 hours a week. That is like sending one's child to a weekly meeting about some foreign land where parents once lived, in which the child merely listens to others speak its foreign language."[4]

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[4] Smith and Adamczyk, *Handing Down the Faith*, 71-72.

What is important is the reference that parents create for their children as they attempt to navigate their spiritual life on their own. The results of the research survey give a sample of what is important and what is practiced in many homes today. While the many areas in a teenager's life are not necessarily bad, an imbalance of priority can ill-prepare them to take ownership of their faith life. Parents who invest in developing a discipleship culture at home will see the results in a spiritually thriving young adult.

Additionally, parents who seek to develop a discipleship culture in their home must recognize potential impediments to this endeavor. The pursuit of regular family discipleship is bound to face some resistance. The results of the research survey presented an underlying theme of what can prevent parents from discipling their children. If parents do not recognize these obstacles, they can expect their children to begin to drift away from the faith.

Foremost, parents can be inundated with busy schedules and numerous commitments for both their children and for themselves. The research survey shows that families often lack the time to disciple their children because every minute is scheduled throughout the week. Hectic schedules become the focus while little thought is given to spiritual conversations or activities. Filling up the family schedule with commitments can make it difficult to create a discipleship culture in the home.

Busy schedules, however, do not equal wrong intentions. The commitments that are made for children can come from a desire to provide them with opportunities. Yet, the busyness also reflects one's priorities. Misaligned priorities can become an obstacle for a discipleship culture in the home as time and attention is given to other areas of family life. Each family is allotted the same amount of time each week and how parents prioritize the family schedule can reveal what is important to them.

In addition, Justin Gravitt offers an important observation on one of the biggest obstacles of disciple-making, apathy. He states that, "the biggest obstacle to making disciples is the disease of indifference. It turns out that collectively, we just don't care much about knowing Christ or making Him known. We are far more interested in Netflix, sports, Candy Crush, and TikTok than in God and our Kingdom calling."[5] It is possible that indifference can be in the heart of some parents based on the choices they make for their families. Indifference can be a serious obstacle for disciple-making as it can lead parents (and families) away from discipleship to other priorities. A timely warning is given by the writer of Hebrews 2:1 (ESV), who says: "therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it."

Creating a discipleship culture in the home will always be faced with challenges and obstacles. Parents should take an inventory of their priorities in the home and how those are represented in everyday life. While discipleship does not require large amounts of time, allowing an appropriate amount of time will create opportunities for success. Parents can be intentional about the time they have with their children and moderate their commitments. Acknowledging potential impediments for discipleship in the home will help parents understand how to apply discipleship to their family.

Research Questions Answered

RQ1: Do young Christian adults have an accurate understanding of discipleship?

An important aspect of this thesis project is a proper understanding of the concept of discipleship. Without a clear understanding of discipleship, participant responses may be skewed. Participants demonstrated their understanding of discipleship by identifying their

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[5] Justin Gravitt, "The Biggest Obstacle of Disciple Making," *Discipleship.org*, n.d., https://discipleship.org/blog/biggest-obstacle/.

preferred method of delivery (Table 4.3) and what are the key components of discipleship (Table 4.4). In addition, they summarized their overall understanding by selecting which definition of discipleship best fits their understanding (Table 4.2).

According to the results, 53% of young Christian adults identify discipleship as involving a spiritual mentor, while 31% of participants identify mentoring as one of its prime components. Participants recognize that discipleship involves a relationship with someone who is more experienced or knowledgeable about spiritual matters. More young Christian adults see that discipleship is not simply a program to follow or a state of being. They recognize that engagement is necessary to experience spiritual growth.

What further establishes their understanding of discipleship is that an overwhelming majority of participants (72%) recognized discipleship as "the process of one believer investing in the development of healthy, growing believers who can then multiply themselves in others." Discipleship not only involves the act of one believer investing in another believer (i.e., mentoring), but it is a process that continues beyond the current discipleship relationship. Participants show that there is an expectation of multiplying one's faith in others. The essence of discipleship is about what Bill Hull describes as "the immense value of God at work in one individual's life and the resulting impact on other lives."[6]

A right understanding of discipleship will help young Christian adults recognize if their experience was truly genuine. This section of questions proved that young Christian adults were generally familiar with what discipleship looks like and can use this understanding to filter through their own experiences. The understanding of discipleship that is seen in the research survey results can reflect what they were taught or modeled while living in the home. This

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[6] Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship,* 27.

research shows that most young Christian adults have a general understanding of the process of discipleship but may have experienced it differently, as we will see in the following analysis of how the survey results help to answer the research questions.

<p style="text-align:center">RQ2: What Was Most Important In The Home To Parents And To Teenagers?</p>

At the heart of this thesis project is emphasizing the role that parents have in discipling their children. Smith and Adamczyk states that "Parental religious investment and involvement is in almost all cases the necessary and even sometimes sufficient condition for children's religious investment and involvement."[7] The priorities that are set by the parents in the home will serve as the crux to the spiritual success of their children. What is modeled by parents will be reproduced in their children when they leave the home.

The results of this research survey highlighted two types of responses that were worth exploring. It was important to understand what parents and participants found most important and least important. Unsurprisingly, both parents (Table 4.5) and participants (Table 4.6) indicated that spiritual matters were most important. A combined 37% (42 out of 113) of responses named spiritual matters as most important. Responses for what was important to parents (19) and to participants (23) were similar. This close result indicates that the priority of spiritual matters likely was transmitted to participants during their time at home. The same could be said of the other areas that mattered to parents and participants.

Approximately 60% of participants indicated other areas apart from spiritual matters as most important to them. What was important to parents had similar outcomes. While there is a significant group of participants and their parents who found spiritual matters most important,

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[7] Smith and Adamczyk, *Handing Down the Faith,* 69.

well over half of all participants felt other areas were important. Technology/Gaming/Social

Media ranked high on what was most important to both parents (26%) and participants (18%).

These results revealed what was most important by showing the priority in the home and how it

transmitted to the children. What was most important to the parents became what was important

to the participants. Time and attention are dedicated to one's priorities, therefore shaping habits

and beliefs.

It is interesting to see that a combined 31% of participants indicated that spiritual matters

were least important to both them and their parents. This substantial percentage of participants

and their parents give reason for concern, as other areas were clearly more important than

spiritual matters. This trend represents many households where academics and sports fill the

family schedule. When faced with the decision between extracurricular activities and

participating in a weekly youth group, parents look for the activities that bring the tangible result.

RQ3: What Elements Of Discipleship Were Practiced In The Home And Outside Of The Home?

An important part of the anonymous research survey is understanding what elements of

discipleship were practiced in and out of the home. The elements that were practiced will give a

picture of how the parent's priorities were carried out. The goal of family discipleship is as

Chandler and Griffin describe: "more common than replacing commitments in order to

accomplish our discipling goals will be repurposing your existing family times, bringing

profound purpose into the normal everyday intersections of your family's life to make family

discipleship ordinary."[8]

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[8] Chandler and Griffin, *Family Discipleship*, 527-529.

The presence of discipleship elements in everyday life will show the priority given within the home. More often, discipleship exists when intentional spiritual conversations take place. The anonymous research survey showed that 33% of participants experienced daily intentional spiritual conversations in the home. The remaining participants indicated they experienced less frequent intentional spiritual conversations. The intentional nature of spiritual conversations conveys some level of priority. The results show that parents gave some priority to intentional spiritual conversations.

The challenge may be the expectation to have intentional spiritual conversations replace different aspects of a family's life. The "repurposing of existing family times," as Chandler and Griffin claim, brings a more realistic expectations for family discipleship. No longer should parents be expected to completely transform their family dynamics to include family discipleship. Instead, family discipleship should be injected into everyday life. Approaching intentional spiritual conversation in this way may move some participants from *occasional* intentional spiritual conversations to 2-3 times a week, or even daily.

Participants also indicated what elements of discipleship were practiced in the home. It was no surprise to see traditional spiritual practices predominate. 16% of all responses indicated that families attended Sunday Worship Service, with 14% showing Prayer as commonly practiced. It is important to note that participants were asked to select all that applied. Regular attendance at a Sunday Worship Service is a common expectation for Christian families. Bible reading (9%) and Family "devotions" (9%) were also mentioned in these responses. While no specific element makes a family more or less spiritual, the intentionality and consistency of these elements practiced will yield a greater impact.

Another aspect of the discipleship practices in the home is what was supplemented outside the home. Outside environments prove to be instrumental in experiences that can help children live out their faith. Participating in outside spiritual activities can help connect children (and their families) to the greater Biblical community. Engaging the Biblical community is a part of family discipleship and further illustrates the role of the local church.

Participants indicated that weekly youth groups (18%), serving in a ministry (17%), and Bible study groups (16%) were the most common activities practiced outside the home. These results suggest that outside spiritual activities are widely engaged. The danger can be that parents only rely on these outside spiritual activities to disciple their children. Mike McGarry adds, "When parents view their spiritual duty as fulfilled by bringing their kids to church, Christian formation simply will not happen at home. We shouldn't be surprised when lukewarm parents produce lukewarm kids. Faithful reflection of the gospel will only happen when parents themselves have been transformed by gospel grace."[9] The role of outside spiritual activities should be understood as an extension of the ministry that is taking place at home.

To guard against a reliance on only outside spiritual activities, student ministries should pursue a partnership with parents. Many student ministries have started to make the transition to involve parents in the ministry to their children. Jim Burns and Mark DeVries emphasize that "We need to bring parents into the circumstances and situations of their children, affirming and helping to reestablish parental roles in their spiritual formation of our students."[10] Spiritual activities that teenagers participate in should be a supplement to what happens at home. Parents should involve other spiritual influences that can help support their efforts at home.

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[9] Mike McGarry, "Youth Ministry Feeds the Church and the Family," *The Gospel Coalition*, April 30, 2016, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/youth-ministry-church-and-family/.

[10] Burns and DeVries, *Partnering With Parents,* 17.

The results also show that, on average, participants were involved in at least 4 spiritual activities. The maximum number of activities participated in was 9 spiritual activities, while there were some participants who only indicated 1 spiritual activity. The participants of this research survey show that many of them were involved in many important activities that added to their spiritual formation. However, parents should be aware of what role these activities play in the big picture. If parents are not involved in the discipleship of their children, the few hours a week their children spend with these outside activities may not be enough.

A parallel can be made to what Jon Saunders illustrates with the place and purpose of parachurch ministries. He says, "In the middle of the 20th century, men like Bright and Dawson Trotman rightly recognized that churches weren't effectively engaging students. They rightly wanted to fix this problem. If not carefully monitored, however, their ministries may inadvertently strip our Lord's disciple-making mandate from the very institution to which it belongs."[11] An important distinction is made that parachurch ministries should not replace the local church, but instead should come alongside the church.

The same can be said about the role that outside spiritual activities play in a teenager's life. They should not replace the discipleship that happens at home but support it. It is important to note that these spiritual activities that the participants indicated can be positive elements of their spiritual formation when utilized properly. Parents can help balance the role that these spiritual activities play in their children's life. This goal requires parents to play an active role in how spiritual activities can help in their children's discipleship.

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[11] Jon Saunders, "The Place and Purpose of Parachurch Ministries," *The Gospel Coalition*, August 31, 2015, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/parachurch-ministry/.

RQ4: How Has the Presence or Absence of Discipleship In the Home Impacted the Young

Christian Adults' Current Spiritual Life?

This research question becomes the crux of this thesis project. The presence or absence of discipleship in the home can impact the trajectory of a teenager's life. The experience that participants had with discipleship in the home can be a good indicator of their spiritual life as a young adult. The results in Table 4.15 show a majority of participants (60%) feeling equipped to pursue a personal relationship with God. The participants' current spiritual life reflects what Christian Smith describes as transitions. He says, "Life's major challenge for them is transitioning from dependence to independence, from reliance on others to self-sufficiency, from being under others' authority and eye to living on their own."[12] Most participants felt that they were prepared to experience autonomy with their faith.

The impact of family discipleship can be felt through the presence of spiritual disciplines. The level of engagement by the participant in spiritual activities indicates what priority their faith has in their life. While common practices such as attending a Sunday worship service, prayer, and Bible reading are good indicators of an active spiritual life, the impact of discipleship can truly be seen in how the participant continues to make disciples themselves. Table 4.12 shows 65% of participants having participated in a discipleship relationship after graduating high school. These results show that consistently over half of participants have chosen to progress in their spiritual walk by being discipled by someone and discipling others. There may be some variance within the responses, but participants who seek to reproduce themselves demonstrate

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[12] Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls In Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2009), 35. Accessed October 17, 2023. ProQuest Ebook Central.

that they wish to grow in their spiritual life. Their spiritual life does not resort to a consumer

mentality. They continue to participate in the discipleship process by discipling others.

While a majority of participants indicated that they have participated in or are currently

participating in a discipleship relationship, the focus shifts to the 35% of participants who

responded with no. The possible array of reasons for not participating in discipleship outside of

the home would be worth exploring. The Barna Group explored this idea in their 2022 research

on "the barriers that keep Christians from being a part of a discipleship community and they

report that 38% of U.S. Christian adults indicated that 'I haven't thought about it' and 35% said

'I haven't found someone who I would want to have this kind of relationship with.'"[13] These

types of responses bring to question what type of experience they had with discipleship in the

home.

The first question in response to these results is, what type of priority was given to

spiritual matters? Also, how was discipleship modeled in the home? The 2022 research by the

Barna Group shares common ideas with this research project; in both, priority and modeling

serve as important themes in discipleship. Young adults who have had discipleship modeled for

them and given the proper priority are more likely to carry those habits and experiences from

their childhood.

This idea is similar to what Matt Chandler and Adam Griffin describe as family

discipleship modeling, "serving as a godly example for your family, living out your genuine

walk with God, and demonstrating true repentance where and when you fall short."[14] The

manner in which this type of discipleship was modeled to participants will impact their ability to

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[13] "Two in Five Christians Are Not Engaged in Discipleship," Barna, accessed October 16, 2023, https://www.barna.com/research/christians-discipleship-community/.

[14] Chandler and Griffin, *Family Discipleship*, 1162.

practice it themselves. Even the level of priority given to spiritual matters in the home can translate the same way when young adults approach their own faith.

The results as seen in Tables 4.12-4.15 show that a majority of participants feel they were equipped to pursue a relationship with God as a result of their experience with family discipleship. The importance of parents cultivating a discipleship culture in the home cannot be understated. The priority and practices of discipleship can become ingrained into the hearts and minds of children so they can be recalled when they are young adults. The presence of discipleship creates a framework and the application for spiritual formation. The absence of discipleship creates uncertainty and misplaced priorities. Parents who make discipleship a consistent presence in the home allow their children to experience spiritual growth in a safe place. In turn, their children become more confident when they pursue their relationship with God on their own.

RQ5: How Does The Priority Given To Discipleship Compare To The Priority Given To Another Area Of A Teenager's Life (i.e., Technology Use)?

A relevant aspect of this research project was to compare the priority given to discipleship and another important area of a teenager's life, specifically technology use. With the ongoing expansion of technological access that teenagers have, this comparison may further illustrate where parents place their priorities. Family discipleship and the healthy use of technology are both critical issues to address in the home. How do parents decide what level of priority is given to each area? Do parents find the monitoring of technology use easier than facilitating discipleship in the home?

An interesting aspect of technology use among teenagers is how much parents are actually participating in technology themselves. The Pew Research Center reports that "Teens

and their parents often have similar technology profiles in the gadgets they use and the frequency

with which they use them."[15] As technology continues to permeate society, both parents and

teenagers have a vested interest in its access and use. Technology use becomes a normal part of

home life and parents may give more attention to this area compared to others.

As the research survey conveys, teenagers first have access to technology as young as

eight years old. 44% of participants in the research survey indicate they first had access between

13-17 years old. What this means is that technology use is introduced during formative years.

However, excessive interaction with technology can have damaging effects. To address this

problem, parents implement rules to regulate the time spent on technology. Some parents may

have specific rules that regulate both the content and the time spent on technology. The Pew

Research Center adds that "Parents of teenagers are more vigilant about regulating the media

content consumed by their children than the amount of time their children spend in front of a

screen."[16] These results imply that parents who make an effort to monitor the content and time

spent on technology should also be able to make an effort to disciple their children.

Almost 60% of participants in this research survey (Table 4.19) indicated that parents

outlined expectations and rules for technology. If parents are regulating the content and time

spent with technology, why is not the same effort given to the discipleship in the home? It is

likely that parents may not envision the effects of a lack of discipleship like they do the effects of

excessive technology use. Parents may understand the dangers that exist in the digital world, but

the benefits of the spiritual realm may not be tangible. This is why parents are likely to set

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[15] Alexandra Macgill, "Parent and Teen Internet Use," *Pew Research Center*, October 24, 2007, https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2007/10/24/parent-and-teen-internet-use/#:~:text=Some%2093%25%20of%20youth%20are,teens%20often%20mirror%20each%20other.

[16] Ibid.

boundaries and rules for technology use yet not have a concrete plan for discipleship in the home. The research shows that up towards 82% of participants (Table 4.19) had some level of parental involvement in their use of technology. This compared to the 56% of participants (Table 4.7) who had minimal spiritual conversations in the home (less than daily and more than never). Spiritual conversations are necessary to successfully navigate through everyday life just as "parental controls are only as good as the conversations that precede them."[17]

The results in response to questions about technology in the home present an interesting contrast to the level of priority given to discipleship in the home. Parents bear an enormous responsibility in preparing and equipping their children to face a real world. Their involvement in discipling their children should exceed the attention they give to other areas such as technology use. In fact, addressing the discipleship of their children would speak into their use of technology. If the priority that parents give to technology use involves their own technology use, it is worth exploring the spiritual life of the parents. Are parents seeking to progress in their own spiritual walk in the same way they want for their children? Parents have a unique opportunity to model important characteristics and behaviors to their children. Giving discipleship and spiritual matters more priority shows teenagers that this type of lifestyle is ideal when they become young adults.

The Future of Family Discipleship

The purpose of this thesis project was to highlight the important role that parents have in discipling their children at home. The alarming trend of young adults drifting away from their faith forces parents and church leaders to re-examine what led to this current state and how to

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[17] Jonathan McKee, *Parenting Generation Screen: Guiding Your Kids to Be Wise In a Digital World* (Colorado Springs: Tyndale House Publishers, 2021), 145-146.

address it. While this thesis project was limited in the depth of its research, there are several

takeaways that are paramount to continuing the discussion of parents discipling their children at

home.

The recommendations that this thesis project leads to are not simply new programming to

implement at home nor an exclusion from all normal activities in family life. Instead, this thesis

project identifies three calls to action for parents and the local church. By engaging in these three

calls to action, parents can help equip their children to face the world when they are adults.

Valerie Bell of Awana addresses this reality, asking, "Will today's church children be strong

enough in their adult years to lead the church and influence the culture in which they must live in

2050?"[18] The state of family discipleship today may undermine an affirmative answer to this

question. The research results in this thesis project identify three key areas that lead to a call to

action: (1) responsibility of family discipleship, (2) priorities in the home, and (3) equipping

parents for family discipleship.

Parents Must Assume the Responsibility of Family Discipleship

At the heart of this thesis project is the call to awaken parents to their responsibility of the

discipleship of their children. The moment when that responsibility is recognized and assumed is

the moment when parents can take the first step towards preparing their children for their future.

While children have many key individuals who influence their formation, parents have a unique

role that sets them apart. Christian Smith and Amy Adamczyk describes the advantage that

parents have: "Parents normally have a massive advantage of access to youth in the life-

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[18] Valerie Bell, *Resilient: Child Discipleship and the Fearless Future of the Church* (Marceline: Walsworth Publishing Company, 2020), 27.

formation process."[19] Parents already assume the responsibility of meeting their children's basic needs. In the context of Christian parents, this responsibility includes their child's spiritual development.

The responsibility of family discipleship is both logical and Biblical. George Barna identifies common reasons for the lack of ability of parents to spiritually lead their children, including, "the complexity of modern life, the inescapable negative influence of the media, the distorting views and behaviors of their children's peers, the warped perspectives taught in schools, the lack of trust children have in their parents' moral and spiritual perspectives, the cultural reinforcement of unbiblical thought and behavioral patterns, the ingrained nature of the politically correct movement, and so forth."[20] Parents may give a myriad of reasons for not assuming responsibility for discipling their children. Yet without taking this first step, children will enter adulthood unequipped to pursue their own relationship with God and stand firm on their faith in a complicated world.

The best place for parents to start family discipleship is to recognize how important discipleship is to their children, as presented in Table 4.5. If children do not see that discipleship or spiritual matters is most important in the home, they will quickly find a substitute. Parents can assume responsibility by making discipleship in the home a priority. This prioritization includes making spiritual matters the subject of conversations throughout the week. Initiating spiritual conversations will show children that their parents are taking responsibility for their role of disciple-maker.

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[19] Smith and Adamczyk, *Handing Down the Faith,* 70.

[20] George Barna, *Transforming Children Into Spiritual Champions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 62.

A common understanding among many parents is that the church is responsible for discipling their children because they are trained professionals in spiritual development. As George Barna describes, "knowing that there are trained professionals and other willing individuals who will provide spiritual guidance to their children is a source of security and comfort for most churchgoing adults."[21] With many parents not feeling confident in their own ability to disciple their children, they feel better assuming that there are others who "know what they are doing."

This perspective is what makes the difference between families that thrive with family discipleship and those that pass the responsibility to the church. If parents can overcome this hurdle, they stand a better chance to influence the spiritual formation of their children. Parents should make the effort to establish a plan for the discipleship of their children in the home. With a tangible plan, parents can set a course for certain rhythms in the home and priorities. Parents must assume responsibility of the discipleship of their children in the home.

Parents Must Examine and Set the Priorities of the Home and in the Lives of Their Children

Another clear theme seen in the research of this thesis project is that the priorities parents set in the home will ultimately become the priorities that young adults will set for themselves. Parents will establish well-intentioned priorities in order to set their children up for success in the future. These priorities can range from academics, to sports and friendships, to social media and technology. Parents will commit a finite amount of time to these priorities. If family discipleship is not a priority in the home, parents are indicating that other areas are more important.

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[21] Barna, *Tranforming Children*, 60.

Parents may often view family discipleship as an impossible ideal because of a preconceived idea that in order to implement family discipleship they must forsake everything. With such an expectation, parents may find the task undesirable. Justin Whitmel Earley states in his book *Habits of the Household* that "One of the most significant things about any household is what is considered to be normal. Moments aggregate, and they become memories and tradition. Our routines become who we are, become the story and culture of our families."[22] Discipleship was intended to align with everyday living. Parents should not feel that normal aspects of family life should be discarded when pursuing family discipleship.

Instead, parents should evaluate which areas of home life should receive the most time and attention. Family discipleship should not be something that is scheduled as just another activity but should blend into the existing areas of home life. Parents can incorporate discipleship into the everyday moments that fill a family's schedule. Something as simple as a car ride home can become a moment for a spiritual conversation. This concept is a callback to Old Testament teaching of teaching children these commands, "when you walk by the way" (Deut 6:7, ESV). Setting the right priorities in the home will allow children to see what should truly important.

A practical way to look at this practice of family discipleship is the family calendar. The activities that are scheduled for the family can determine how much attention is given to all the priorities of the family. While most activities may not be bad in nature, giving them time certainly communicates a message. Rooted, a ministry focused on gospel-centered youth ministry, comments on an important aspect of the family calendar when they say, "What you do—and what you don't do—shapes your kids' priorities and habits in ways that often continue throughout their lives. Your family calendar blazes a well-worn trail that your kids will likely

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[22] Justin Whitmel Earley, *Habits of the Household* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021), 4-5.

walk for the rest of their lives."[23] The priorities and habits communicate what is important and what should be continued.

The priority that family discipleship should have in the home must come with intentionality. Family discipleship should be something that parents pursue for their family. Matt Chandler states, "If you want to build a strong family, you will need a plan, and if you want to communicate that plan, you'll need to prioritize connecting… Some parents believe, or at least operate as if they believe, that the discipleship of their kids will happen 'naturally' or 'organically.'"[24] Family discipleship must be planned and cultivated. This is true with setting the right priorities for children to engage in spiritual formation. It simply will not happen on its own. Parents must intentionally set priorities to bring family discipleship to the forefront.

Churches Should Help Train and Resource Parents To Successfully Disciple Their Children

The third takeaway from the research of this thesis project is that churches must partner with parents to equip them to successfully disciple their children. As stated earlier, many parents feel ill-equipped to facilitate family discipleship in their home. It is common practice for parents to involve their children in as many church activities and youth groups as possible to receive their spiritual training. Parents often will assume that connecting their children to the church is sufficient for their spiritual development.

Yet George Barna makes an important observation about what he calls a "Compliant Church." He says, "When a church—intentionally or not—assumes a family's responsibilities in the arena of spiritually nurturing children, it fosters an unhealthy dependence upon the church to

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[23] Mike McGarry, "Three Overlooked Aspects of Family Discipleship," *Rooted*, January 18, 2022, https://rootedministry.com/three-overlooked-aspects-of-family-discipleship/.

[24] Chandler and Griffin, *Family Discipleship*, 1391-1394.

relieve the family of its biblical responsibility…a very desirable situation—the family takes the lead in the process, and the church supports its efforts."[25] Churches today have started to make the shift in connecting with parents and providing training and a community that can help them disciple their children at home. The goal should not be to just create spaces at church for children to engage in their spiritual formation. Those elements should supplement what happens at home.

Churches should strategically aim their efforts at connecting what happens in different ministry environments to the home environment. Ministry groups and activities that are self-contained may have less of an impact, since what children and teenagers take away may not be retained. Churches that provide resources that connect what children and teenagers learned in ministry environment to home life can further support parents in their efforts at family discipleship. Creating a partnership can further mobilize parents to assume their roles as primary disciple-makers.

Conclusion

With the increase in teenagers and young adults stepping away from their faith, the role of parents in the discipleship of their children is even more critical. While parents discipling their children does not guarantee a thriving spiritual life for their children, it is sure that without it teenagers and young adults will face a future unprepared. Mark DeVries describes this reality well when he says,

> "Teenagers today are in trouble. And what they don't know can literally kill them. We are sending our kids into adulthood ill prepared for the increasing demands of our complex society. Like so many children in the Middle East who defend themselves only by throwing rocks at solders with machines guns, this generation of teenagers enters the confusing battlegrounds of adulthood armed with nothing more than vague values and innocuous religious experiences."[26]

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[25] Barna, *Transforming Children*, 63.

[26] DeVries, *Family-Based Youth Ministry*, 35.

Today, teenagers face a wide array of challenges that continue to escalate as they become young adults. If parents stand idly by, their children will succumb to the very things that are trying to capture their attention. Parents have an advantage because they spend the most time with their children and have the most influence. It is time for parents to assume their responsibility for discipling their children. Parents must first understand the importance of their role as primary disciple-makers of their children and set priorities in the home that create a culture of discipleship. Doing so will give teenagers and young adults a better chance at being prepared to face the world with the tools and resources they need to thrive in their relationship with God and continue the process of making disciples of all nations.

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APPENDIX A

FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP QUESTIONNAIRE

Q1 Thank you for your interest in participating in this research project on the common reasons why parents do not regularly disciple their children and what the expected outcomes are for the future spiritual life of their children. A consent document is provided below. The consent document contains additional information about my research. After you have read the consent document, please click CONTINUE to proceed to the survey. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the survey.
  Research consent document

Q1 Which of the following would you most identify with as a Christian?

  ○ Spiritually committed (1)

  ○ Spiritually searching (2)

  ○ Spiritually apathetic (3)

Q2. Which of the following best fits your understanding of discipleship?

  ○ Discipleship is an apprenticeship/mentorship relationship to grow as a Christian. (1)

  ○ Discipleship is the process of one believer investing in the development of healthy, growing believers who can then multiply themselves in others. (2)

  ○ Discipleship is a program to gain competence as a Christian. (3)

  ○ Discipleship is the decision to follow Jesus Christ. (4)

Q3. Based on your understanding of discipleship, what is your preferred method of delivery? (Select top 2)

☐ Spiritual mentor (1)

☐ Attending church (2)

☐ Being active in a youth ministry (3)

☐ Attendance at a Christian/home school (4)

☐ Participation in parachurch opportunities such as Bible camp, FCI, Young Life, etc. (5)

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  Q4. Based on your understanding of discipleship, what are its most key components? (Select top 3)

☐ Mentoring (1)

☐ Scripture memorization (2)

☐ Practical training (3)

☐ Attendance/participation (4)

☐ Personal service (5)

☐ Identification of spiritual gifts (6)

☐ Small group (7)

- -

Q5. Based on your experience, rank in order (1 being least important and 7 being most important) what was most important to your parents?

_____ Academics (1)
_____ Sports/Athletics (2)
_____ Family (3)
_____ Art (Theater, Band, etc.) (4)
_____ Spiritual Matters (5)
_____ Friendships (6)
_____ Technology/Gaming/Social Media (7)

- -

Q6. Based on your experience, rank in order (1 being least important and 7 being most important) what was most important to you?

_____ Academics (1)
_____ Sports/Athletics (2)
_____ Family (3)
_____ Art (Theater, Band, etc.) (4)
_____ Spiritual Matters (5)
_____ Friendships (6)
_____ Technology/Gaming/Social Media (7)

- -

Q7. How often did you experience intentional spiritual conversations in your home?

○ Daily (1)

○ 2-3 times a week (2)

○ Once a week (3)

○ Once a month (4)

○ Occasionally (5)

○ Never (6)

- -

Q8. What elements of discipleship were practiced in your home? (Select all that apply)

☐   Family "devotions" (1)

☐   Sharing spiritual moments from the day (2)

☐   Spiritual conversations (3)

☐   Scripture memorization (4)

☐   Attending Sunday Worship Service (5)

☐   Bible reading (6)

☐   Prayer (7)

☐   Reading a Christian book (8)

☐   Home schooling/Christian school (9)

☐   Required attendance at youth group (10)

☐   Podcasts/Other Technology media (11)

☐   None (12)

Q9. What other spiritual activities did you participate in outside of the home? (Select all that apply)

☐   Weekly youth group (1)

☐   Evangelism ministry (2)

☐   Mentoring relationship (3)

☐   Bible study group (4)

☐   Serve in a ministry (5)

☐   Internet Searches and Websites (6)

☐   Accountability relationship (7)

☐   Parachurch organization (FCA, Young Life, etc.) (8)

☐   Missions Trip (9)

Q10. During the ages of 12-19, which of the following best described your relationship with God?

○ Given priority and experienced significant growth (1)

○ Engaged it when I had time in my schedule (2)

○ Showed no interest (3)

○ Effective at publicly claiming to be a Christian, but privately lived a different life (4)

Q11. Which of the following best describes your relationship with God now?

○ My relationship with God is my top priority and I am experiencing significant growth (1)

○ I give it some priority, but it has room to grow (2)

○ My relationship with God has not been a priority and I feel disconnected (3)

○ Effective at publicly claiming to be a Christian, but privately lived a different life (4)

- -

Q12. Are you currently or have you participated in a discipleship relationship after graduating high school?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

Q13. Which of the following elements of discipleship have you adopted in your own spiritual life now? (Select all that apply)

☐ Daily "Quiet Time" (1)

☐ Sharing spiritual moments from the day (2)

☐ Spiritual conversations with others (3)

☐ Spiritual memorization (4)

☐ Attending a Sunday Worship Service (5)

☐ Bible reading (6)

☐ Prayer (7)

☐ Reading a Christian book (8)

☐ Service opportunities (9)

Q14. Which of the following best describes the level of priority that you give to your relationship with God?

○ I give my relationship with God the top priority - engaging it daily (1)

○ I give my relationship with God some priority when my schedule allows it (2)

○ I give my relationship with God little priority only when I am experiencing a hardship (3)

Q15. Which of the following best describes the impact that the presence or absence of family discipleship has had on my current spiritual life?

◯ My experience with discipleship in the home equipped me to pursue my personal relationship with God now. (1)

◯ My experience with discipleship in the home has created challenges to having a thriving relationship with God now. (2)

◯ My experience with discipleship in the home has had no impact on my current relationship with God. (3)

Q16. At what age did you first have access to technology? (i.e., smartphone, gaming system, social media accounts)

◯ < 8 years old (1)

◯ Between 8-12 years old (2)

◯ Between 13-17 years old (3)

◯ > 17 years old (4)

Q17. Approximately how much time daily was spent on technology (smartphones, gaming, streaming, social media) while living at home?

◯ Less than 2 hours (1)

◯ 2-4 hours (2)

◯ 4-6 hours (3)

◯ 6-8 hours (4)

◯ Over 8 hours (5)

Q18. What type of access to technology did you have while living at home?

○ Unlimited access, no parental controls in place (1)

○ General access, with some parental controls in place (2)

○ Limited access with heavy parental controls in place (3)

Q19. What type of conversations did your parents have with you about technology?

○ Parents discussed in depth the purpose of technology, expectations, and the safe use of technology (1)

○ Parents only outlined expectations and rules for using technology (2)

○ Parents did not have a conversation with me about the use of technology (3)

Q20. How involved were your parents in your use of technology?

○ Parents were fully involved and had full access to all my technology (1)

○ Parents were somewhat involved and were familiar with my use of technology (2)

○ Parents were not involved and had no idea how I used technology (3)

End of Block: Default Question Block

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM

Consent

Title of the Project: An Examination of the Parental Role in the Discipleship of Children
Principal Investigator: Robert Jarman, Doctoral Candidate, John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be between the ages of 18-21 and identify as a Christian. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to identify the reasons why parents do not disciple their children at home and what strategies can help establish a discipleship culture in the home. When the importance of discipleship is not passed on to the next generation, families become lost. If the problem of parents not discipling their children can be understood more clearly, then the local church can engage families with more intention and address the reasons for not taking on the responsibility.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

1. Access a link to complete a 20-question survey on your personal discipleship experience. The survey can take between 10-15 minutes to complete.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include a further awareness of the importance of parents engaging their children with discipleship as well as propelling the local church to equip and train parents to disciple their children at home.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be anonymous.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Bedrock Community Church. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time prior to submitting the survey without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please exit the survey and close your internet browser. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Robert Jarman. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at
You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Dan Burrell at

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

Before agreeing to be part of the research, please be sure that you understand what the study is about. You can print a copy of the document for your records. If you have any questions about the study later, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.

APPENDIX C

IRB LETTER OF APPROVAL

Subject:	[External] IRB-FY22-23-324 - Initial: Initial - Exempt
Date:	Friday, February 3, 2023 at 3:28:47 PM Eastern Standard Time
From:	do-not-reply@cayuse.com
To:	

Attachments: ATT00001.png

[EXTERNAL EMAIL: Do not click any links or open attachments unless you know the sender and trust the content.]

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

February 3, 2023

Robert Jarman
Dan Burrell

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-324 An Examination of the Parental Role in the Discipleship of Children

Dear Robert Jarman, Dan Burrell,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(i). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording).
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your

research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

APPENDIX D

CHURCH INQUIRY EMAILS

Subject: Discipleship Study Opportunity
Date: Saturday, August 13, 2022 at 1:24:51 PM Eastern Daylight Time
From:
To:

Good Afternoon Gentleman,

I pray all of you are doing well. As you already know, I am in my final stages of completing my Doctor of Ministry degree program with the Liberty University School of Divinity. It has been quite the journey in completing my thesis project even during the pandemic. Even since we last spoke, many things have changed and that is the reason for my email.

For my thesis project, I am conducting research on the parental role in the discipleship of their children and the impact it has in that child's life as a young adult. The purpose of this study is to reveal the outcomes of a lack of discipleship in the home compared to a home with a regular focus on discipleship. As we all know, discipleship is critical during the formative years and parents have the greatest opportunity to prepare their children to engage their faith when they become adults. I have experienced the significance of family discipleship in my own life as I have two small children and have felt the urgency to engage this and help others to see the importance of discipleship at home.

To add to existing research, **I would like to ask your permission to distribute a brief survey to the young adults in your young adult life groups within the next two months.** This one-time anonymous, voluntary survey will consist of approximately 15 questions that gauge the participant's experience with discipleship in the home and how it has prepared them for their spiritual life as an adult. The results of this survey will be included in my thesis project which will aid me in developing some conclusions about the need for parents to be involved in family discipleship. The survey would be sent out electronically and would not require much time to complete. My hope is that this research and this thesis project will be a new opportunity for ministry and create new ways to equip and train families for discipleship.

Thank you for your time to hear about this opportunity. I thank God for all the years that I have been able to be a part of your ministry. I look forward to discussing if this opportunity is possible. Please let me know if I can provide any additional information.

Blessings,

Robert Jarman

Subject: Discipleship Study Opportunity
Date: Saturday, August 13, 2022 at 1:29:46 PM Eastern Daylight Time
From:
To:

Good Afternoon Gentlemen,

I pray all of you are doing well. As you may know, I am in my final stages of completing my Doctor of Ministry degree program with a concentration in Discipleship with the Liberty University School of Divinity. It has been quite the journey in completing my thesis project even during the pandemic. I am in the research stage of completing my thesis project with the plan to finish by the end of this year.

For my thesis project, I am conducting research on the parental role in the discipleship of their children and the impact it has in that child's life as a young adult. The purpose of this study is to reveal the outcomes of a lack of discipleship in the home compared to a home with a regular focus on discipleship. As we all know, discipleship is critical during the formative years and parents have the greatest opportunity to prepare their children to engage their faith when they become adults. I have experienced the significance of family discipleship in my own life as I have two small children and have felt the urgency to engage this and help others to see the importance of discipleship at home.

To add to existing research, **I would like to ask your permission to distribute a brief survey to the young adults in your young adult life groups within the next two months.** This one-time anonymous, voluntary survey will consist of approximately 15 questions that gauge the participant's experience with discipleship in the home and how it has prepared them for their spiritual life as an adult. The results of this survey will be included in my thesis project which will aid me in developing some conclusions about the need for parents to be involved in family discipleship. The survey would be sent out electronically and would not require much time to complete. My hope is that this research and this thesis project will be a new opportunity for ministry and create new ways to equip and train families for discipleship.

Thank you for your time to hear about this opportunity. I thank God for all the years that I have been able to be a part of your ministry. I look forward to discussing if this opportunity is possible. Please let me know if I can provide any additional information.

Blessings,

Robert Jarman

APPENDIX E

YOUTH GROUP EMAIL

Bedrock Church Young Adults,

As a student in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research to better understand the role of parents in the discipleship of their children. The purpose of my research is to understand the common reasons why parents do not regularly disciple their children and what are the expected outcomes in the future spiritual life of their children. I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be between the ages of 18-21 and identify as Christian. Participants, if willing, will be asked to access a link to complete a 20-question survey on your personal discipleship experience. The survey can take between 10-15 minutes to complete. Participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected.

To participate, please click Family Discipleship Questionnaire.

A consent document is provided as the first page of the survey. The consent document contains additional information about my research. After you have read the consent form, please click CONTINUE to proceed to the survey. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the survey.

Sincerely,

Robert Jarman
Doctoral Candidate, John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

APPENDIX F

SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

Facebook/Instagram:

ATTENTION FACEBOOK/INSTAGRAM FRIENDS: I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree at Liberty University. **The purpose of my research is to identify the reasons why parents do not disciple their children at home and what strategies can help establish a discipleship culture in the home.** To participate, you must be between the ages of 18-21 and identify as a Christian. Participants will be asked to complete an anonymous online survey, which should take about 15 minutes. If you would like to participate and meet the study criteria, please click the link provided at the end of this post. A consent document will be provided as the first page of the survey. Please review this page, and if you agree to participate, click the "Continue" button at the end.

To take the survey, click [Family Discipleship Questionnaire](#)

Twitter:

Are you a Christian young adult between the ages of 18-21? Click here to participate in a research study on discipleship experiences at home: [Family Discipleship Questionnaire](#)